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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Indian Peace Keeping Force

IPKF

Janatha Vimukti Peramuna or People's Liberation Front

JVP

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

LTTE

Sinhala-Buddhist Heritage of North and East

SBHNE

Traditional Tamil Homeland in the North and East

TTHNE

United National Party

UNP

United People's Freedom Alliance

UPFA

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'History' after the War: Historical Consciousness in the Collective Sinhala-Buddhist Psyche in Post-War Sri Lanka

Part I

Introduction

'Historical consciousness' has played, and continues to play, a decisive role in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Both Sinhala-Buddhist¹ and Tamil communities have developed mutually exclusive historical narratives that have a strong bearing on their ethnic self identity. One of the important contours of this historical consciousness is how these two communities imagine their territoriality. While Tamil nationalism has invented the 'Traditional Tamil Homeland in the North and East' (TTHNE) thesis in order to historicise their political claims, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has responded with the 'Sinhala-Buddhist Heritage of North and East' (SBHNE) counter-thesis. I argue here that these competing historical narratives have become a major obstacle to any meaningful attempt at ethnic reconciliation between Tamils and Sinhala-Buddhists after the end of the military confrontation between armed forces of the state of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The focus of the essay is the way in which the historical consciousness of Sinhala-Buddhists operates in the post-war context. It mainly concentrates on two post-war developments. The first is the Sinhala-Buddhist attempts to spatialise its imagined territory in the North and East based on historical claims to this territory. This spatialising trend is explored in relation to the politico-ideological meaning of North-bound pilgrimage-cum-tourism by Sinhala-Buddhists from the South, and what I term the archaeologising of the North and East in popular Sinhala-Buddhist archaeology.

The second development is the way in which the Sinhala-Buddhist mind grapples with the post-war situation. The humanitarian disaster at the conclusion of the war presents a dilemma in the mass-psychology of Sinhala-Buddhists. While there seems to be no overt repentance in the Sinhala-Buddhist mind about the violence and suffering with which the war was concluded, some significant manifestations of this dilemma or guilt are arguably visible in discursive practices that demonstrate some uncertainties in post-war Sinhala-Buddhist mass psychology.

I propose as a hypothesis that, while the first development aims at the completion of Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony over the claimed territory of the Tamils by annexing it to the actual territory of Sinhala-Buddhists, the second attempts to create an ideological balance,

¹ I use the term 'Sinhala-Buddhist' instead of 'Sinhala' with a special purpose, when referring to ethno-nationalism among Sinhala people. This does not mean that I place non-Buddhist Sinhalese outside Sinhala ethno-nationalism. However, I want to highlight the fact that particular version of 'Buddhism' is a core component of ethno nationalist ideology of Sinhalese.

enabling the Sinhala-Buddhist mind to cope with the moral claims of Tamil nationalism with those who are sympathetic towards Tamil claims.

The literature on the links between historiography and ethnic consciousness is wide ranging. Coomaraswamy (1987) highlighted this relationship by demonstrating how competing historical interpretations surfaced with the intensification of tensions between Sinhala and Tamil ethno-political formations in the 1980s. Tennekoon (1987 & 1990) explored the ideological significance of a debate that unfolded in the *Divaina* newspaper in the mid-1980s over two important issues: the nature of the Sinhala culture and the validity of the Tamil nationalist claim of ‘traditional homelands’. Gunawardena (1995) provided a broader perspective on the relationship between ethnic consciousness and historiography in Sri Lanka within a context of intensifying ethnic conflict in his long essay “Historiography in a Time of Ethnic Conflict”. This essay adds to and extends this scholarly engagement with the nexus between history, historiography and ethno-nationalist consciousness by exploring the renewed importance of historical consciousness in Sinhala-Buddhist society following the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009 and its implications for imagining the post-war order, especially, in the North and the East.

Emergence of Two Historical Claims

The discourse of SBHNE emerged in response to the historical claims of Tamil nationalism promoted by the TTHNE thesis. Historically the notion of ‘Traditional Homelands of Tamils’ emerges with the establishment of the Federal Party (or Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi – literally translating as the ‘Lanka Tamil State Party’) when regional autonomy for Northern and Eastern provinces of the island became the principal demand of Tamil nationalism (de Silva, K.M. 1995: v). The ideology of the ‘Traditional Homeland of Tamils’ became a major force in Tamil politics when the latter evolved into a movement for a separate state in the late-1970s.

It was as a reaction to the growing strength of the Traditional Tamil Homeland ideology that the Sinhala-Buddhists developed the notion of the ‘Sinhala-Buddhist Heritage of North and East’. The SBHNE narrative of course derives from the dominant historical discourse of Sinhala-Buddhists which evolved in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and lays claim to the entire island as Sinhala-Buddhist territory.

A good number of Sinhala-Buddhist intellectuals passionately engaged in challenging the TTHNE thesis. Two major publications established in 1981 by Upali Newspapers,² *Divaina* (Sinhala) and *The Island* (English), soon became the newspapers with the best circulation in Sri Lanka, and provided an effective platform for this counter-discourse. The debate in the *Divaina* newspaper in 1984 over the historicity of the ‘traditional Tamil homelands’ concept brought an intellectual debate that was until then restricted to a limited intellectual circle into

² The owner of this newspaper was a leading Sinhala businessman in Sri Lanka at that time. He mysteriously disappeared in 1983 while travelling in his private jet. However, the two newspapers that he established continued to play a decisive role in providing a platform for Sinhala-Buddhist ideological claims in general.

wider public discussion, paving the way for the emergence of this counter-discourse as a truly popular one.³

The ideological milieu of the Sinhala-Buddhist South, especially after the 1983 July anti-Tamil riots, provided ideal breeding ground for this popular and populist discourse. The new conjuncture that Newton Gunasinghe conceptualised in his path-breaking article in May 1984 "Mayday after July Holocaust" is quite significant here because Gunasinghe argues that ethnicity, rather than class, will become the dominant force in Sri Lankan socio-political culture in future (1996:204-07). With Tamil militancy growing in leaps and bounds after July 1983, effective reactions gathered momentum in the Sinhala-Buddhist South as well. This reactionary movement was multi-faceted and probably more effective in the long run than the Tamil nationalist movement as far as the future political developments in the island are concerned. This reaction culminated in the armed insurgency led by the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna – JVP) ostensibly to expel the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) which arrived in the island following the July 1987 peace accord between Sri Lankan President Jayewardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. However, this armed insurgency also saw the development of several new Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist political and ideological movements which survived the brutal suppression of the insurgency.

These new political and ideological movements opened up a new frontier in the politics of the Sinhala-Buddhist South which probably culminated in the 2004-09 period with the consolidation of the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime with its strong Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist foundation.

Political organisations such as 'Maubima Surekeeme Vyaparaya' (Movement for the Defence of the Motherland) became an effective rallying point for the masses that were inspired by the new nationalist fervour. Although these movements faded away in the 1990s with the rise of non-nationalist political mobilisation, they re-emerged with more rigour and intensity in the 2000s. It was this Sinhala nationalist lobby that was instrumental in bringing the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) into power in 2004.

Perhaps more relevant to our discussion is the formation of a new intellectual movement in the post-1983 period with immense ideological power. This movement, which crystallised as the 'Jathika Chinthanaya' movement, absorbed all the disparate elements of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and gave them a sound philosophical and epistemological foundation. Although the movement split into several fractions, the impact of the movement did not diminish. Nalin de Silva, Gunadasa Amarasekera and Champika Ranawaka played the leading role in this intellectual movement, while many others also contributed.

With the emergence of 'Jathika Chinthanaya', the counter-discourse against historical claims of Tamil nationalism began to evolve into an effective ideological force in the Sinhala-Buddhist South. If early writers who challenged Tamil historical claims were isolated

³ I have discussed this *Dinaina* debate in an article published in Sinhala (Dewasiri, 2011a). An English version of this article was presented at an international conference organised by American Institute of Lankan Studies in Colombo in 2009.

intellectuals, these Jathika Chinthanaya intellectuals were intellectuals, activists and mobilisers at the same time. While their methods of propagation of ideas were more effective and aggressive, they were also actively involved in training new young intellectuals. They successfully made use of the political crisis in the late-1980s in order to push and popularise their Sinhala-Buddhist political project. Historical consciousness played a pivotal role in the Jathika Chinthanaya project as it promised to reinvent the Sinhala-Buddhist ethos that they believe to have flourished in ancient Sri Lanka. Tamil nationalist historical claims were identified as part of a broader conspiracy against the revival of this Sinhala-Buddhist ethos.

A New Role for History after the War

One of my main arguments in this essay is that historical consciousness has acquired new significance for Sinhala-Buddhists after the end of the war. This renewed significance is due to the need to redefine in the post-war context the *raison d'être* of the Sinhala-Buddhist claims vis-à-vis Tamil nationalist claims.

Paradoxically, when military confrontation between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state overshadowed other aspects of the ethnic problem, the dominant group within Sinhala-Buddhist political elite of the South was forced to accommodate, to a considerable extent, Tamil political claims. At times this accommodation was to such an extent that it upset general Sinhala-Buddhist sentiments. There were several instances that stood out, such as the Indo-Lanka Accord of July 1987, the political package of Chandrika Kumaratunga in 1995 and the 2002 Norway-brokered cease-fire agreement. The dominant policy thinking of the Sinhala-Buddhist ruling elite of the South tended to separate the LTTE-led military campaign from the basic demands of Tamil nationalist politics, with the latter been seen as at least partially legitimate. This was, arguably, for two main reasons. First was popular support for Tamil nationalist political demands within the Tamil population. This support could not be overlooked by the Sinhala-Buddhist political elite because Tamil political support was vital to Sinhala political parties to form governing coalitions — especially given the sharp political divisions in the Sinhala-Buddhist constituency. The second was international sympathy towards Tamil political demands. This was a crucial factor, especially in Indo-Lanka relations.

Since the election victory of the UPFA in the 2004 general election, two important developments have occurred in the politics of the Sinhala-Buddhist South, which led to the reversal of this policy orientation in the governing elite. One was the rapid decline of the two-party equilibrium in electoral politics due to the rise of UPFA as a major political bloc in the South overshadowing its main political rivals, the UNP and the JVP. The other was the emergence of ultra nationalist groups within the political mainstream as a powerful, and often determining, politico-ideological force. Although Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism was a dominant force in much of Sri Lankan post-colonial politics, it was after 2004 that groups representing an explicitly Sinhala and Buddhist agenda gained ascendancy at the centre of the ruling bloc. These two developments counter-balanced the international pressure mounting on the government following the end of the war, especially from India and domestic Tamil political forces, to respond positively to Tamil political demands. Furthermore, with the near

unification of the Sinhala-Buddhist constituency, the bargaining power of Tamil politics dramatically declined.

These new developments, however, demanded a strong moral and political justification for debunking Tamil political demands. Renewed interest in historical consciousness could be placed within this context. History was mobilised to challenge not only the claim for a separate state in the North and the East, but also against any significant power sharing arrangement. Concessions to Tamil demands were seen as a violation of the historical right of Sinhala-Buddhists to the North and the East of the country. Exponents of this view, therefore, looked to the post-war North and East in order to re-establish the historical order envisaged by SBHNE which could challenge the historical right of Tamils as envisaged by the TTHNE thesis. What follows is a discussion of how these historical claims of Sinhala-Buddhists are being deployed in order to claim the North and East territory as an integral part of a pre-colonial Sinhala-Buddhist order.

Part II

Historicisation of the North and East by Sinhala-Buddhists after the War

Following the end of the war there was a sudden glut of Sinhala-Buddhist North-bound tourists. A similar trend was visible during the cessation of hostilities between the LTTE and Sri Lankan armed forces under the Norway brokered agreement in 2002. The political and ideological significance of the phenomenon after May 2009 is, however, more pronounced. The implications of this phenomenon are pithily encapsulated in a Sinhala caption on a sticker displayed on Jaffna-bound SLTB (Sri Lanka Transport Board) buses, which reads: "This is the Realm of Gauthama Buddha" (*mey gauthama buddha rajjayayi* – මේ ගෞතම බුද්ධ රාජ්‍යයයි).

Pasting small stickers with this, or other similar, captions on cars, three-wheeler taxis and entrances to houses became a popular practice among Sinhala-Buddhists in the last decade or so. This could be read as a popular manifestation of the 'Buddhist revival' that became a significant feature of the politics and ideology of the Sinhala-Buddhist South. The appearance of a 'mega-version' of this sticker on the Jaffna-bound state-owned busses, however, is a peculiar phenomenon and it is important to note some features of this mega sticker: a large picture of a smiling President Mahinda Rajapaksa and red and blue shapes with a lotus; all being symbols of the propaganda campaign of the United People's Freedom Alliance.

Does this signify a reminder to the militarily-defeated Tamils who were influenced by the political demands of Tamil nationalism of the new post-war political reality? If this is the case, it is an irony that the caption is only in the Sinhala language which is not a language familiar to many ordinary people in Jaffna. My proposition is, however, that the appearance of the caption exclusively in Sinhala is also quite significant. We can ask the question as to whom this message is addressed. It can only be read by those who read Sinhala. The bus is travelling from Colombo to Jaffna and the message is potentially read by Sinhala people

travelling to and possibly living in Jaffna. Does not this remind Sinhala people that they have a legitimate right to the territory they are visiting?

I would like to discuss some other messages appearing in public places in the North directed towards Sinhalese. There is a name board indicating directions at the Mankulam junction on the A-9 road (to Jaffna). This is not a standard road sign set up by the official road authorities and it is in yellow in contrast to the normal luminous green official road signboards. The place names on this board are not the official names, but alternatives that some advocates of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism propose. The best example is the alternative name that has been used on this board in place of ‘Mullaitivu’, a main town on the Northeast coast, ‘Mūladīpa’ (මුලදීප). It is also noteworthy that the only language used on the board is Sinhala, which is also contrary to the official trilingual practice of using Sinhala, Tamil and English. The SBHNE discourse has proposed a series of alternative Sinhala forms for many Tamil place names currently used in the North.⁴ Advocates of SBHNE propose that these alternative names are irrefutable evidence of the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage in the North and East regions of the island.

I argue that the underlying logic in these claims is that the North and the East is a territory to be conquered and occupied. Once the territory is occupied by the military it has to be redefined and renamed so that its legitimate owners can reclaim it. My reading of the political and ideological significance of this post-war phenomena has, however, been questioned by some commentators. When I briefly mentioned the significance of post-war North-bound Sinhala-Buddhist pilgrimages in an earlier essay,⁵ one commentator challenged the plausibility of such a reading. He argued that I have “taken poetic licence to the extreme, to support the above hypothesis”. He argues that:

The vast majority of the Sinhala-Buddhist people cannot be accused of having this ‘Pathological’ mind set. They visit Jaffna to see a part of the island they have not had free access for several decades, see the war damage, see the left-overs of the LTTE war-machine and rule, pray at the Nagadipa Vihara and Nallur temple and buy dry fish, grape juice, Pinnatu (Palmyra toffee) and Palmyra juggery. Some may drink Palmyra toddy too!

Many visited VP’s mother in hospital, when she was alive. They carried apples and grapes as gifts for her. Many were also curious to see the house of VP’s parents and carried away bits of soil.⁶

Does the presence of these ‘individual’ intentions in visiting Jaffna necessarily negate the presence of collective ideological intent? If such ‘individual’ and ‘practical’ aspects of human actions are seen to be devoid of ideological significance, no human action may be considered ideological. As Fredric Jameson says, ideology bridges “the gaps between the individual and

⁴ For a list of these place names, see Kannangara (1990).

⁵ www.groundviews.com, posted on February 25th 2012.

⁶ The commentator identified himself as Dr. Rajasingham Narendran, an ethnic Tamil name. (See Groundviews/2012/02/25)

the social, ...reason and the unconscious and the private and public" (2008: ix). I will elaborate this point in the following section with special reference to an important destination of Sinhala-Buddhists' North-bound pilgrims.

Kadurugoda: Construction of a Sinhala-Buddhist Super Space in the Tamil North

A culmination of the political and ideological significance of this new wave of North-bound Sinhala-Buddhist pilgrimages and new naming patterns can be observed in an area called 'Kandarodai' in the Jaffna peninsula. Located off the Palali-Kankesanturai road, this place can be easily identified as an ancient Buddhist religious space and has been conserved by the archaeological department. Kandarodai is now a popular destination of North-bound Sinhala-Buddhist pilgrims. Although the official name of the area is 'Kandarodai', the specific site of pilgrimage is named 'Kadurugoda Viharaya', i.e., a Sinhalsed form of the Tamil term 'Kandarodai'. Highly guarded by the Sri Lanka Army, this space is entirely detached from the Tamil neighbourhood it is located in and has been converted into a place resembling any Buddhist space in the South — making it familiar to ordinary Sinhala-Buddhist pilgrims. The conversion of this site into an exclusively Sinhala-Buddhist space can be seen as the emergence of a parallel 'super space' in the middle of the Tamil North. I argue that this 'super space' is constructed as a part of the broader strategy to dominate the post-war North.

For a better understanding of the construction of this super space, I propose to compare and contrast this with somewhat similar cases of Buddhist sites in India. Buddhist sites in North India and Nepal, for which Sinhala-Buddhists use the name *Dambadiva* form a part of an imaginary Sinhala-Buddhist territory. *Dambadiva* in the Sinhala-Buddhist imagination is not an actual physical space existing in the geography of South Asia. Therefore *Dambadiva vandanava* is a pilgrimage to the imagined cosmos of Sinhala-Buddhist territory. Moreover, this is also not viewed by Sinhala-Buddhists as a visit to a foreign land. The usual term *rata yanava* (going abroad) is not used for this journey. It is simply referred to as *Dambadiva yanava* (going to *Dambadiva*, not even 'going to India').

The ultimate realisation of Sinhala-Buddhist territoriality in relation to *Dambadiva* is however restricted to this religious act of pilgrimage. Yet in the case of the North-bound pilgrimage it is sharply different. Unlike *Dambadiva*, which is already a part of a powerful neighbouring state, the North is a place that can be conquered and occupied. In the Sinhala-Buddhist imagination, it is a part of its actual territory. Moreover, it is a space that forms part of the territory of the Sinhala-Buddhist state which has been occupied by Tamils, thereby depriving Sinhala-Buddhists their legitimate historical rights. When Anagarika Dharmapala called upon Sinhalese to "wake up and rescue Buddhagaya" in the early twentieth century it was limited to reclaiming the site from a Hindu land owner. This did not question the jurisdiction of the Indian state over the site. In the case of the North, realisation of the imagined territoriality of Sinhala-Buddhism could potentially go beyond that, especially through the effective use of the jurisdictional authority of the state.

The defeat of the LTTE and the subsequent military occupation of the North along with a severely weakened Tamil nationalist opposition provided Sinhala-Buddhist ideology an ideal opportunity to reclaim this land as actual Sinhala-Buddhist territory. Kandarodai is a microcosmic representation of this much larger project.

Let us return to the site. This is how the site is described by a prominent advocate of the SBHNE thesis, Rev. Ellavala Medhananda.

Kaduru (Kanduru) of the word Kadurugoda is equivalent to the Pali *kandara*. It means wet ground or water stream. Therefore, this suggests that the monastery was located on higher ground near a water stream. It was this word that has transformed into *kantbarōda*. Most likely, valuka aru that flows besides this holy place must have been this stream. Portuguese records identify this place as kandara kudde. This was their pronunciation of the Sinhala word Kadurugoda.

It was Dr. Paul E. Pieris, then the district judge of Jaffna district, who gave an account of the place for the first time. That was in 1917. C.A. Godakumbure who went in search of the place following this account carried out an excavation in 1956. Excavation of the place, resulted in knolls (*godāli*) of foundations, stone pillars and various other remnants, and the unearthing of about twenty *stupas*. (Medhananda, 2008: 427-28)

I visited the place in April 2010, and interviewed a number of pilgrims. I posed a series of questions to several randomly selected pilgrims. Almost all of them belonged to the rural lower middle class. My questions were unstructured and informal. I tried to glean from these informal conversations their knowledge of the place prior to the visit; their sources of knowledge about the place; the level of their knowledge about the historicity of the place and; their views regarding the protection of the place. I also interviewed some Tamil residents from the area to obtain an idea of their perception of the location and the new wave of pilgrims. I also engaged in conversation with the Tamil family who accompanied me to the place. Followings are some of my observations from these interviews:

- Almost all of the interviewees did not have prior knowledge of the place. Many came to know of the place after they visited Jaffna. All of them were unaware of the Tamil name and only knew the Sinhalesed form 'Kadurugoda'.
- Their knowledge of the place came from descriptions given on boards erected in the location. There were several such boards erected by various organisations and business firms from the South. They clearly represented the dominant Sinhala-Buddhist accounts of the place.
- Many tend to link general commonsense historical knowledge of Sinhala-Buddhist society to the historicity of the place. For example, one pilgrim thought that the place may have flourished in the past and might have been destroyed by Cholas (note that Cholas are popularly seen as destroyers of Sinhala-Buddhist civilization). Some believed that the area may have been occupied by both Sinhala and Tamil people in the past and hinted that Sinhalese might have been expelled from the area. Interestingly they linked the presence of Buddhist sites with the presence of Sinhalese in the area.

One pilgrim clearly said that “it may have been because of the presence of Sinhalese in the area that Arhaths came here” (*rahathan vahansela methanata vadinna äththe Sinhala minissu mebe hitapu nisa venna äthi- රහත් වහන්සේලා මෙතනට වඩින්න ඇත්තේ සිංහල මිනිස්සු මෙහෙ හිටපු නිසා වෙන්න ඇති*).

- When asked whether the surrounding place needs to be occupied by Sinhala people in the future in order to guarantee the protection and wellbeing of the place, everyone gave affirmative answers. Everyone welcomed the presence of the military in order to protect the place but suggested that permanent Sinhala residents may be helpful in the long run.
- It is also important to note that the views expressed by these pilgrims were not as aggressive as some exponents of extreme Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. However, even in lighter vein they articulated basic elements of the discourse of SBHNE. It is also obvious that they are ideologically predisposed to be easily mobilised by extreme Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.
- An old Tamil woman recalled the good old days when they used to collect beads from the premises and sell them to tourists. She complained that they are no longer allowed to do so. She obviously had no idea of the political or ideological significance of the phenomenon. However, she seemed to be quite annoyed with the intruders who have deprived her of the place that supported her livelihood. The surrounding neighbourhood seemed quite detached from the entire drama of the location, except for some families trying to sell sundries to pilgrims.
- My guide, however, had strong views about the political implications of these developments. Although supportive of the military campaign against the LTTE, he seemed to be disturbed by the way in which religious spaces are being politicised.

To conclude this section I briefly recapitulate the main argument. An individual act of pilgrimage with a religious purpose is transformed into a collective ideological act in a particular politico-ideological context. This occurs under the auspices of the present-day Sinhala-Buddhist politico-ideological project of claiming the entirety of Sri Lanka as its territory. The dominant and hegemonic historical consciousness of Sinhala-Buddhists is a prime driver of this enterprise.

Part III

Tamils and the Troubled Sinhala-Buddhist Collective Conscience:

A Historical Answer

This part of the essay is mainly devoted to analysing the popular novel *Maharaja Gāmunu* (2011), which is based on the character of the legendary king Duttagāmani Abhaya, or Dutugāmunu as he is popularly known, the hero of the Pali Chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*. The novel was written by a prominent figure among the Sinhala literati, Jayantha Chandrasiri. In this discussion, I will try to locate the novel within the dynamic of post-war Sinhala-Buddhist collective conscience. For a better understanding of Chandrasiri's discourse, I compare it with another powerful text which is based on the same historical persona (i.e., Duttagāmani

Abhaya), addressing similar issues—the script of the play *Ratnavalli* (2006) authored by Sunil Wijesiriwardana.⁷

The comparison is justified because *Ratnavalli* can be understood as the anti-thesis of *Maharaja Gāmunu*. If we consider *Maharaja Gāmunu* as the realisation of post-83 Sinhala-Buddhist discourse, *Ratnavalli* occupies a similar place in relation to the post-83 critical discourse produced by a group of left and liberal intellectuals and political activists. The author of *Ratnavalli* himself is an important figure in this critical discourse.

It seems somewhat ironic to talk about the post-war Sinhala-Buddhist collective conscience as a problematic issue since the war seems to have posed little or no moral questions in the Sinhala-Buddhist mind. This is in contrast to cases such as post-World War II German society in which collective guilt became a serious issue. However, *Maharaja Gāmunu* shows that some unsettled issues are still lurking in the Sinhala-Buddhist mind and need to be grappled with. In a context where the righteousness of the war is being continuously questioned by various groups which are perceived as enemies of Sinhala-Buddhism, it has become imperative for the Sinhala-Buddhist intelligentsia to counter this claim.

In Sinhala-Buddhist ideology, the Dutugāmunu-Elāra war could be considered the ultimate reference point for just-war ideology and the articulation and re-articulation of this story, therefore, is closely linked to the justification of the war against Tamil militants. While notable Sinhala-Buddhist intellectuals such as Rev. Ellavala Medhananda and Nalin de Silva stand out as those who made consistent efforts to fulfil this ideological need,⁸ Chandrasiri's novel can be identified as a literary culmination of these intellectual efforts. If the attempts of the first two intellectuals are in dry scholarly form, Chandrasiri provides an affective fictional representation for the consumption of the ordinary Sinhala-Buddhist.

The main focus of both these literary texts, *Maharaja Gāmunu* and *Ratnavalli*, is the mind of Dutugāmunu, with special reference to the Dutugāmunu-Elāra war.⁹ It was a popular Sinhala-Buddhist fantasy, arguably since the late-nineteenth century, to view this war as a pre-modern form of the modern Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict. This interpretation was, however, questioned by prominent historians. Siriweera proposes that “Duttagamini and Elāra were not partakers of a conflict between Tamil-Hindus and Sinhala-Buddhists but they were those of a feudal power struggle” (2002: 51). This scholarly version is however not acceptable to the popular historical consciousness.

The Dutugāmunu-Elāra confrontation can be considered the foundational myth of the Sinhala-Buddhist state, which is built on the exclusion of Tamils. How is this desire to exclude Tamils performed? There were of course allegations of ethnic cleansing against

⁷ This play was staged on 26 July 2006 at the Colombo Elphinston Theatre under the direction of Nadeeka Guruge. Due to an internal conflict within the theatre group, the play was not staged thereafter.

⁸ See Medhananda (2006) and de Silva (2010).

⁹ For a comprehensive account of the significance of Duttagamini-Elāra war in the Sinhala-Buddhist mind see, Siriweera (1984).

Sinhala-Buddhists by extreme Tamil nationalist propagandists. Although there is a justification for this allegation in the context of mass riots which decimated the lives and property of ordinary Tamils, with the paradigmatic example being 1983, it is also clear that this specific trend did not continue after 1983. Although there was no public or state atonement for these anti-Tamil massacres, there was a cautious attempt to take away the responsibility of these massacres from ordinary Sinhala-Buddhists and suggest they were primarily the work of groups with vested interests within the then UNP regime.

The 1983 anti-Tamil riots reinforced an already-existent heavy intellectual offensive against Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. There was a range of literature, both by local and foreign scholars, where the historico-mythical foundation of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism was brought under serious scrutiny. The most serious 'victim' of this critical intellectual onslaught was the Dutugāmunu myth. Gananath Obeyesekere's (1988) study on Dutugāmunu's conscience is a key point of arrival in the critical reading of the mythical function of the Dutugāmunu episode.

Sinhala-Buddhist intellectuals took this 'attack' on Dutugāmunu as a serious threat to the very foundation of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. They not only made every possible attempt to defend their hero against these attacks, but they also began to revisit the Dutugāmunu-Elāra war and reinterpret it to face this challenge. The Dutugāmunu-Elāra story as found in the chronicles and accepted in Sinhala-Buddhist popular historical discourse provided a lot of ammunition to the intellectuals seeking to critique Sinhala nationalism. As many critics have pointed out, there is a serious mismatch between some fundamental teachings of the Buddha and the general orientation of the Dutugāmunu-Elāra story in the chronicles. For nationalists, therefore, addressing this apparent mismatch became a serious concern and challenge.

The challenge before the new generation of Sinhala-Buddhist intellectuals was therefore to re-deploy the Dutugāmunu-Elāra story in a way that it addressed and mitigated the criticism directed at it while, at the same time, satisfy the current ideological needs of Sinhala-Buddhists. It is useful at this point to look at how 'just war' ideology was articulated in the context of escalating fighting between the LTTE and the military forces of the state.¹⁰

A systematic attempt to provide a moral justification for war was for the first time attempted by the Chandrika Kumaratunga government in 1995 after the war was restarted in the name of "War for Peace" (*sāmaya sandabā yuddhaya* – සාමය සඳහා යුද්ධය) following the failure of peace talks between the government and the LTTE. The most effective justification however came after the military campaign was begun in 2006 when the war was 're-named' a 'humanitarian operation' (*mānushika meheyuma* – මානුෂික මෙහෙයුම). This time the war was supported by a massive propaganda campaign, which sidelined and silenced almost all anti-war voices. The mass campaign in support of the war initiated in 2006 contrasted sharply with the one launched by the Chandrika Kumaratunga government in 1995. In 1995 the '*sudu nelum vyāpārāya* – සුදු නෙළුම් ව්‍යාපාරය (White Lotus Movement) took a two-pronged

¹⁰ See Bartholomeusz (2002) for a comprehensive discussion on the moral justification of war in Sri Lanka.

approach not only to promote war but also to promote a ‘political solution’ to the demands of Tamil nationalism. Although Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism supported the war campaign, it vehemently opposed the latter. This problem was effectively solved through the post-2006 ‘humanitarian operation’ campaign. It was a campaign that was carried out with the active leadership of all Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist groups, bringing together, for the first time in the history of the Eelam war, all the forces that represented the Sinhala-Buddhist politico-ideological mindset. Before this conjuncture while various governments carried out military operations against the LTTE there were tensions between these governments and those who represented the Sinhala-Buddhist politico-ideological mindset.

Nalin de Silva, probably the most eloquent exponent of the Sinhala-Buddhist view on Tamil nationalist demands, insists that Tamil nationalism has to be defeated on three fronts: military, political and ideological (de Silva, 1995: 11 & 1997). It was the generally held Sinhala-Buddhist opinion that the ruling elite before 2005 had surrendered politically and ideologically to Tamil nationalism while militarily fighting against the LTTE. This tension was decisively solved in 2005 when almost all elements of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism came together to bring Mahinda Rajapaksa to power.

The military victory of the armed forces of the Sri Lankan state against the LTTE in mid-May 2009 was followed by a series of massive celebrations in the entire Sinhala-Buddhist South. Significantly, when the end of the war was heavily criticised by Western countries, India and small anti-war elements within the country as a humanitarian catastrophe, there seemed to be no sense of remorse whatsoever in the Sinhala-Buddhist psyche. What happened instead was that Sinhala-Buddhists perceived themselves as rescuers of innocent Tamils from the clutches of LTTE terrorism — an attitude very well represented by the term ‘humanitarian operation’. When displaced Tamils who were used by the LTTE as a human shield during the last phase of the war looked to the state for their bare survival, it was a welcome gesture for the Sinhala-Buddhist psyche which took it as affirmation of their view by Tamils. Southern media carried endless footage of Tamils caught in the LTTE controlled area being rescued, welcomed and helped by state military personnel. At the same time organised Sinhala-Buddhist groups visited Tamil refugee camps in large numbers to help them with various essential items. These gestures became a substitute for any regret or remorse about the alleged ‘humanitarian catastrophe’ caused by the military operations.

Duttagamini’s Conscience Rearticulated: Jayantha Chandrasiri’s *Maharaja Gāmunu*

I contend that the novel *Maharaja Gāmunu* marks the culmination of Sinhala-Buddhist intellectual preoccupation with *Dutuḡāmunu*. It is also ‘timely’ in the sense that it coincides with the historic realisation of Sinhala-Buddhist political hegemony. This was achieved in the period from 2004 to 2009, where two landmark elections, the 2004 general election and the 2005 presidential election established a political bloc that brought together an overwhelming majority of the groups that represent Sinhala-Buddhist political ideology and climaxed with the military victory over the LTTE.

There is an extraordinary similarity between *Maharaja Gāmunu* and *Ratnavalli* in terms of the ideological issues the two literary texts address. Both texts grapple with the problem of Elāra's mind and Dutugāmunu's conscience and suggest alternate ways for the contemporary popular psyche to relate to the paradigmatic Dutugāmunu-Elāra confrontation. I shall begin the discussion of these two texts with the problem of Elāra's mind which is arguably a thorny issue for the present-day Sinhala-Buddhist psyche.

The Problem of Elāra's Mind

Gananath Obeyesekere's following remarks help us locate how the issue is raised in the two texts:

...If the Tamils were evil, then and now, what about the good king Elāra who was deified by Dutugāmunu? I noted earlier that the chronicles have a consistent theme: wherever Dutugāmunu is presented as having a conscience, Elāra appears as the just king; and when Dutugāmunu is portrayed as doing his duty untroubled by his conscience, Elāra is ignored or presented as evil. What is remarkable about the current scene is the dismantling of Elāra, literally and metaphorically, through a coalition of scholars and politicians. (1988: 44)

In the ideological context that Obeyesekere compiled his work, the classification of Elāra within the just/evil binary occurred on somewhat different terms than the present. A clear contrast is visible when the two contexts are compared. Obeyesekere presents us with two contrasting discourses on the Dutugāmunu-Elāra war that prevailed in the mid-1980s. One is represented in a poem by a radical Sinhala poet Parakrama Kodituwakku. In this poem the poet implores the two kings to get off their elephants and sit together, referring to the famous image of the two warriors mounted on their elephants. In direct opposition to this, he presents the aggressive discourse of Cyril Mathew, Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs during the early part of the J.R. Jayewardene regime. Cyril Mathew was well-known for his strong anti-Tamil views and his name had become synonymous with extreme anti-Tamil Sinhala nationalism at the time. If the difference between these two discourses is juxtaposed with the difference between *Maharaja Gāmunu* and *Ratnavalli* a significant divergence is evident. The divergence in the two present day texts is much subtler than the black and white difference in the earlier texts.

What is relevant to our discussion here is, however, the fact that there is subtle tension between the *Mahāvamsa* description of Elāra's reign and the parallel account of the birth and life of the young Dutugāmunu and the needs of the present-day Sinhala-Buddhist psyche. This could also be seen as a tension between the political morality of the *Mahāvamsa* period and that of the present. The *Mahāvamsa* and other pre-modern literary works following a similar trajectory depict Elāra as a righteous king, while Dutugāmunu is the villain.

Even *Dīpavamsa*, which gives only a brief account of the Dutugāmunu-Elāra episode, states: "Elāra, the *Kshatbriya*, who ascended to the throne by killing Asela, reigned forty four years righteously (ධර්මයෙන්) (*Dīpavamsa*, Chap. 18, verses 50-51). It further states: "King ruled the

country without succumbing to the four sources of bias, namely favouritism, animosity, fear and delusion, and maintaining equilibrium like a scale” (*Chandha dvesha moha bhaya yana sathara agathiyata nopemina thulavak men dāhāmin rajjyannushasana kala bavayi* – “ඡන්ද ද්වේශ මෝහ භය යන සතර අගතියට නොපැමිණ තුලාවක් මෙන් දැනැමින් රාජ්‍යානුශාසනා” කල බවයි) (*Dīpavamsa*, Chap. 18, verses 51-52).

Although it is possible to surmise that these are standard hyperbolic expressions in the genre of Pali chronicles, *Mahāvamsa* describes his righteousness at length:

A Damila of noble descent, named Elāra, who came hither from the Chola country to seize on the kingdom, ruled when he had overpowered king Asela, forty-four years, with even justice toward friend and foe, on occasions of disputes at law.

At the head of his bed he had a bell hung up with a long rope so that those who desired a judgement at law might ring it. The king had only one son and one daughter. When once the son of the ruler was going in a car to the Tissa-tank, he killed unintentionally a young calf lying on the road with the mother cow, by driving the wheel over its neck. The cow came and dragged at the bell in bitterness of heart; and the king caused his son’s head to be severed (from his body) with that same wheel.

A snake devoured the young of a bird upon a palm-tree. The hen-bird, mother of young one came and rang the bell. The king caused the snake to be brought to him, and when its body had been cut open and the young bird taken out of it he caused it to be hung up upon the tree. When the king, who was a protector of tradition, albeit he knew not a fearless virtues of the most precious of the three gems, was going (once) to the Cetiya-mountain to invite the brotherhood bikkus, he caused as he arrived upon a car with the point of the yoke in the wagon and injury to the thūpa of the Conqueror at a (certain) spot. The ministers said to him: ‘King, thūpa has been injured by thee’. Though this had come to pass without his intending it, yet the king leaped from his car and flung himself down upon the road with the words: ‘Sever my head also (from the trunk) with the wheel’. They answered him: “Injury to another does our master in no wise allow; make thy peace (with the bikkus) by restoring the thūpa”; and in order to place (anew) the fifteen stones that had been broken off he spent just fifteen thousand kahāpanas.

An old woman had spread out some rice to dry it in the sun. The heavens, pouring down rain at an unwonted season, made her rice damp. She took the rice and went and dragged at the bell. When he heard about the rain at an unwonted season he dismissed the women, and in order to decide her cause he underwent a fast, thinking: ‘A king who observe justice surely obtains rain in due season.’ The guardian genus who received offerings from him, overpowered by the fiery heat of (the penances of) the king went and told the four great kings of this (matter). They took him with them and went and told Sakka. Sakka summoned pajjunna and charged him (to send) rain in due season. The guardian genus who received his offerings told the king. From thence-forth the heavens rained no more during the day throughout his realm; only by night did the heavens give rain once every week, in the middle watch of the night; and even the little cistern everywhere were full (of water).

Only because he freed himself from the guilt of walking in the path of evil did this (monarch), though he had not put side false beliefs, gain such miraculous power; how should not then an understanding man, establish in pure belief, renounce here the guilt of walking in the path of evil? (*Mahāvamsa*, Geiger translation, Chap 21, verses 13-34- sic).

The picture painted in the chronicles goes completely against the desire of the Sinhala-Buddhist fantasy of 'Tamilness' in the context of the conflict. I present below an interesting instance that I came across to delineate this problem:

The president of one of the most powerful private commuter bus owners association is named 'Gāmunu'. A presenter of a TV programme, referring to a decision Gāmunu's association had made to withdraw free passes for military servicemen, said "*nama gāmunu unath vāda elāra vage*" (නම ගැමුනු වුනත් වැඩ එළාර වගේ). He behaves like Elāra, although the name is 'Gāmunu').¹¹ This is not a common saying among Sinhala speakers. It is possible to suggest that the young TV presenter who probably does not have a sound knowledge of popular tradition, articulated the Duttagamani/Elāra dichotomy, established in the Sinhala-Buddhist mind as a hierarchical good/bad binary opposition. Thus Elāra represents bad while Gāmunu represents good.

Is Duttagamani a Villain?

Several features are identifiable in the description of Duttagamani in the *Mahāvamsa* and other chronicles that run against the modern Sinhala-Buddhist fantasy.

- Unnatural cravings of the pregnant Viharamahadevi, mother of Duttagamani.
- Being named a villain (Dhushta - දුෂ්ඨ) after disobeying his father.
- Engaging in a bloody long-drawn out battle for the crown with the brother.

There have been several intellectual attempts to rescue Duttagamani from the negativity ascribed to him because of the prefix *Dutta* (villain). G.H. Vedage in his Sinhala novel *Valagambā Hatana*, based on Vattagāmani Abaya, a nephew of Duttagamani Abhaya, uses *Detugāmunu* (දෙටුගැමුණු) instead of *Dutugāmunu* (දුටුගැමුණු) (1987). He proposes an alternative etymological root to the prefix, whereby it is argued that originally it was not *Dutta* (දුෂ්ඨ > දුට්ඨ > දුටු) but *Jetta* (*jeshtha* > *jetta* > *detu* - ජේෂ්ඨ > ජේෂ්ඨ > දෙටු). He speculates that *jetta*, which means something like 'great', 'senior' or 'illustrious' has transmuted itself into *dutta* for some unknown reason.

While debunking this explanation, Ellavala Medhananda provides a more effective answer to the problem. According to him this prefix probably has its root in the Sanskrit word *Drushta* (ධෘෂ්ට - brave) (Medhananda, 2006: 26-29). In line with this interpretation Laleendra Sannasgama in an essay appearing in the *Divaina* newspaper (21-03-2012, Wednesday Supplement – බදාදා අතිරේකය), even recommends that the state must use its own funds and take measures to popularise the 'accurate' usage 'Vira Gamini' (වීර ගමිණී) in place of

¹¹ The programme, titled *Derana Aruna*, is a morning breakfast show on the *Derana* television channel telecast on 08-01-2011, at 7.15. AM.

Dutugāmunu (දුටුගැමුණු). Nalin de Silva also proposes a very interesting reason for this transformation. According to him this ‘crime’ has been committed by “Non-Governmental Organisations” (NGOs) that were active at that time. To do justice to de Silva, it must be mentioned that he does not use the term “Non-Governmental Organisations” (රාජ්‍ය නොවන සංවිධාන) in a literal sense but in a metaphorical sense.

In place of these scholarly and pseudo-scholarly explanations, in *Maharaja Gāmunu* and *Ratnavalli* we see the historical agents in question speak for themselves. What follows is a detailed discussion of how some important issues have been addressed in the novel *Maharaja Gāmunu*. At times, *Ratnavalli* will also be brought into the discussion for comparison.

The myth of Elāra’s righteousness is a fiction created by Elāra himself as a part of his strategy to win over the Sinhala people

Elāra in Chandrasiri’s *Maharaja Gāmunu* suffers from a guilty conscience over the capture of the island. Being a sensitive man, he was very aware of the righteous character of the people in this land. This is how Elāra’s attitude towards the people of the island is represented through a third person narrator:

People whom he met in this land that he had conquered, believing it to be a paradise, are an extremely strange group of people. Although they are made out of the same bodily parts as other human beings and possess the same weaknesses, they enjoy an incredible mental tranquillity. Living a very simple and easy life, they always spoke aloud and their faces were always full of smiles. They generously offered their smiles to their guests.

At the same time they did not view their guests with distrust or fear. Any visitor could enter their country at any time and trade with them. There was also no barrier to enter into marital relations and settle down here if anyone wished so. No discrimination on the basis of skin colour or race and no one was victimized. (Chandrasiri 2011: 82-83)

Further, Elāra himself utters the following words:

Yet Gamani Abhaya is born not out of Vijaya’s heart. He was born out of Dewanampiyatissa’s heart. He is not asking for the right of blood. He is not asking for the right of royalty. He is asking for the right of human tradition, asking for the right of people who have vowed to preserve this tradition. (Chandrasiri, 2011: 139)

Elāra utters these words when his chief advisor, Bhattāra, attempts to console him when the latter’s conscience is troubled when he felt that he is simply an invader by arguing that: “all powerful kings in this world are invaders. King Vijaya, the hero of Sinhala’s is also an invader.”

The notable feature of this discourse is that Elāra is shown to be self-aware that he is morally wrong and that Duttagāmani is morally right. This representation can be contrasted with that

in *Ratnavalli*. Given below is a conversation between Gāmunu and Padmashri. It is important to note that Padmashri is represented in the text as a Bodhisatva.

Gāmunu:

Even thirteen years after Elāra's death – more accurately after being killed by me – he is still remembered by the people with great respect. It is said that you also influenced his reign, which is regarded as righteous.

Padmashri:

O great king! What advisors do is to simply show the wisest path among those visible before you. The one who seeks advice makes the choice by himself; carries out the action by himself. Therefore, King Elāra's just deeds belong to none other than himself.

Gāmunu:

I like that answer. Those people who say Elāra is righteous call me Dushta Gamini (Gamini the Villain).

Padmashri:

If you think the name is important, you can change it.

Gāmunu:

The chief priest instructed me several times to ban the name Dushtagamini and those who continue to call me so to be punished. But I am not so stupid.

Padmashri:

Your decision is an intelligent one.

(Wijesiriwardana 2006: 50-51)

In this representation Dutugāmunu assigns himself a slightly inferior moral position compared to the superior one of Elāra, which is in contrast to the higher moral status assigned to Dutugāmunu in Chandrasiri's text.

Erection of the Elāra Monument by Dutugāmunu

The erection of a monument devoted to Elāra by Dutugāmunu after the former was defeated by the latter has led to much controversy. Obeyesekere interprets this act of Dutugāmunu in relation to his troubled conscience. He ascribes a deeper psychoanalytic meaning to this act in which Dutugāmunu unconsciously identifies Elāra with his own father (Obeyesekere 1988: 12).

This interpretation naturally provoked Sinhala-Buddhist intellectuals. One university professor of history strongly condemned this attempt by Obeyesekere to portray Dutugāmunu as a psychopath (Wawwage 2005, 312).

Mahāvamsa provides little detail on this episode. This is all it states:

In the city he caused the drum to be beaten, and when he had summoned the people from a yojana around he celebrated the funeral rites for king Elāra. On the spot where his body had fallen he burned it with the catafalque, and there did he build a monument and ordained worship. And even to this day the princes of Lankā, when they draw near to this place, are wont to silence their music because of this worship. (XXV: 72-74)

It simply records Dutugāmunu's act of erecting a monument in memory of Elāra and Obeyesekere interprets this act within the broader context of Duttagamini's conscience. This act of magnanimity by Dutugāmunu, and the way in which it elevates Elāra's stature, has become a moral dilemma for the Sinhala-Buddhists, especially in the context of a modern war which is popularly cast as one reminiscent of the Duttagamani-Elāra war.

This is the conversation that Chandrasiri creates in his text, just before the duel between Gamani and Elāra.

“Gamani, go away with your baby elephant.” Elāra said with sudden pride.
Gamani Abhaya kept silent. Elāra, therefore, said something again.
“I will extend my dominance throughout Ruhuna after your death.”
Gamani did not think of uttering a word as a response. Instead he said:
“After your death, I will build a monument (*dagāba*) here.”
(Chandrasiri 2011: 269-70)

Following is the end of a conversation that takes place between Gamani and Elāra who is dying.

“O dear king, I will perform your funeral with utmost respect! It says two things. One is the great respect that I have for you. The other is that if I respect you, there cannot be any harm to your people from my people...”

For the first time tears poured out of Elāra's eyes. It was difficult for him to speak for he was reaching his death and because of his deep emotions.
Ultimately he uttered: “I think I wasted my time.”

“I should have learned that philosophy during the last forty-four years...” He said thereafter with a very clear voice.
“We have also not yet completed learning that...” said King Gamani Abhaya. “My intention is complete it at least in the next life... you may also try to do so...”
(Chandrasiri 2011: 273-74)

The representation of the same sequence of events in *Ratnavalli* is different.

Gāmunu:

Yes, I saw Elāra's face at his dying moment, there was no sign of fear or anger there.

Padmashri:

Eye witnesses say that you knelt before his corpse in the middle of the circle of soldiers who were standing mesmerized; leaving aside all friend-foe divisions.

Gāmunu:

He gazed at my face laying his blood-filled hand on my right hand. Afterwards, closed his eyes as if going to sleep.

Padmashri:

So, you remembered your father?

Gāmunu:

Padmashri... Padmashri... you see the stake that has pierced my heart.
(Wijesiriwardana 2006: 75-76)

For obvious reasons *Ratnavalli* can be expected to incite fury in the Sinhala-Buddhist psyche. Since the play was not staged more than once and the published text also did not receive much circulation, there was no significant discussion about it. However, exponents of Sinhala-Buddhist ideology denounced the play. Sena Toradeniya (2006), a well-known critic, closely associated with Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist discourse, produced a merciless critique of the play.

Maharaja Gämunu on the other hand was very well received by the Sinhala-Buddhist reading public. It was first serialised in the *Divaina* newspaper, the uncontested organ of Sinhala-Buddhist causes, and published as a book by a publisher well-known for his carefully selective publications. It became a best-seller by Sri Lankan standards.

In my view, *Maharaja Gämunu* is good testimony for the way in which the Sinhala-Buddhist psyche has managed to successfully counter the intellectual assault of the post-83 period which sought to discredit dominant Sinhala-Buddhist historical consciousness. What is achieved here is the restoration of the unquestionable position of the ultimate and paradigmatic hero of Sinhala-Buddhists.

Historical Consciousness and the Problem of Post-War Reconciliation

The Sinhala-Buddhist politico-ideological mindset has a very clear view on post-war reconciliation. In this view, any meaningful reconciliation process must aim at defeating Tamil nationalism. Any positive approach towards the political demands of Tamil nationalism is to be categorically denied. The 'gains' for Tamils in the North and East within this discourse may be speeding up of the development process and vague promises to allow Tamils in these areas enjoy every right enjoyed by other communities in other parts of the country. The other important elements of this 'reconciliation' drive are re-establishment of the pre-Tamil nationalist hegemonic order of the North and East, resettlement of non-Tamil people, especially Sinhala people, who were forced to leave during the war, discourage Tamil nationalist political movements and to ensure sufficient military presence in the region to prevent any threat to this hegemonic order. The historical consciousness of Sinhala-Buddhists is the most effective component of the ideology that supports this approach to post-war reconciliation.

This discourse of post-war reconciliation obviously runs squarely against the discourse of post-war reconciliation articulated by those who view Tamil nationalist demands sympathetically. If we are to imagine an alternative model of post-war reconciliation which would acknowledge, at least some manifestations of Tamil nationalist interests as legitimate and tenable, it is practically impossible to do so within the dominant mindset justified and reinforced by Sinhala-Buddhist historical consciousness.

When I presented this argument in the public domain in shorter form, in an earlier essay (www.groundviews.com, 2011b), Dayan Jayatilaka commented on it by arguing for the need for a pluralist, liberal, secular, modernist perspective for a unitary Sri Lanka (albeit with substantial devolution of powers) to guard against the possibility of Tamil irredentism. He

further argued that “so long as a pluralist, modernist patriotism is lacking in Sri Lanka, the advantage will remain with Sinhala Buddhist chauvinistic patriotism”.

While not focusing on the flaws of Jayatilleka’s proposed scheme for “a pluralist, modernist patriotism”, I would like to briefly discuss if such attempts are plausible within the ideological matrix of Sinhala-Buddhist historical consciousness. What is important to bear in mind here is that the ascension of the existing view of the ideal post-war order, upheld by the Sinhala-Buddhist ideology, is not an unchallenged and linear process. It has been tested and contested in the last three decades. It must also be highlighted that the trajectory of the politico-ideological career of some extremist advocates of Sinhala-Buddhist ideology demonstrates that they have at some points represented moderate views that are similar to what Dayan Jayatilleka terms “a pluralist, modernist patriotism”.

Nalin de Silva’s politico-ideological career is exemplary here. Being an uncompromising defender of the right of the Tamil people to establish a separate state in the early years of 1980s,¹² he took a u-turn around the 1983-84 period towards Sinhala nationalism and is currently its most vociferous exponent. Between 1983 and 1987 he advocated a more moderate approach to Tamil nationalist political interests. However, these short-lived moderate views soon disappeared.

There have been other “pluralist, modernist patriotisms” as well. Kuliypitiye Sri Prananda, who was an active interlocutor with Nalin de Silva, attempted to propose a version of *Jathika Chintanaya* which is more moderate in attitude towards Tamil nationalist interests. It has, however, failed to make a decisive impact on the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist mainstream. Even the intellectual attempt behind *Ratnavalli* belongs to that genre of moderate patriotism. What I propose here is that without ideologically confronting Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, especially its historical imagination, which forms its very core, an alternative approach to post-war reconciliation cannot be imagined.

¹² The essay he wrote in 1982 to the magazine ‘*Yathartha*’ that he edited is clear evidence of this. This was republished in the *Ravaya* newspaper in 1995 under the title *Eelam Aithiya (Right to Eelam)*. Unfortunately I don’t have a copy of the essay at the moment to give the full reference. What is extraordinary in this essay, however, is that he answers most of his own arguments that he forwards later on against Tamil nationalist aspirations. He, especially, defends the ideological justification of the historical consciousness behind Tamil nationalism.

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This essay examines the renewed importance of historical consciousness as a part of the hegemonic discourse of the Sinhala-Buddhist South in Sri Lanka after the end of the military engagement between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan state. This post-war revival of historical consciousness is a continuation of the long standing historical narrative based on an imagined past which links present-day Sinhala-Buddhist ethnic identity with the pre-colonial and pre-modern historical developments in Sri Lanka. The specific character of this renewed discourse of 'history' is that it is becoming an integral part of the everyday social and political life of the Sinhala-Buddhist South. It also enjoys the overwhelming support of the dominant political players of the Sinhala-Buddhist South. The post-war order that is envisaged within this discourse — through the notion of 'Sinhala-Buddhist Heritage of North and East', that was constructed as an ideological answer to the notion of 'Traditional Tamil Homeland in the North and East' — categorically denies any positive accommodation of the political demands of Tamil nationalism including devolution of power. While highlighting two instances where this post-war discourse of 'history' is embodied in two popular practices, namely pilgrimage and popular literature, this essay raises the need to critically engage with this ideological discourse as a part of any meaningful attempt at reconciliation between Sinhala and Tamil ethnic identities.

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