

Political Buddhism and Sinhala Ethnonationalism

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Abstract

Sinhala-Buddhist ethnonationalism is a political construction in defence of a projected unitary state. Such a state is centralized and sometimes culturally homogeneous. In Sri Lanka desired homogeneity is constituted by Sinhala-Buddhist ethnonationalism. In Sri Lanka the state's Sinhala-Buddhist homogeneity has never been a reality. As Sinhala-Buddhist ethnonationalism is part of a political program to achieve a unitary state, we can talk about political Buddhism. Political Buddhism in Sri Lanka has taken several forms in the past and present. There is not one unchanging Vamsic mindset. Political Buddhism of dynastic regimes during the pre-colonial period is different from the political Buddhism, which has developed during the colonial period by the Anagarika Dharmapala. This again is different from the kind of political Buddhism which was developed during the postcolonial period by Walpola Rahula in defense of the unitary state. Moreover, we have must see political Buddhism in a comparative perspective with other states' political Buddhism and subordinate the category political Buddhism under the category political religion, which opens a world-wide perspective on different religions' sacralisation of politics. What is remarkable in Sri Lanka is not the existence of a political religion, but that this is filtered through Sinhala-Buddhist culture and that it violates the Charter of Human Rights and the Word of the Buddha.

Keywords

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Introduction

How are political Buddhism and Sinhala-Buddhist ethnonationalism related? The latter is an ideological nationalist construction in defence of a projected Unitary State. In such a state, power is centralised and sometimes culturally homogeneous. In Lanka desired homogeneity is constituted by Sinhala-Buddhist ethnonationalism or Sinhalaness. The latter is a self-identification. It implies that the Unitary State should culturally reflect Sinhala-Buddhist culture.

In Lanka, the state's Sinhala-Buddhist homogeneity has never been complete. Sinhala-Buddhist ethnonationalism is part of an ongoing political program to achieve a homogenous Unitary State. Therefore, we can talk about political Buddhism. The construction and use of the concept and terms ethnonationalism or more specifically Sinhalaness has as an ultimate goal the achievement and maintenance of the Unitary State. The tone in “political Buddhism” is on “political”, its ultimate goal is the Unitary State. “Buddhism” is used as rationalisation of this state.

There were and are individuals and groups within the Ilattamil Resistance Movement who insist that Sinhala Buddhist ethnonationalism is not a contingent political construction, but an expression of an innate mindset. They accept gratefully an image, produced by Sinhala ethnonationalists about themselves. It focuses the concept of Sinhalaness as an innate attribute in the folk psyche of Sinhala speakers. This self-image is, however, just a populist stereotype or political rhetoric. This fiction about a homogenous cultural state was created in an exceptional condition of a war of attrition, which had a precursor, a climax and an aftermath; it may have an end, or the aftermath may turn into a new precursor in a distant future.

From a comparative point of view the ultimate political aim may vary, but usually, it is formulated regarding state formations. In our insular context, the unitary, united, federal, con-federal and independent states appear in political/religious discourses, but political Buddhism in Lanka is evident in the

formulation of its ultimate goal: nothing less than a Unitary State. In our present case, we face political totalitarianism among the Buddhist organisations.

Here, I shall focus only one particular kind of political Buddhism. It defends the integrity and sovereignty of the unitary state. It can be shown that this present political Buddhism is a conscious construction of canonical, Chronicle and modern ideas. Here, we encounter an anti-democratic or totalitarian form of political Buddhism, whose self-designation is Sinhaleseness (simhalatva) or National Ideology (jatika cintanaya).

In 1972 the Parliament accepted a new Constitution, which turned Lanka into a Unitary State. Politicians rationalised the idea of Unitary State concerning *Great Chronicles* approach of One Umbrella where the umbrella was one Buddhist King as representative of the whole country being Buddhist. A religious approach was used to rationalise a political goal. We get a sacralisation of politics. In political Buddhism, violence is domiciled as a method to subdue resistance. Political Buddhism should be studied comparatively under the heading “political religion” that has global representatives.

Buddhism as a System

Lankan Buddhism is a religious-ideological system like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and other religions. By “religious-ideological”, I refer to the fact that these religions are ideologies, which have an ultimate goal; it is transcendent, and the rhetoric or discourse reflects its transcending interests to move from a beginning to an end, which is the ultimate goal. Buddhism like other religions is characterised by an internal dynamic movement. Buddhism like other religions is a movement.

The religious, ideological system in Lanka is named Theravada-Buddhism, which connects it to a network in Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and migrated and converted Theravada-Buddhists in the West and East. They all have the same canon written in a North Indian language known as Pali and a collection of commentaries written by learned monks. The canon, which was codified in its formation in the 4th century AD., is wholly translated into Sinhala. There is also an English translation produced by the Pali Text Society (PTS) in London. Many parts of the Pali canon have been translated into national languages including Tamil. Theravada-Buddhism or Pali-Buddhism is a common religious ideology.

Besides the canonical and the commentarial tradition, Lankan Buddhism also has historiography documented in chronicles. The most famous is the *Great Chronicle* starting with the arrival of Vijaya and finished in the 18th century at the arrival of the British, who replaced the Dutch, who earlier had replaced the Portuguese. This historiography gives us the cultural specific form of Lankan Theravada-Buddhism. It also is exploited in the rhetoric and discourse of modern political Buddhists. The *Great Chronicle* is part of long tradition embracing several other works like the preceding *Chronicle of the Island* and the following *Small Chronicle* and other works. I summarise them by the term Chronicle Tradition, which promotes a central idea to which I come below several times.

Buddhists in Lanka have also been exposed to different traditions representing religious and non-religious ideologies, specific political ideologies like Marxism, social evolutionism, Fascism, Nazism, and different evaluations of life and worldviews, which all have influenced insular Buddhists. Among these, we also find racist/racialist ideas, which were used by Tamil and Sinhala speakers from the late 19th century onwards. Geopolitics has in some cases been apprehended as a threat and danger to Buddhism in Lanka, especially when geopolitics was accompanied by Christian missionary NGOs. Most Sinhala speakers have encountered Tamil speakers for good and evil. All are aware that there are four different central Lankan religious value systems represented by Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam alongside with profiled non-religious alternatives and religious indifference.

By “system” I refer to an organised, purposeful structure that consists of interrelated and interdependent types of values. These elements continually influence one another (directly or indirectly) to maintain their activity and the existence of the system, to achieve the goal of the system.

Now we focus Buddhism only, which is a mental system, consisting of the following three subsystems within Lankan Buddhism. The three subsystems within Lankan Buddhism, I name Buddhist activism, renouncing Buddhism and political Buddhism. The first two share the system's ultimate goal, Quenching (of a Flame or Thirst) in Sanskrit Nirvana, in Pali Nibbana. For the case of political Buddhism, Quenching has been discredited, but political Buddhism is still Buddhism for a particular reason to which I shall come below. Political Buddhism in

Lanka was and is a subsystem within the ideological system Theravada-Buddhism. These three subsystems are existent over time and place in Lanka, but they are not stable about each other. Political Buddhism in the 20th and 21st centuries has become strong and has marginalised in the world of media the two other subsystems of historical Buddhism.

In the case of Lankan Buddhism as a tripartite system, we can discern parts or subsystems, which display emergent properties that are different than the whole, but which maintain an internal steady-state. This steady-state cannot be sustained if the system is exposed to dysfunctional inputs. All religions are periodically exposed to such inputs from outside and inside. In the island, we can identify the invasions from South India in the pre-colonial period and from colonialism from 1505, which resulted in a near break-down of the Buddhist tradition. In the pre-colonial period, the provocation came from the Tamil land in the form of invasions for many decades before the modern colonisation in the 16th century. This colonisation was another provocation. During the colonial period, the provocation came from the Portuguese and Dutch, who controlled the economy of the country in part. The British succeeded even to get political control over the whole island from 1815. It was a challenge to the Great Assembly of monks, which felt distressed by the missionary activities of the colonisers.

This distress continued in the post-colonial period, to which was added the influence of economic and security interests by a global community. These interests infringed on the supremacy of the state. Today, the dominance of the Lankan state is questioned by its indebtedness to the global community and by geopolitical manipulations from superpowers. We also note the internal dynastic fights in the pre-colonial period, which brought the country several times to near ruin. Moreover, there is the global community, which demands from Lanka reforms in its human rights record. The country is deeply involved in economic depths, which affects its status as a sovereign nation. Insiders have also contributed to question the supremacy of the state, which are not only divided ethnically in Sinhals, Tamils and Muslims. There is also a class struggle related to a caste struggle within both the Sinhala and Tamil societies. There is the selling out of assessing of land and property to China to improve the national economy of the country. There is the struggle

between the GoSL and the labour unions, which feel exploited. The GoSL must meet challenges from its own Sinhala speakers, who tried to topple the GoSL in 1971 and 1987-1989. There are also linguistic and regional differences and finally religious and non-religious ethnic differences. The two leading parties, the UNP and the SLFP compete about which one is the most patriotic. This competition takes place even within of each party. Finally, Buddhism as a system was and is questioned in its expansion on the island by a countering with the non-religious-ideological system, which is known as Patriotism/Nationalism of the Tamils for Tamililam. Tamil Patriotism/Nationalism has survived the defeat of the TM in 2009 and is active today.

All these dysfunctional challenges mentioned above resulted in the emergence of contemporary political Buddhism as a defence for what has been won and for what must be regained. Political Buddhism is as old as Buddhism in Lanka, but its performance could take different appearances. The present one is exceptionally xenophobic.

Now we go closer to each subsystem. What is Buddhist activism?

Buddhist activism has been taken up today by modern socially engaged Buddhists; they may point at the UN Charter of Human Rights as the directory for action, but claim that the Charter by its content is already included in the Word of the Buddha.

Buddhist activism shows an interest in the transformation of society by above given Buddhist values. Buddhist politicians, individuals and groups, the whole nation, will yearn for the ultimate state of being, when community and state have been prepared with Buddhist values like Friendliness, Compassion, and Pleasance at the pleasance of others. This penultimate state of being may last long to be established entirely, centuries, even millennia, before the threshold of Quenching (of a Flame) is reached, which is called Equanimity. The ultimate goal, Quenching, is deferred for the realisation of imminent goals, which, however, express Buddhist values; they lead to the ultimate goal Quenching. These values are practised in the world, but they are not regarded as worldly. During this time of deferment, a gradual internalisation of Buddhist values should take place. To create the possibility for such a spiritual career of everyone, a society must be built, which is encouraging and patronizing. Buddhist education must be provided in schools and homes, in all law-

making; political decisions too should consider that these goals conduct towards the ultimate goal of Buddhism, to Quenching.

The Buddha himself was a Buddhist activist, for example in the case of his advice at the beginning of the Mahaparinibbanasuttanta in the *Digha-Nikaya* for an ideal government, which should be formed in analogy to the structure of the Great Assembly and reproduce its virtues. Religious activism is not limited to Buddhism. Several religions have a section dedicated to it.

We come now to the second subsystem of Buddhism, which I call renouncing Buddhism. We could call it forest Buddhism too because it is transmitted by the Forest Dweller. His choice to abandon village life precludes a consciousness of a progression and advancement he has made on the path. He feels that the ultimate goal, Quenching, is imminent. There is no penultimate goal. Forest dwellers are regularly males; women are believed to be exposed to dangers in the wilderness, but they can advance mentally in the surrounding of a monastery's solitude.

The communication between renouncing Buddhism and Buddhist activism is intensive. We can imagine a Buddhist monk, who has abandoned society. He has chosen complete isolation in a forest, but even this isolation makes it not possible to entirely avoid society, which brings him Gift (of food), which enables his renunciation. Moreover, a forest monk alternates often between living a forest life in solitude and village life in a Monastery. This alternating of monks induces a consciousness to villagers what the ultimate goal is. The relation between renouncing Buddhism and Buddhist activism is a gradual one, especially when Village-Dwellers decide to set apart some time for their spiritual advancement regularly.

Now we come to the third subsystem, to political Buddhism, which is the centre of this article. What is political Buddhism in Lanka? First, it is an evaluation by individuals and groups that the existence of Buddhism as the cultural homogeneity of a Unitary State is endangered. The danger can be turned away by strengthening the cultural homogeneity. This strengthening is done by acting out characteristics, which are described below. They can be summarised by the concept of xenophobia, which can amount to verbal and physical aggression. The ultimate goal is not to reach the state of Quenching (of a Flame), but the condition of a Unitary State as a guarantee for the preservation of cultural homogeneity.

Political Buddhism is also part of a global category, which is named political religion, and which has particular specific traits. We can find them also in many other religious national and nationalistic, religious movements. There is especially one characteristic, which is the core of all political religion. It is the theme "sacralisation (or consecration) of politics". Political Buddhism as a religious, ideological sub-system in the island Lanka sacralises the political doctrine about Lanka as a Unitary State, which was introduced in 1972 in the Constitution. This goal, the Unitary State, is rationalised by being sacralised/consecrated by reference to the Buddha's supernatural coming to Lanka three times, where he sealed Lanka as Island of the *Dhamma*. This reference to sealing is a way for political Buddhists to appear as authentic Buddhists. This way is to refer to the Chronicle tradition which made the Buddha sacralise the state of Lanka as Buddhist by literally sealing, by putting his footprint on the Sumanakūta, known today as Adam's peak.

The historical Buddha never mentioned Lanka, and never idealises a united, federal, confederal or independent state of Lanka. We must turn to the Lankan Chronicle tradition to get an answer. We conclude that this Chronicle form of Buddhism is a political religion because it sacralises a political project by relating its origin to a supernatural power. This kind of political religion belongs to the category religious nationalism, which we encounter in many parts of the world.

The authors of this Chronicle tradition have concluded that the ruler of Lanka must be a Buddhist and that this ruler rules the country under One Umbrella, i.e. that he rules over the whole country which is not united but unitary (centralised and culturally homogenous) under him. One umbrella is the old term for a Unitary State in the Constitution from 1972. Political Buddhists have made this political doctrine its ideological profile after a particular treatment. Political Buddhists endowed the doctrine of the Unitary State with a religious and heroic past and eschatology, which eliminated scruples about striving for centralised power and cultural (religious) hegemony and about the means to reach this imminent goal.

In the pre-colonial period, the realisation of Lanka as being under One Umbrella of a dynastic ruler was made the precondition for the attainment of a society based on Buddhist values. This anticipating of a Buddhist community was a *carte blanche* for

political and military action directed against Tamil invaders. This pre-colonial thinking was retrieved after independence in 1948 in the struggle against Tamils for Tamililam. It was made a part in the construction of a collective memory of the representatives of the post-colonial Lankan nation-state. They regularly repeated mimetically the role of the Tamil adversary King Dutthagamani, Sinhala Dutugāmunu (101-77, 161-137).

The use of violence to reach the stage of One Umbrella finally was Dutthagamanis killing of King Elara, who in the chronicle *Great Chronicle* was classified as just king, but as adhering to another (post-Vedic) faith. This deviation from Buddhism was the only reason for the Buddhist adversary Dutthagamani to kill him. The killing of Elara is today used in a strong persuasive homology, which justifies the killing of Velupillai Pirapakaran.

Political Buddhism is a reaction to provocation by outsiders and inimical insiders, which question and undermine the strive for supremacy of the Lankan state in the island.

Political Buddhism as a form of sacralising politics is not a modern phenomenon. Political Buddhists have learned how to sacralise politics from the past in the Chronicle literature, but the application on a Unitary State is of course stylish. It was made explicit only after independence in 1948 in connection the promulgation of the Constitution in 1972, which creates a problem: The Constitution does not sacralise the Unitary State. This sacralising is done by political Buddhists, who specially interpret the Constitution.

Political religion is used here as a technical term. Political religion is a blanket name for political religions and is a global entity. The political Buddhism of Lanka is part of it. Other well-known examples of political religions from the past and present, based on Christianity, are Italian Fascism, German Nazism, the British Union of Fascists, and the Romanian Iron Guard. Al-Qaida and ISIS are examples of political religions based on Islam. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India is based on Hinduism. All sacralise a political agenda in the name of religion.

Characteristics of Political Buddhism

The threat felt by an enemy may be objectively real, but it may also be a consciously invented as a mobilising tactic. The fear that 70 millions of Tamil speakers from Tamilnatu would invade Lanka is

designed. Some political Buddhists tend to exaggerate threats, for example, that Muslim customary laws in Lanka, which allows young girls to be married at the age of eleven, results allegedly in their giving birth to many children, which soon outnumber the number of the Sinhala Buddhists. We note that there is no concern for the human rights of the girls in this statement; the concern is for preserving power over a minority. This kind of political xenophobia is related to what I have called dharmacracy, what others call an ethnocracy, what political Buddhists themselves call Sinhalaness, and from an angle of the history of religions can be called fundamentalism. I prefer dharmacracy to ethnocracy to indicate that this kind of ethnonationalism is sacralised.

A famous political Buddhist has coined the term *simhalatva* 'Sinhalaness' as the common term for the ideology of all political Buddhist groups. It echoes *Hindutva* 'Indianess' as a totalitarian movement. Sinhalaness, being a self-characterisation, is a new insider term. Indianess as a model for Sinhalaness has been closely related to the ideology of the Bodu Bala Sena by the Chief-Executive of this organisation. He made clear in an interview in January 2015 that the Bodu Bala Sena is inspired by the BJP and the RSS, which are based on Indianess.

Indianess, as an exponent of Indian fundamentalism, accepts a cluster of religions of Indian origin (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism) as qualifying for state protection. Indianess does not comprise Christianity, Islam and other religions not arisen in India. Lankan fundamentalist Buddhists have chosen a more radical solution than Indianess: in Section 9 of the present Constitutions dating from 1972 and 1978, they have constructed a hierarchy of state-protected religions. On top is, of course, Buddhism, as the foremost religion. Neither Indianess nor Sinhalaness, under pressure from the international community, have dared openly to call for a single official religion of the state. The monopolising tendency is however clear. When a two-thirds majority in Parliament, and the economic strength to ignore criticism by international opinion, have been achieved, the Constitution may be changed in the direction of a monopoly for one state religion, for Buddhism. The tendency, especially in Lanka among political Buddhists, to create a dharmacracy is clear.

There is a special point in introducing Sinhalaness as reflecting Indianess. Sinhalaness'

adherents are understood as political Buddhists who commit themselves to the slogan “one nation, one state”. They were evaluated by the TM just as an annexe to the Lankan states ideology of a Unitary State. Both Indianess and Sinhaleseness manipulate religion and subordinate it to national politics. What a commentator said about *Hindutva* is equally valid for Sinhaleseness:

In contrast to communism, we are not dealing here with eradication of religion, but with a process of rendering it subservient to the state.

Sinhaleseness is political Buddhism with a strong anti-Tamil, anti-Christian and anti-Muslim strain. Political Buddhism refers in the Lankan case to the expansion of an internal colonialist agenda. Today, as in the past, colonialism, now internal colonialism, is an vital conflict creating political agenda by the GoSL.

Sinhaleseness is an ethno-nationalist ideology with representation also in the political parties of Sinhala speakers like the SLFP, UNP and JVP, and in thick layers of a population which voted for a government and a president in 2006 standing on a clear ethno-nationalist and militarist programme. In January 2006, the government suspended the cease-fire agreement and launched Ilam War IV. The strength of the government in the eyes of the international community was democratically elected and had its Constitution on its side.

Sinhaleseness is a political ethnonationalist ideology with a strong base in the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which houses a unique identifiable section known as the Sinhaleseness Body, but Sinhaleseness has mostly spread anonymously among individuals and represented by Buddhist militant organisations. In parliament, the supporters have come together in the same place, but this is somewhat misleading because the ideology is of course not limited a group of MPs. Single charismatic leaders appear, often monks, who can assemble hundreds of listeners.

Even Sinhaleseness' representatives avoid, however, describing the conflict regarding Sinhalas against Tamils. It would play into the hands of stereotypes constructed by the Ilattamil Resistance Movement, which often projects the conflict as being between Sinhalas against Tamils. Sinhaleseness, therefore, makes a distinction between Tamils and "terrorists" and directs its struggle against the latter in public statements. They may speak in English about "Ealamists", which is a pejorative term and connotes terrorists.

The unity of the unitary state is conceptualised as Buddhism-cum-territory-language-race in classical formulation going back to the Anagarika Dharmapala and being exploited by Sinhaleseness represented by the Buddhist monk and Great Leader (of an Order), Madihe Pannasiha. His ideal of a Buddhist is the Anagarika Dharmapala. This monk issued one of the best-known biographies in Sinhala, *Life of Hero*”, about the Anagarika Dharmapala.

There is a direct line of ideological dependency from the Anagarika Dharmapala to Madihe Pannasiha, who in this biography quotes an essential formula for (political) Sinhala Buddhism, which we also can apply to Sinhaleseness.

My country, my race, my religion, my language have become to me a group of four great, invaluable jewels. It is my duty to make these jewels of four the protection.

Not only religion, but also the Sinhala country, the Sinhala race, and the Sinhala language take the position of a “jewel”, i.e. the position of a concern in a cluster of concerns. These together constitute the unity of the island. Sinhaleseness comprises the Sinhala language, the culture of the Sinhalas, which is a special kind of Buddhism, the territory of the Sinhala speakers, which is the whole island, and finally Sinhalese speakers themselves, who since the 19th century have been conceived of not only as a people but also as a race. These four are called “the four jewels”, which is a travesty of the traditional “three refuges”: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. The slogan of the four jewels was created by the Anagarika Dharmapala at the beginning of the 20th century and transmitted by monks and the laity to the present day. It suggests that just as the three jewels constitute ultimate values, so also do the four. All these four are parts of a state formation that is called *unitary*.

In the pre-modern period, as documented in commentaries and chronicles, there was a firm belief that the island's destiny was to become the lamp or light for the world, where pure Buddhism would shine for the benefit of the whole world. This idea has been taken up, even in the modern period, and in a particular way, through symbolic communication. The national flag of Lanka, created in the 1950s, consists of mainly two parts. The primary and dominant section comprises an armed lion, expressing Sinhaleseness and surrounded by four depictions of *bodhi*-tree leaves, symbolising Buddhism. Sinhaleseness and Buddhism are framed as one unity by a broad strip separate from the minor part

of the flag, which consists of two stripes, orange for Hindus and green for Muslims. Meanwhile, activists, represented by a group of Buddhist monks, have created a "pure lion flag" which eliminates the minorities stripes, on the argument that they did not initially figure on the national flag. This flag is a reminder of the island's destiny, which must not be forgotten by Buddhists; it was produced commercially by Madihe Pannasiha's Monastery in Colombo and is carried in demonstrations and street fighting by monks and activists.

Sinhalaness is metaphysics: It precludes the existence of *simhalatatva(ya)* 'Sinhalaness' a racial essence as result of belonging to the Sinhala race. *Simhalatatvaya* has been consciously shortened to *Sinhalatva* to correspond to Hindi *Hindutva*. Sinhalaness is a neologism that has been massively launched in Lankan media like *The Island* and *Divayina*. This ideology, which is identified with Buddhism - I prefer to say with political Buddhism - focuses those who question the integrity and the sovereignty of the unitary state as traitors. One of these antagonists are the representatives of Jewish ideology, which is a characterisation of Western science and of Western politics including NGOs and the Norwegian mission to facilitate negotiations between the conflicting parties. They are allegedly anti-national. An important aspect is that Sinhalaness exploits the theory about the clash of cultures on the insular situation, where *Jewish Ideology* supposedly fights a [cosmic?] battle against the National Ideology.

For Sinhalaness, there is no radical change in history. The pre-canonical, canonical, , and post-colonial tradition constitute no breaks. There is allegedly a continuity represented by the concept of the island as Island of the *dhamma*. It is connected with the concept of Island of the Sinhalas, and they form together with the idea that the island from the arrival of Buddhism has in toto been a Buddhist island for the Sinhalas only. This modern anti-canonical and even in part anti-Chronicle interpretation of the concept of Island of the *dhamma* is projected anachronistically into the past to form continuity.

We note: there is a Motherland for Tamils for Tamililam, and there is a Motherland, for Sinhalaness minded political Buddhists. Both parties operationalise the same concept, but there is an ideological/religious surplus or overhang on the Sinhalaness side. Tamils for Tamililam follow a non-

religious tradition of arguing for territory as Motherland. Moreover, their main categories of instrumentalization are not a race, but political unity, language, history and human rights that provide "peoples" with a right of self-determination. There is no symmetry about the other party, to the Sinhalaness movement. Sinhalaness representatives go for a religiously defined island, which, by being religious, is lifted above all negotiations.

The Chronicle's sectarian Theravada view, which was also anti-Mahayana, was retrieved by Sinhalaness in the 20th century, but combined with an additional new belief, namely that Buddhism is the racial trait of the Sinhalas only. It connected sectarianism with racialism and made it therefore impossible for Tamils to convert to Buddhism.

In addition to the retrieval of the Chronicle sectarian anti-Tamil xenophobia, Sinhala was not only regarded as a language group of people, but also as a race in the 20th century. Buddhism became the religion of a race, and inversely and symmetrically Caivam was related to the Tamil race, not by the Tamils this time, but by Sinhalaness.

In the 1980s, I counted more than 100 organisations having Sinhalaness as ideology. It is possible to follow some of them back to the beginning of independence of the state in 1948. Some of them have changed names, leaders have gone and come, methods of the propaganda work has shifted from verbal to physical injuries, but the ultimate aim remained, the establishment of the Unitary State, and the primary approach to operationalise Buddhist concepts for this aim remained unchanged.

Political Buddhists appear in public as dharmacrats, ethnocrats, economic protectionists, adherents of Sinhalaness, and finally as fundamentalists. It is easy to recognise a political Buddhist by her/his verbal and physical outbursts of xenophobia.

Political Buddhism as Aggression

In a crisis, several ways of pacifying "minorities" were considered by the GoSL. One is the politics of assimilation by cultural superimposition. There was the attempt of enforcing of the use of the language Sinhala of the majority, which happened in 1956, but which failed in the end due to the resistance of the "minorities", the Tamils for Tamililam, the Tamil speaking Muslims, and the English-speaking Burghers.

The policy of cultural assimilation succeeded in the case of the Vāddō, who could not offer any resistance. A legend about their origin of being descendants of Vijaya, the alleged founder father of the Sinhala, was ascribed to them, which facilitated assimilation.

Assimilation failed with the Burghers, the decedents of intermarriages with Portuguese and Dutch. They had been English-speaking mediators between the colonial administrators and the Sinhala and Tamil speakers. After Independence in 1948 many left the country disgusted by the revengeful treatment, they had to undergo.

As both cultural assimilation and political integration had failed, there seemed to be only one way left, the use of violence, recommended and executed by some MPs, and political Buddhist monks with the help of a mob in the name of Buddhism. They were only a small part of the Great Assembly, but they had support from large groups of lay Buddhists in the South and by powerful politicians in the GoSL. Today violence is used openly and repeatedly by some groups of Buddhist monks, which motivated the General Secretary of the UN Ban Ki Mon to express his concern in August 2014:

---I am alarmed by the rising level of attacks in Lanka against religious minorities. The Government of Sri Lanka and faith leaders must respond and ensure the safety and security of all communities. In both Myanmar and Lanka, I am concerned that Buddhist communities are being swept up by a rising tide of extremist sentiment against other groups. This betrays the peaceful teachings of the founder, Lord Buddha. Calls to violence in the name of religions violate their true principles.---

There is often a multivocality in diagnosing the causes for this aggression. Is it unleashed because of religious reasons or are there other reasons also, economic, racist and political? We note what is said by contemporary political Buddhists, namely that Christians convert Buddhists to Christianity, which is a threat to Buddhism as the religion of the island. This explanation does not exclude other reasons also.

This multivocality is also in the case of unleashing aggression against Muslims. Muslims are not said to convert Buddhists, but to introduce a non-desirable culture into the purity of the island and of taking space. In the background is the reality of economic competition in the same area and same

livelihood. Muslims are focussed by political Buddhists today, but this is not new; it is a repristinating from 1915 when a nation-wide anti-Muslim pogrom took place in colonial Ceylon. Anti-Muslim sentiments were cultivated already in the colonial period.

In the case of political Buddhists attacking Hindus, we must study the attacks carefully if they are directed against Hindu religious tokens or against Tamils, who are Hindus, or if the aggression is an act of revenge for Hindus having destroyed Buddhist tokens.

We note that there are examples in Lanka of Buddhists attacking Buddhists in the history of the island, of Muslims attacking Muslims and of Hindus attacking Hindus, and of Christians attacking Christians. Religious internal sectarianism is a visible feature as a result of the insecurity to which each religious system is exposed by the dominating religious subsystem, by political Buddhism. A pressured minority religion, which cannot fight upwards in the hierarchy can fight downwards.

Earlier research from the pre-colonial over the colonial and post-colonial period onwards makes it possible to discern a continuity up to 2018. This continuity consists in the attempt by representatives of political Buddhism as a subsection of Buddhism to gain territory in thought, word and deed by aggression. We emphasise that we are focussing a subjection of Buddhism only.

Aggression generates aggression. Some reflecting Buddhists realised that the expansion of Sinhala Buddhism in an aggressive way encounters bitter resistance on the edge of using violence. Why not try to expand Buddhism with Tamil? If the Buddha himself has declared that his dispensation can be preached in any folk language, and if the national anthem of Lanka can be sung in Tamil, why can't we can teach Buddhism in Tamil? If it was possible to translate the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin and folk languages, why should it not possible to translate the Word of the Buddha from Pali and Sanskrit into Tamil, primarily as a full translation of the Pali canon? It exists already in Sinhala and English and partial translations of it in many other folk languages. After 2009, when the TM could not mobilise resistance, some reflecting persons started to think in that way. The strategy was clear, to expand Buddhism over the whole country including the areas of Tamil speakers who were mostly Caivas. The tactic

was using Tamil. The message was: Buddhism is not only Sinhala; it is Tamil too, but in what sense Sinhala and Tamil?

The question arises what is meant by Tamil Buddhism. Is it Sinhala Buddhism translated into Tamil, is it a re-creating of Tamil Buddhism from the pre-colonial period, is this Tamil Buddhism something new and what happens to Sinhala-ness if its foremost mark, the Sinhala language, is absent? We note that Tamil Buddhism, whatever it may be, is in the company with political Sinhala Buddhism expanding by aggression in the North and East. How do these two trends of Buddhism evaluate each other? The Snake Monastery is the centre in Yalpanam district where Buddhism and martial Sinhala nationalism are housed together. We note that Tamil Buddhism does not replace Sinhala political Buddhism; it alternates with it in the world of media and reality.

Recommended Reading

Coming to the fore

Allan Keenan, "Buddhist Militancy Rises Again in Sri Lanka", 7 March 2018.

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/buddhist-militancy-rises-again-sri-lanka>

Stephanie Nebehay, Simon Lewis, "'Acts of genocide' suspected against Rohingya in Myanmar. U.N. World News, March 7 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-rights/acts-of-genocide-suspected-against-rohingya-in-myanmar-u-n-idUSKCN1GJ163>.

Classics

H. L. Seneviratne. *The Work of Kings. The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

S. J. Tambiah. *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.