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The Sinhala Nationalist Imagination: Jathika Chinthanaya

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By

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ABSTRACT

I approach Sinhala nationalism as a social movement from above that draws on and mobilizes economic, political, and cultural resources in articulating and carrying out the hegemonic project of the dominant social group in the country. Sinhala nationalism needs to be understood as a complex blend of ideology, class interests and political power. Sinhala nationalism is an ideology and practice of the Sinhala ruling elite which ensures their hegemonic leadership in society. The study investigates the dynamics of Sinhala nationalist imagination with a focus on the *Jathika Chinthanaya* (JC) or the School of National Thinking. Since its formation in the 1980s, the JC is singularly instrumental in ideologically guiding the Sinhala national movement up to the present times. The study covers the period from the emergence of the JC in mid 1980s to 2005, the blossoming of the JC project with the coming to power of Sinhala nationalist forces under the political leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Key Words:

Sinhala nationalism; Jathika Chinthanaya; Sri Lanka; social movements; Marxism

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfD: Alternative fur Deutschland

ALP: Arakan Liberation Party

BBS: Bodu Bala Sena

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

BJS: Bharatiya Jana Sangh

BNP: British National Party

BRI: Belt – and – Road Initiative

CKD: Chronic Kidney Disease

CP: Communist Party

DKBA: Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

DSP: Dharma Samaja Party

EDL: English Defense League

FOIP: Free and Open Indo-Pacific

FP: Federal Party

GSLF: Global Sri Lankan Forum

JC: Jathika Chinthanaya

JHU: Jathika Hela Urumaya

JVP: Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna

JVP: Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna

KNLA: Karen National Liberation Army

LSSP: Lanka Sama Samaja Party

LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

MEP: Mahajana Eksath Peramuna

NDA: National Democratic Alliance

NDU: National Defense University

NLD: National League for Democracy

NSSP: Nava Sama Samaja Party

PA: People's Alliance

PEGIDA: Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident

PLA: People's Liberation Army

PNM: Patriotic National Movement

PVV: Party for Freedom

QUAD: Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

RSS: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

R2P: Responsibility to Protect

SJM: Swadeshi Jagaran Manch

SLCAC: Sri Lankan Canadian Action Coalition

SLFP: Sri Lanka Freedom Party

SLPP: Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna

SLUNA: Sri Lanka United National Association of Canada

SMP: Sinhala Mahajana Peramuna

SMS: Sinhala Maha Sabha

SPUR: Society for Peace, Unity and Human Rights for Sri Lanka

SSMNC: State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee

SU: Sihala Urumaya

UKIP: United Kingdom Independence Party

UNF: United National Front

UNHRC: United Nations Human Rights Council

UNP: United National Party

UPFA: United People's Freedom Alliance

VHP: Vishwa Hindu Parishad

VLSSP: Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Party

Introduction: Nationalism as the Most Legitimate Political Phenomenon in Our Times

My nation is halluci-nation; my culture is agri-culture! Krysantha Sri Bhagyadatta

(Cheran 2000:17)

The modern world is largely a product of nationalist ideologies and nationalist movements. Amidst the fall of empires, the nation-state established itself as the only legitimate form of territorial rule. Nationalism thus became the principal mode of political legitimacy. The nation state not only constitutes the organizing principle of the modern world but the basis of international relations as well. Furthermore, a variety of nationalist notions and practices such as, education, mass media and public sphere, sporting events, cuisine, and tourism have become part of everyday life. Yet, this organisational and ideological omnipotence of nationalism mostly remains invisible until it becomes aggressive and excessive (Cole 2022).

Nationalism is basically a doctrine of popular freedom and sovereignty. It is characterized by three major themes: autonomy, unity, and identity. Autonomy entails the idea that people must be free from external constraint, and they ought to determine their own destiny. Unity conveys the notion that people must dissolve all internal divisions and be united. Identity in this context carries the idea that people must be gathered in a homeland, the land of their forebears, and share a culture, a heritage passed down the generations (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:4,5).

Nationalism became prevalent in North America and Western Europe in late 18th century, and shortly thereafter in Latin America. Some of the dates that are associated with the advent of nationalism are: 1775 (the First Partition of Poland), 1776 (the American Declaration of Independence), 1789 and 1792 (the launch and second phase of the French Revolution), and 1807 (Fichte's *Addresses to the German nation*) (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:5).

Certain scholars argue that the world is fast moving into a post-national period characterized by international division of labour, transnational conglomerates, regional power blocs and international civil society, and an ideology of mass consumerism. In this so-called post-national world, they argue, phenomena such as, ethnicity and nationalism are increasingly becoming irrelevant and will soon become a thing of the past (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:11,12).

Yet, contrary to the above prognosis, we witness a resurgence of ethnicity and the persistence of conflicts based on ethnicity and nationalism throughout the world. Nationalisms of all varieties have been on the rise. For example, the campaign in support of Breton language after it was banished from Brittany's schools more than a century ago; the rapid popularity of teaching of minority languages such as, Occitan, Basque, Corsican and Alsatian in schools in France; the return of Gaelic to schools in Scotland and Wales that have gained more autonomy from the UK; the commencement of Frisian broadcasts in Dutch radio stations; the revival of Saami language in Finland; and the recognition by Barcelona of the primacy of Catalan over Spanish in Catalonia are some manifestations of the resurgence of ethnicity and nationalism (Cheran 2000:3,4). Moreover, the landslide victory of the Scottish National Party at the 2021 elections, the importance given to Gaelic and Ulster Scot in the negotiations prior to the restoration of an assembly in Northern Ireland in 2020, the efforts of the Scottish nationalist government to have Scots recognized as a national language and not as a dialect, the current reform of Bill 101 in Quebec dealing with the

French language, and the recognition of Guaraní in Paraguay or the pre-Colombian languages in Bolivia as co-official are also noteworthy developments in this regard (Molinari 2021).

Nationalism linked to indigenous or Indianist movements are on the rise. The Chiapas Zapatistas, a somewhat romantic manifestation of the above development. On the other hand, we witness the resurgence of the far-right, especially in Europe and North America. For example, the upsurge of the Golden Dawn in crisis-ridden Greece; the arrival of the English Defense League (EDL) thugs on British streets; the Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States in 2016; the mainstreaming of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) that spearheaded the Brexit campaign; the popularity of the National Front in France; the increasing electoral success of the Alternative fur Deutschland (AfD); the "protest" movement of Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) in Germany and beyond; political vibrancy and continued electoral success of the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands; the far-right populist Austrian Freedom Party candidate, Norbert Hofer's stunning performance (securing almost 50 per cent of the vote) at the Austrian presidential election in 2016; the rising popularity of anti-immigration Swedish Democrats, the Law and Justice Party in Poland, the Progress Party in Norway, and Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary are some glimpses of the far-right spectre that is haunting Europe and America (Vieten and Poynting 2016:533,534; Roth 2018:500).

Amidst globalization, many parts of the world are trapped in bloody conflicts based on ethnicity and nationalism. South Asia, Balkans, Caucuses, the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa, Middle-East are some of the best-known and deadliest hotspots. The ethnic conflicts in countries in these regions have resulted in the destabilization of provinces, states, and entire regions. Even the affluent and stable Global North has not been able to relegate ethnicity and nationalism to the dustbin of history. The tremors of various forms nationalism are felt in places like Canada, Britain,

Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, and Germany, (Cheran 2000:6). As many ethno-nationalist movements advocating self-determination have as their ideal the formation of a nation-state of their own, the world has witnessed the creation of at least fifteen new states since 1990 and nationalism and ethnic conflicts continue to be the most ubiquitous, explosive and intractable problem as at present times (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:11).

Hutchinson and Smith argue that national identities are primary in comparison to other identities such as, class, gender, and race and perhaps only religious attachments have rivalled national loyalties in terms of scope and fervour (1994:4). Hence, Anderson observes:

> The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism', so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time (2006: 3).

I take a Marxist approach to the study of nationalism. Marxism as a theoretical perspective is concerned with the analysis of the capitalist world system. Nationalism was both a response to and an integral element in the transformation associated with the Industrial Revolution (Munck 2010:52). Nationalism and capitalism are twins. Lenin explains the relationship in the following manner:

> For the complete victory of commodity production the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, and there must be politically united territories whose population speak a single language…Therein is the economic foundation of national movements…(Nimni 1991:77).

However, it is surprising to witness Marxism's under theorization of the key accomplice of capitalism. According to Tom Nairn, "the theory of nationalism represents Marxism's great historical failure" (1981:329). Marxism's neglect of nationalism is thrown into relief in a dialogue on nation and homeland that takes place in a safe house in Athens, Greece, between an Israeli hit team leader cum Mossad agent disguised as a Red Army Faction cadre and Ali, a Palestinian

Liberation Organization fighter in the movie *Munich,* directed by Steven Spielberg. Ali elaborates

on the Palestinian struggle for a homeland in the following manner (Spielberg 2017):

> You don't know what it's like not to have a home. You, European reds don't get it…You say it (home) is
> nothing but you have a home to come back to. ETA, ANC, IRA we all pretend to care about your international
> revolution, but we don't care. We want to be nations! Home is everything!

Nationalism was not a central concern for Marx and Engels. It was peripheral to their main

concerns. For Marx, nation was a transitory form of association. Like the state, it will wither away,

with the development of forces of production. Hence, his assertion in the *Manifesto of the*

Communist Party, "working men have no country" (1986).

Thinking on the national question in the Second International was greatly limited by the

orthodoxy of the founding fathers – evolutionism, eurocentrism, and economic reductionism.

However, the revisionism advocated by Bernstein is noteworthy as it defended the notion of nation

as well as European colonialism (Nimni 1991:62-64, Munck 1986:33). Moreover, the Austro-

Marxist Bauer's work on nationalism marks a significant deviation from economic determinism

and evolutionism of the Second International. Bauer conceptualized nation as conjuncturally

determined historical process (Munck 2010:51, Purvis 1999:222-224).

Lenin's approach to the national question marks a certain rupture with the orthodoxy.

Especially, his theorization of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism marks a clear break

with the orthodoxy in relation to the question of nation. Lenin came to view national liberation

movements of oppressed nations as progressive (Nimni 1991: 82,83). Nevertheless, Lenin viewed

nationalism as a transient phenomenon in the great march of history towards socialism.

Unlike Lenin, whose views to a large extent limited by the notion of class, in Gramsci we

find an unorthodox attempt to synthesize class and nation in the conception of "national class"

(Nimni 1991:96,110,113). What is unique about Gramsci's conceptualization of the national question is its non-reductionist approach. The historical bloc and the national-popular are not reducible to direct determination of any of the classes in the production process (Nimni 1991:192).

The non-European colonial world gave rise to a hybrid communism that synthesized nationalism and Marxism. Mao, Cabral, Fanon, Guevara and Debry are the most well-known advocates of this brand of communism that came to known as Third Wordism.

Since the collapse of the "actually existing socialism" in the 1990s, a second Great Transformation has been taking place that disembeds market from society as part of the "globalization revolution." This has given rise to a counter social movement that aims to protect the society from the rapacious attack of unregulated markets and nationalism (to an extent) has become a champion in this struggle of resistance (Munck 2010:52).

In a time of heightened sense of national identity and nationalism, Marxism as a critical social theory that is concerned with understanding and transforming the capitalist world system needs to seriously engage with this most potent feature of contemporary social life without dismissing it as a "false consciousness." In this connection, Purvis presents some insightful reflections that are useful to think about the nation and nationalism from a Marxian intellectual tradition (1999:235-237):

- The nation should not be understood as a static phenomenon in terms of a combination of constant elements. Instead, it should be viewed as a conjunctural, historical and political phenomenon.
- Threshold views on the nation need to be rejected as they tend to be seductively simplistic.

- The nation should not be reduced to class. Identities other than class need to be granted an adequate measure of autonomy and they need to be viewed in relation to class.

- The nation is neither bounded by the geopolitical space of the state nor reducible to it.

- The nation is a hegemonic project that has been articulated with the politics of the modern state.

- The nation is fundamentally a political animal.

The following dissertation is an investigation into the dynamics of Sinhala nationalist imagination with a focus on the *Jathika Chinthanaya* (JC) or the School of National Thinking. Sri Lanka, formerly Ceylon, is known as the pearl of the Indian ocean. This scenic island is renowned for its high-quality teas and golden beaches. It is also associated with ethnic conflict and political turmoil. A key factor that sustains conflict and unrest in the island is Sinhala nationalism.

The JC is a significant development in the Sinhala national movement. The school was the major intellectual stimulus behind the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces in the South of Sri Lanka between 2004-2005 that brought to power the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa (Dewasiri 2018:41,42). Since its formation in the 1980s, the JC is singularly instrumental in ideologically guiding the Sinhala national movement up to the present times. Nevertheless, the JC, the ideological nucleus of the Sinhala national movement, is a highly under-researched topic.

The main objective of the dissertation is to critically investigate the different dimensions of the Sinhala nationalist imagination with a focus on the JC. In this endeavour, I specifically intend to understand the history and the political significance of the JC.

I have used document analysis and ethnographic research in the study. With reference to texts, I have analysed print as well as electronic sources. Moreover, in-depth interviews and participant observation were used to collect data in the field.

The major focus of the following study covers the period from the emergence of the JC in mid 1980s to 2005, the blossoming of the JC project with the coming to power of Sinhala nationalist forces under the political leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa. However, as Sinhala nationalism is a dynamic phenomenon, I have discussed some of the more recent developments, until the end of 2021, and probable future trajectories of Sinhala nationalism in the conclusion.

The organization of the chapters of the dissertation is as follows: chapter one, "Conceptual and Theoretical Frames," lays out the overall theoretical framework in the dissertation. I take a social movements approach to the study of Sinhala nationalism and therefore the chapter is concerned with a critical review of social movements theoretical traditions. Moreover, the contours of a Marxist theory of social movements are identified that theoretically frame the following study.

The second chapter, "Euro-American and Asian Contexts of Nationalism," involves a discussion on diverse forms of nationalisms in above regions. In relation to Asia, I pay special attention to the *Hindutva* movement in India and Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar due to their ideological and geographical proximity to Sinhala nationalism.

The third chapter, "The Historical Context of the Sinhala National Movement," maps the historical trajectory of the Sinhala national movement, from the Buddhist revival in the mid-19th

century till the crystallisation of the JC school in the mid-1980s. The discussion is focused on some of the significant developments in the movement during this period.

The fourth chapter, "*Jathika Chinthanaya*: Historical Context and Political Impact," is an in-depth analysis of the history and the political significance of the JC. The chapter addresses the discursive construction of hegemonic notions of the Sinhala nation through a close analysis of selected texts of the JC school. It also attempts to make sense of the emergence of the school as well as to assess its impact on the political landscape in Sri Lanka. The chapter also sheds light on a disturbing aspect of the post-war Sinhala nationalist imagination that manifested in the form of anti-Muslim mob violence.

The concluding fifth chapter, "The Return to Power of Sinhala Nationalism," reasserts the thesis that Sinhala nationalism is an ideology and practice of the Sinhala ruling elite which ensures their hegemonic leadership in society. It also discusses some of the more recent developments and dynamics in Sinhala nationalism and reflects on probable future trajectories of the movement.

Eco warns that Ur-Fascism is still around us, at times disguised in plainclothes. It would be so much easier for us to identify them if they scream "I want to reopen Auschwitz, I want the Black shirts to parade again in the Italian squares." However, life is not that simple. Ur-Fascism can reappear amidst us in the most innocent of guises. Our task is to uncover it, point our finger at any of its new avatars – every day, in every part of the world (Eco 1995:8,9). I shall conclude this introduction to the dissertation with a poem (translation) by Franco Fortini (Eco 1995:9):

On the bridge's parapet

The heads of the hanged

In the flowing rivulet

The spittle of the hanged.

On the cobbles in the market-places

The fingernails of those lined up and shot

On the dry grass in the open spaces

The broken teeth of those lined up and shot.

Biting the air, biting the stones

Our flesh is no longer human

Biting the air, biting the stones

Our hearts are no longer human.

But we have read into the eyes of the dead

And shall bring freedom on the earth

But clenched tight in the fists of the dead

Lies the justice to be served.

1. Concepts and Theoretical Frames

1.1. Social Movements

The social movement is a relatively recent form of organization for social change. The traditional forms of collective action such as, food riots, grain seizures and land revolts were short in duration and local in focus. The social movement took shape and form in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century conditions in Europe and North America. Unlike the parochial traditional repertoire, the new one was cosmopolitan and often targeted national authorities. Moreover, their tactics were modular, with wide-range applicability of tactics to diverse situations (Staggenborg 2012:4). However, as the social conditions change and favour a more globalized society, the significance of transnational social movements and Internet-based collective action as agents of social change also increase (Tilly and Wood 2009:14).

Defining social movements is a "theoretical nightmare" (Marwell and Oliver 1984:4). Contentious politics is one perspective on social movements. Contentious politics involves group action of making claims that if realized would conflict with someone else's interests. This will involve coordinated efforts where the target or the object of claims is the government. The key features of this approach are that movements are contentious, noninstitutional, target government and other authorities, and involve sustained action and a specialized repertoire (Rodgers 2018:8). Based on this approach, Tarrow defines social movements as "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (1998:4).

Contentious politics perspective is criticized by some for its narrowness, especially its overemphasis on the conflict between the state and the activists (Goodwin and Jasper 2003, Soule 2009). According to these critiques, the narrow focus of the contentious politics definition misses the many different forms contemporary social movements take.

The multi-institutional politics approach to social movements addresses the above limitation. Power and domination can take non-state forms and the contentious politics approach does not shed light on challenges to nonstate authorities (Rodgers 2018:9, Armstrong & Bernstein 2008). According to this view, social movements are challenges to authority, based on multiple sources of power. Hence, some scholars perceive social movements as counterhegemonic projects (Carroll 2010).

According to McCarthy and Zald, social movement is "a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society" (1977:1217-18). In other words, social movements are "preference structures," opinions and beliefs, that may or may not translate into collective action depending on such factors as pre-existing organization, opportunities, and costs for expressing preferences. Hence, this view underscores the idea that the size and intensity of preferences does not predict the rise and fall of movements. On the contrary, collective action may depend more on social movement leaders who act as entrepreneurs in mobilizing and even constructing preferences (Staggenborg 2012:7, McCarthy and Zald 1973).

Social movements are also perceived as formal and informal networks of groups and individuals (Castells 2007, Diani 2003). Diani perceives social movements as "complex and highly heterogeneous network structures" (2003:1). The network view of social movements challenges the conceptualizations of social movements as unified actors and groups of organizations and

engenders an understanding of social movements as decentralized networks of groups and individuals. This view of social movements captures best the uncoordinated actions of individuals who express their political commitments through lifestyles (Rodgers 2018:10).

The political economy perspective attempts to understand social movements as either collective opposition to global capitalism or as representing alternative democratic institutions (Rodgers 2018:11). Therefore, scholarship in this tradition perceive many contemporary social movements as a result of contradictions in the capitalist system and as a challenge to neoliberalism (Prempeh 2006; Spronk 2007; Barker, Cox, Krinsky, and Nilsen 2013; della Porta 2017).

The above discussed views on social movements are hardly compatible. Yet, we can delineate some features common to many definitions of social movements. Hence, we perceive social movements as collective efforts of some organization, networked, sustained actions mostly taking place outside the formal political system, employ a distinct set of techniques, bound together by a shared identity, and whose efforts are aimed at structures of authority to bring about social change (Rodgers 2018:13, Staggenborg 2012:9).

1.2. Theoretical Orientations in Social Movements

Before the 1980s, European and North American scholarship developed relatively independent of each other. Hence, new social movement theory originated in Europe while collective behaviour and resource mobilization theories mostly developed in the United States. However, subsequent cross-national collaborations and influences between the two regions have resulted in extensions and integration of these theories (Staggenborg 2012:13).

1.2.1. Collective Behaviour Theories

The collective behaviour theory also know as the classical model of collective behaviour is largely out of vogue in the contemporary academia. It includes several diverse perspectives. A common theme found in many of these perspectives is the view of social movements as a deviant response to a "sick" society. The then dominant structural functionalist perspective on society, which emphasised the importance of group solidarity for a heathy society, was influential in perceiving social movements in this light (Rodgers 2018:25).

According to the mass society theory (Kornhauser 1959), social alienation and atomization that people experience because of rapid social change such as industrialization and urbanization lead them to join social movements where they find solidarity and belonging. The rise of German Nazi movement was understood in this manner. Yet, critics point out that people who are most likely to join a movement are not the alienated individuals but who are part of social networks and organizations (Jenkins 1981). The relative deprivation theory, based on the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville, argues that what motivates people into collective action is not alienation but feelings of deprivation (Staggenborg 2012:17). However, critics raise the point whether the sense of alienation and deprivation are enough to motivate people to organize into social movements. Moreover, how can we understand social movements whose objectives (environment, animals, etc.) don't directly affect the members? (Rodgers 2018:25).

Another related perspective focused on social strain to explain social movements. Smelser (1962) was a leading advocate of this tradition. According to this perspective, societies experience strain (i.e., economic depression) from time to time. Consequently, people experience psychological distress. This state of mind leads them to act in deviant ways which includes

collective behaviour. The early writings of this perspective viewed people engaged in collective action as mobs that were dangerous, irrational, and pathological (Bevington & Dixon 2005:17).

According to critiques, there is no clear criteria to identify strain in society. Therefore, the argument associating social movements with social strain could become tautological (Useem 1975:9). Subscribing to the structural functional perspective of society, strain theories or breakdown theories assumed society to be in state of equilibrium and activism was understood as a reaction to a disruption of this social harmony. Hence, activists came to be perceived through a deviant lens and social movements understood as morbid responses to a "sick" society (Rodgers 2018:26). Such a view on social movements delegitimized them as serious agents of social change. Moreover, contrary to the view that strain in society as unusual, critiques argue that it can be an enduring feature of societies and social movements may be better explained by reference to factors such as political opportunities, resources, and organization (Staggenborg 2012:16).

1.2.2. Resource Mobilization and Political Process Theories

The civil rights movement in the United Sates in the 1950s and the following mass mobilizations of students, women and minorities created the conditions for a paradigm shift in understanding social movements. The new perspectives that came to be known as resource mobilization theory which developed in the 1970s questioned the earlier notions of social movements as relatively rare occurrences that took place as a result of structural strain of social change and accumulating grievances of individuals (Jenkins 1983). Moreover, the earlier notions of social movements as pathological and deviant increasingly lost currency in this new milieu. Instead, this approach focused on the aggregation of resources in mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977). The resource

mobilization theory emphasises the central role of resources in collective action. Resources include both tangible assets (i.e., funds) as well as intangible assets (i.e., participant commitment). The research on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in recent waves of protest, as in the case of Egypt (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011), expanded and refreshed the concept of resource to capture the contemporary dynamics of social movements (Nulman and Schlembach 2018:380).

Scholars who built on the resource mobilization approach argued that movements do no emerge and develop in isolation, and they need to be understood in relation to the larger context which would facilitate or hinder social movements. For example, Tarrow raised the question (1998:1), "although ordinary people possess the resources for collective action during many periods of history, they mainly accept their fate or rise up timidly, only to be repressed. Under what conditions does the power in movement arise?" The perspectives which situated social movements in the larger national and international contexts came to be know as political process theories (Tarrow 1998, McAdam 1982).

The political process approach emphasises the role of political opportunities in the mobilization and outcomes of collective action. The concept of political opportunity generally refers to elements of the political environment that impact on movement emergence and success. Tarrow (1998:77-80) conceives political opportunity in terms of the extent of openness in the polity, changes in political alignments, divisions in the elite, the support of influential allies, and repression or facilitation by the state. Further, the concept of political opportunity has been expanded to include cultural factors such as, discourse and ideology that may facilitate and constrain collective action along with political factors (Staggenborg 2012: 23). Moreover, the

"cultural turn" in social sciences has led to a focus on movement participants as active interpreters of opportunity structures (Nulman and Schlembach 2018:381).

The above two approaches were sometimes perceived as distinct models and sometimes as two variants of the resource mobilization theory. Nevertheless, resource mobilization and political process approaches could be considered as one evolving perspective (Staggenborg 2012:21). However, the perspective lacked an emphasis on the role of meanings and ideas in collective action. The concept of collective action frames was developed to fill this lacuna. Collective action frames are interpretations of issues and events that inspire and legitimate collective action (Staggenborg 2012:21,22).

Opportunities are the broader contextual factors that constrain and facilitate social movements. Mobilizing structure are "those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action" (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996:3). In other words, these are the formal and informal forms of organization. Shared meaning and interpretations of the situation or the framing processes are what mediate between opportunity, organization, and action. Snow defines framing as "conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action" (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996:6).

The above discussed three concepts of mobilizing structures, political opportunities, and collective action frames have been synthesized into a conceptual framework (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996:1-20). The effects of the above three factors on social movements are understood as determinant and interactive rather than independent. They mutually act on each other and influence each other (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996: 1-20). This approach has come to be

know as the "mainstream social movement theory" as it has come to dominate research on social movements (Rodgers 2018:29,30).

According to critical scholars, mainstream social movement theory fails to produce usable knowledge for those seeking social change (Flacks 2004, Bevington and Dixon 2005). This may be due to the knowledge interests peculiar to academics for whom movements are objects to be observed, described and explained, rather than processes that are actively constructed to fulfil unmet needs (Nilsen 2009:110).

Resource mobilization and political process theoretical perspectives are criticized for their narrowness. Their focus on instrumental rationality in relation to movement dynamics misses such aspects as the pleasures of protest, moral visions fought for, and the emotional and cultural dimensions of political activity which are at the heart of activist experience (Jasper 1997:33, Worth and Kuehling 2004). Moreover, the resource mobilization and political process approaches are dismissive of aspects of social movement activity that seek self-realization (Melucci 1989:33) and social movement activity that lead to large-scale social change (Katsiaficas 1987). Instead, social movements are reduced to collective actors that seek inclusion in a political market (Melucci 1989:23).

Buechler (1993) subjects the resource mobilization and political process approach to a comprehensive critique with reference to his research on the women's movement in the USA. He goes on to underscore the importance of several factors that have been neglected by the resource mobilization and political process approach. According to Buechler (1993), grievances, ideology, informal organization, macro and micro-level analysis, collective identity, awareness of diversity within movements, and culture are vital factors that need to be considered to properly understand

mobilizational dynamics of social movements. Moreover, he problematizes the rational actor model based on the exchange theory in the resource mobilization and political process approach from sociological and feminist perspectives and underscores the need to transcend this limited notion (Buechler 1993:227-228).

1.2.3. New Social Movements

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s new forms of protest crystallized in the global North that indicated structural transformations in the society from industrial to post-industrial phase. In these post-industrial societies in the global North, protest movements of students, anti-nuclear groups, regionalist groups, and women came to overshadow the working-class movement of the industrial society. The above social movements of the post-industrial era are generally known as the new social movements (Wieviorka 2005:5). New social movement theorists argue that above types of movements differ in structure, constituency, and ideology from the old movements of industrial society, most notably, the labour movement (Staggenborg 2012:23).

In the 1980s a "cultural turn" took place in the social sciences that led to an interest in the notion of culture. Social constructionism - all meanings are collective constructions - was one direct consequence of this shift. In this context, culture became a central concern of the approaches in social movement studies that came to be know as the new social movement theory (Rodgers 2018:31,32). The new social movement theory is rooted in the traditions of social theory and political philosophy in continental Europe. This approach largely emerged as a response to the limitations in classical Marxism in understanding collective action. New social movement theorists rejected Marxism's economic and class reductionism – the notion that all politically significant

social action would derive from the economic logic of capitalist production and the privileged position accorded to class as opposed to other identities. In contrast, new social movement theorists focused their attention on other logics of collective action based on politics, ideology, and culture. Moreover, they have looked to other identities such as, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality as sources of collective action. In this broad tradition of new social movement theory, while some theorists attempted to revise and update Marxist concepts and adhered to the critical tradition others sought to displace and transcend Marxist premises and identified themselves as post-Marxist (Buechler 1995:441-442).

Several themes could be identified as constituting the new social movement approach. Firstly, the emphasis on symbolic action in civil society or cultural domain as an important area of collective action alongside instrumental action in the state or political domain. Secondly, the importance placed on processes that promote autonomy and self-determination as opposed to strategies that maximise influence and power. Thirdly, the emphasis on the role of post-materialist values in contemporary collective action as opposed to conflicts over material resources. Fourthly, the importance placed on the socially constructive nature of collective identities, interests, grievances and ideologies and the rejection of the view that the former are structurally determined. Fifthly, the focus on the importance of submerged, latent, and temporary networks that undergird collective action as opposed to centralised organizational forms. Most of the above themes mark a rupture with classical Marxism as well as resource mobilization theory and point to convergence with social constructionism. However, it would be more accurate to speak of new social movement *theories* as opposed to new social movement *theory* as there is no agreement on the above core premises among theorists of the approach as various new social movement theorists give different

emphases to the above themes and have different relations with alternative theoretical traditions (Buechler 1995:442-443).

The idea of a societal totality that provides a context for the collective action is a unifying theme of theorists of new social movements. These theorists conceive a historically specific social formation such as, the post-industrial society, the information society, or advanced capitalism, as the structural backdrop of contemporary forms of collective action (Buechler 1995:442-443).

However, there are convincing arguments against the newness of new social movements. According to sceptics, it is wrong to assume that the newness of new social movements imply that they do not have historical predecessors. "In point of fact, there are no social movements for which this claim can be plausibly defended. Whether the movements involve students, women, racial, ethnic, or sexual minorities…all have historical predecessors that span at least the twentieth century and sometimes reach much further back into the nineteenth century. Hence, there is more continuity between supposedly old and new social movements than is typically implied" (Buechler 1995:449).

Weir claims that the new social movements discourse distinguishes new movements from the old based on their construction of new and oppositional forms of social and personal identity and in their non-statist orientation for the reform of civil society. Weir argues that most of the nineteenth and twentieth century movements in their daily practices attempted to subvert hegemonic social identities and the writings of W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey are some of the best examples that illustrate the kind of self-reflexive and oppositional identity formation thought that characterize the so-called new social movements (1993:81,84). Moreover, Weir questions the new social movements theoretical premise that contemporary movements are located

in the civil society and oriented towards cultural struggle and their disengagement from power politics and economic struggle. Even though feminist, gay, and ecological politics are not purely state oriented, argues Weir, there is a power dimension in their politics that results in state reforms such as, equal pay, support services for people living with AIDS, and banning of clear-cut logging. Moreover, one also needs to be cognizant of the fact that English and American anti-slavery movements in the distant past targeted both the state and the civil society for the abolition of trade in slavery and slavery (Weir 1993:87).

In a somewhat similar manner, Veltmeyer dismisses the notion of "new peasant movements" in Latin America based on the new social movements theoretical perspective (1997). According to him, the so-called new peasant movements heralded by the Chiapas uprising in Mexico in the mid 1990s have a solid class basis (1997:140,141). Postmodernism and new social movement theoretical perspective have contributed to "intellectual immobilisation" and "political demobilisation" (Veltmeyer 1997:141).

Nevertheless, Weir maintains the position that it would be a grave mistake to claim that social movements of the 1880-1930 cycle and the post-1968 cycle are identical and thus the latter cycle has no new elements. According to Weir, in Canada, the new middle class social base of contemporary collective action, the relative weakness of the labour politics with respect to other social movements, the presence of the electronic mass media are new to contemporary social movements in contrast to the earlier movement cycle (1993:97). In this context, South Africa's Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign is a quintessential new social movement in the African continent (Pointer 2004). Moreover, the new social movement theory has brought to attention key theoretical issues such as, the nexus between large-scale features of society and social movements as well as the significance of culture, collective identity, everyday life, and submerged networks

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in the sense of loosely connected networks of people in neighbourhoods and other social contexts, in the mobilization and outcomes of social movements (Staggenborg 2012:26, Rodgers 2018:33,34). However, critical approaches to social movement studies argue that new social movement theoretical perspectives are preoccupied with highly abstract meta-theoretical discourses of social change which are far removed from activist experiences of social movements and understandings of socio-historical totalities (Cox 1999).

1.2.4. Critical Approaches

This tradition saw the need for social theory to play a central role in activism and to build "movement relevant theory." There seems to be a renewed interest in critical perspectives in the study of social movements (Rodgers 2018:34, Nulman and Schlembach 2018:383,384). However, this is not a coherent body of work on social movements. A motely group of Marxist, critical, feminist, anti-colonial, anti-racism, and intersectional perspectives constitute this broad tradition. Certain Marxist studies in this literature are noteworthy for their originality, scope, and insights (Barker et al., 2013, Nilsen 2009, della Porta 2017).

Some of the themes that characterize the work of scholars in this tradition include, power and domination, social control and ideology, resistance, and alternative ideologies. All these diverse approaches understand social movements in relation to broad social and economic configurations. Moreover, they tend to examine and challenge relations of domination (Rodgers 2018:34).

1.3. A Marxist Theory of Social Movements

Social formations are consisted of structures of human needs and capacities, and they are subject to constant making and unmaking. Praxis is the substance of this historical motion, and it is understood as the satisfaction of human needs through the deployment of bodily and intellectual capacities within historically evolving social formations (Nilsen 2009:113, Nilsen and Cox 2013:64,65).

Praxis is social. Human beings need to corporate to satisfy their needs. This in turn throws up social formations which constitute the conditions for the deployment of capacities for the satisfaction of needs. The outcome of this is a dominant structure of needs and capacities that reflects relations of power between dominant and subaltern groups in a social formation (Nilsen 2009:113,114; Nilsen and Cox 2013:65). Social formations with their dominant structures of needs and capacities are subject to process of change due to contention between dominant and subaltern groups over the structuration of needs and capacities (Nilsen 2009:114; Nilsen and Cox 2013:65). Social movements play a key role in this historical process.

A social movement is defined as the "organization of multiple forms of materially grounded and locally generated skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organized by (would-be) hegemonic actors, and against the hegemonic projects articulated by other such actors to change or maintain a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities and the social formation in which it inheres, in part or in whole" (Nilsen 2009:114). There are two kinds of social movements: social movements from above and social movements from below. A social movement from above is defined as "the organization of multiple forms of skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organized by dominant social groups, which aim at the maintenance or modification

of a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities in ways that reproduce and/or extend the power of those groups and its hegemonic position within a given social formation (Nilsen 2009:115). A social movement from below is defined as "the organization of multiple forms of locally generated skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organized by subaltern social groups, which aims either to challenge the constraints that a dominant structure of needs and capacities impose upon the development of new needs and capacities, or to defend aspects of such a dominant structure that accommodate their specific needs and capacities" (Nilsen 2009:123). Social movements from above and below battle to win hegemony over historicity, direction and form of social organization of human needs and capacities. The outcome of the struggle for hegemony over historicity is not determined by objective laws of history but by human agency and the outcomes of this struggle remain radically contingent (Nilsen 2009, Nilsen and Cox 2013:63-83). This dynamic is characterised by some as the "primacy of politics" in the structuration of social spaces which will never achieve a final closure (Laclau 2006:112, Laclau and Mouffe 1987:106).

In the process of articulating and carrying out hegemonic projects, social movements from above draw on and mobilize the superior access of dominant social groups to economic, political, and cultural resources (Nilsen 2009:116, Nilsen and Cox 2013:67). Exploitation is not a self-perpetuating aspect of society. Social movement from above draw upon and attempt to maintain or expand the directive role of dominant social groups in economic organization of society. The directive role will consist of the ability to determine what is to be produced, how it is produced, for what purposes it is produced, and the ability to extract the surplus of the production (Nilsen 2009:116, Nilsen and Cox 2013:67).

"The state has unequal and asymmetrical effects on the ability of social forces to realize their interests through political action" (Nilsen 2009:117,118). In other words, dominant social groups enjoy privileged access to the power of state to further their interests. The state regulates and reproduces the matrix of power in social formations. Moreover, the capitalist state performs a key role in reproducing social and cultural institutions such as, gendered division of labour, the patriarchal family, and racial hierarchies, that are vital for sustaining accumulation (Nilsen and Cox 2013:69). The state and the form it assumes in different contexts is a condensation of power relations of social forces defined by struggle. Therefore, the state is "a congealment of a wider matrix of power-laden social relations, which can never be equally accessible to all forces and equally available for all purposes (Nilsen and Cox 2013:69,70). Hence, state power needs to be understood in conjunctural and relational terms and not as a fixed sum of resources that can be appropriated by one social group to the exclusion of another (Nilsen 2009:119).

1.3.1. Hegemony, Ideology, and Nationalism

Social movements from above draw on and mobilize cultural and ideological resources as well in projects that seek to reproduce and expand the hegemonic position of the dominant social groups. The concept of hegemony has a long genealogy in the Marxian intellectual tradition. It was much used around the turn of the twentieth century by Plekhanov and his fellow-Marxists with reference to the role of the proletariat (McLellan 1979:184). Lenin also used the term with reference to the political leadership of the party in the context of class alliance forged between the working class and the peasantry (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:55-65). However, in this study, the concept of hegemony is used in the Gramscian sense. Gramsci's approach to the concept of hegemony needs

to be understood against the background of political and theoretical crisis of the Italian and European socialist movements. Hegemony was conceived in strategic terms – the need of the socialist movement to establish intellectual, moral, and cultural leadership over civil society before the capture of power in political society (Dewasiri 2000:24,25).

Gramsci meditates on social hegemony in the following manner: "the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (1998:12). Such general consent is based on the acceptance of representations of the dominant groups impose on social life as being in the universal interest of the society (Nilsen 2009:119). Hegemony permeates the whole of society and human existence. It is a complex of values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality that is supportive of the established order and the class interests which dominate it (Boggs 1976:39). Moreover, hegemony extends beyond the ideational realm into the practical organization of society and everyday routines. Thus, social movements from above come to mould everyday routines and common sense (Nilsen 2009:120). Yet, "hegemony is vulnerable to resistance, limitations, alterations and challenges, and thus has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified" (Nilsen 2009:120). In other words, hegemony is not a finished and monolithic ideological formation (Nilsen and Cox 2013:71).

Ideology is a key concept in understanding the exercise of hegemony in a social formation. It is through ideology that the hegemony of the dominant social groups is exercised in the social formation. According to Gramsci, intellectuals play a key role in preserving the hegemony of their class over society through a justifying ideology of which they are the agents (McLellan 1979:184). As with many key concepts in social sciences, there is no agreement on the meaning of ideology. The SAGE Dictionary of Sociology defines ideology in the following manner (Bruce and Yearley 2006:145):

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Most generally an ideology is a coherent set of ideas but more often than not it has the narrower meaning (which distinguishes it from 'belief system') of some body of ideas that justifies the domination of one group by another. Although some users disclaim this implication, the term (especially in its adjectival form 'ideological') usually also suggests untruth. Hence 'gender ideology' indicates a body of ideas about differences between women and men, some or all of which are false, which justifies male domination.

Althusser's contribution to the concept of ideology is noteworthy. He developed three theses on ideology (1971:162-170):

- Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.
- Ideology has a material existence.
- Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects.

The first thesis basically argues that ideology distorts the existing relations of production and other relations that derive from them. It is an imaginary relationship of individuals to the relations of production and relations that derive from them. The second thesis argues that ideology is embodied in material practices people engage in. Althusser's concept of 'ideological apparatus' (1971:166) captures this notion. The final and his central thesis argues that ideology constitutes concrete individuals as subjects.

According to Laclau, ideology has two notions in the Marxist tradition. The view of ideology as false consciousness is dismissed by him as essentialist. The second notion of ideology as a necessary level of any social formation is rejected as it is too much linked to the notion of a naturalistic infrastructure and societal ideas (Laclau 2006:114). For Laclau, ideology is the representational, metaphorical, and precarious closure that stabilizes meaning within specific contexts (2006:103).

According to the Gramscian approach to hegemony, historical acts can only be performed by the "collective man" who has achieved cultural-social unity on the basis of a common understanding of the world (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:67,68). Nationalism has been instrumental in constructing this "collective man" who engages in historical acts. In other words, nationalism as an ideology has played a key role in constructing the modern political subject. It is in hegemonic discursive formations of nationalism that the "imagined community" (Anderson 2006) of nations are constituted. This relatively recent "invented tradition" of nation (Hobsbawm 1983:1-14, 263-309) erases all differences and obscures power relations. Anderson said in relation to nation (2006:15,16):

> Imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion [and] a community, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, it is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings.

However, even the modernists and the constructivists who subscribe to the notion of nation as political and cultural ideologies of modernity tend to entertain the fiction of nations as real entities and substantial collectivities. The problem with this approach lies in the adoption of categories of practice as categories of analysis. According to Brubaker, analysts should account for the social process of reification – "this process through which the political fiction of the nation becomes momentarily yet powerfully realized in practice" (1996:14-16). Further, he underscores, "it is to treat nation not as substance but as institutionalized form; not as collectivity but as practical category; not as entity but as contingent event" (Brubaker 1996:16). Thus, nation should be perceived as a category of practice, nationhood as an institutionalised cultural and political form,

and nationness as a contingent event or happening and we need to refrain from using the dubious idea of "nations" as substantial and enduring collectivities (Brubaker 1996:21).

The analytical task at hand, according to Brubaker, is to think about nationalism without nations (1996:21). Nationalism is not engendered by nations but induced by political, economic, and cultural fields of particular kinds. Moreover, the dynamics of nationalism are governed by the properties of the above fields and not by the properties of collectivities (Brubaker 1996:17). Nations do not exist as an ontological fact outside nationalist articulations and institutional practices that reify it (Brubaker 1996). Hence, nation is a partial narrative (Bhabha 1990:1-7, Chatterjee 1993:110-115). Not only nations, but all social space is discursive and the result of contingent articulatory practices (Laclau and Mouffe: 1987).

Nilsen argues that the hegemony of dominant social groups is exercised in the social formation through ideologies of dominance (2009:119). The central feature of such ideologies is that the key premises are presented as natural and purposive, and therefore legitimate (Nilsen 2009:119). In nationalist narratives, nation is most often articulated in above terms. Sinhala nationalism is a social movement from above. It is a complex blend of ideology, class interests and political power. Sinhala nationalism is an ideology and practice of the Sinhala ruling elite which ensures their hegemonic leadership in society. Gramsci viewed nations as hegemonic projects. It is in this context he said that "it is in the concept of hegemony that those exigencies which are national in character are knotted together" (Gramsci 1971:241).

2. Euro-American and Asian Contexts of Nationalism

2.1. The Character of Right-Wing Social Movements

Umberto Eco sketches a portrait of what he calls Ur-Fascism or Eternal Fascism. The main features of Ur-Fascism are as follows (1995:5-8):

1. The cult of tradition is the first feature of Ur-Fascism. All fascist knowledge systems are based on traditionalist thinking. For example, traditionalist, syncretistic, and occult elements nourished the Nazi gnosis.

2. Ur-Fascism rejects modernism. The Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, is conceived as the beginning of modern depravity.

3. Irrationalism characterizes Ur-Fascism. It basically translates into a distrust of the intellectual world.

4. Ur-Fascism is strongly averse towards analytical criticism and disagreement. While the modern scientific culture considers disagreement as the means towards advancement of knowledge, the fascists consider it as treason.

5. Ur-Fascism grows up and seeks consensus by exploiting the fear of difference. Hence, the first appeal of fascism is against intruders and therefore Ur-Fascism is racist.

6. Ur-Fascism's audience is the frustrated middle class which suffers from economic woes, political humiliation and from the fear of lower social groups.

7. Ur-Fascist ideology is characterized by an obsession with a plot. The followers feel besieged, and xenophobia follows.

8. The fascists must feel humiliated by the ostentatious wealth and force of their enemies. However, at the same time, they must feel they can overwhelm their enemies.

9. For Ur-Fascism, life is lived for struggle. In other words, life is permanent warfare.

10. Ur-Fascism is characterised by elitism. It is a form of popular elitism where every citizen belongs to the best people of the world and the members of the party are considered the best among the citizens and the leader is the best in the party.

11. Heroism is the norm of Ur-Fascist ideology. This cult of heroism is tangled up with the cult of death. The Ur-Fascist hearo craves a heroic death, the best reward for a heroic life.

12. As the Ur-Fascist's will to power characterised by permanent war and heroism are difficult games to play, the Ur-Fascist transforms them into matters of sexuality which take the character of *machismo.* As even sex is a difficult game to play, the Ur-Fascist comes to play with weapons as an ersatz phallic exercise.

13. Ur-Fascism is based on selective populism. The citizens who have lost their power of delegation do not act. They are merely called upon to play the role of the People. Hence, the People have been turned into a theatrical fiction.

14. Ur-Fascism speaks Newspeak. Newspeak is consisted of an impoverished vocabulary and a rudimentary syntax with the aim of discouraging complex and critical thinking.

The contemporary far-right is not monolithic. It occupies a spectrum ranging from fascism at one end to extreme conservatism on the other. According to Davidson, the span of positions between the British National Party (BNP) and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain and between the American Nazi Party and the Tea Party in the United States exemplify this variation (2014:137,138). Yet, all currents of the far-right are united by two features. They all

enjoy a membership and support base in one or more fractions of the middle-class (i.e., the petty bourgeoisie, traditional middle-class professionals, or the technical-managerial new middle class). The other common feature is an attitude of extreme social conservatism (Davidson and Saull 2017:709).

There are also significant differences within the far-right. The non-fascist far-right is distinguished by fascism in terms of three characteristics: (1) they are electorally oriented and seek office through elections; (2) they do not "worship the state" and some groups (i.e. the Austrian Freedom, the Swiss People's Party, and Tea Party) have subscribed to the neo-liberal small-state rhetoric; and (3) they don't intend to "transcend" class (Davidson and Saull 2017:709).

One of the characteristic features of fascists is their reliance on paramilitary organization and violence as part of their strategy to attain power. However, fascism is not simply defined by the above feature alone (Davidson 2014:138). The fascist project is a one of *transformation* – use the state to socially engineer a "new man and woman" with "new values" while the non-fascist far-right project is a one of *restoration* – the return of the people, the repositories of homogeneity and virtue, to their former happy condition before they were besieged by "elites" from above and "dangerous others" from below (Davidson and Saull 2017:709).

According to Davidson, right-wing social movements can relate to accumulation strategies of capital in three ways (2013:285):

1. They are directly supportive of accumulation strategies of capital
2. They are compatible with and/or indirectly supportive of accumulation strategies of capital. However, they may not be essential to it.

3. They may be indirectly and unintentionally destabilizing the accumulation strategies of capital.

In most instance, what we observe is a cohabitation between right-wing social movements and interests of capital. A classic example in this regard is the strange relationship between German capitalism and the Holocaust. According to Callinicos, the extermination of Jews cannot be understood in economic terms. He points out that German capitalism did not need a Holocaust, but it needed the Nazis who in turn needed the Holocaust (Davidson 2013:295).

Even though right-wing populists capitalise on anti-elite sentiments and growing disillusionment with the establishment and project themselves as representatives of the "people" against a minority of powerful elites, they have an intimate relationship with powerful business interests and their political projects are elite driven. Putin in Russia, Erdogan in Turkey, and Bolsonaro in Brazil exemplify this nexus between big business and right-wing (populist) movements (Onis and Kutlay 2020:108,109,111). Donald Trump, a property tycoon in the USA, who projected himself as the anti-elitist champion of the people, is the best example in this regard. His policies of cutting corporate tax rates, undermining health care reform introduced by President Obama, weakening regulatory measures on Wall Street, and tough anti-environmentalist positions illustrate the powerful business interest that undergird his politics (Onis and Kutlay 2020:111).

Studies on the Tea Party in the U.S. reveal that the membership is largely made up of White business owners who advocate ultra-free markets and who enjoy above-average incomes (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Moreover, the overwhelming majority who voted to leave in the Brexit were not from the marginalised sections of the society but from the middle classes and the elite. The lower social classes represented only 24% of the Brexit voters. Two-thirds of the elite and

middle classes voted to leave the EU guided by a "deep nostalgia for empire" and "imperial racism" (Roth 2018:500).

The programs of right-wing (populist) movements promise to reduce inequality and improve the material conditions of the people who were "left behind." However, in reality, rampant inequality is a pervasive aspect of many right-wing (populist) experiments as their policies are aligned with big business (Onis and Kutlay 2020:109,119-122).

The neo-liberal political economy is based on racialized notions. Racialized stereotypes of welfare recipients, acceptable and unacceptable notions of immigrants and refugees, and criminal and penal regimes that are biased against Blacks are some of the elements that fuel the neoliberal economy in the global North. Stereotyped and demonised ethno-religious minorities are pervasive in the global South. These neo-liberal ideological positions have revived and nourished right-wing movements. With their narratives of homogenous "nations," the latter obscure fundamental class relations in social formations and reinforce above assumptions by racializing the social, political, and economic effects of neoliberalism (Davidson and Saull 2017:714,715). For example, right-wing movements will convince the White working class in the global North that the reasons for their economic woes lie with immigrants while their counterparts in the global South will convince subaltern sections of the society of the unwholesome practices of the ethno-religious minorities. In this sense, right-wing movements provide important source of popular mobilization and domestic political legitimacy for the maintenance of the neo-liberal social regime (Davidson and Saull 2017:719).

Right-wing movements are basically social movement from above. Through offensive and defensive strategies, they attempt to maintain or modify dominant structure of needs and capacities in ways that reproduce and/or extend the power of dominant groups and their hegemonic position

in the social formation (Nilsen 2009). Even though in certain contexts right-wing movements may be perceived as destabilizing the accumulation strategies of capital, they nevertheless contribute to the reproduction of the system by diverting attention from real sources of social anguish onto scapegoats. The ruling classes are willing to put up with the temporary malfunctions caused to the system by these movements as they supress the revolutionary possibilities (Davidson 2013:297, Davidson 2014:148).

2.2. The Euro-American Context

The end of World War 2 and the death of the fascist leader in Spain, Franco, in 1975, gave the impression that fascism has come to an end in Europe (Vieten and Polynting 2016:535). But the far-right returned soon. In West Germany, the so-called "New Right" emerged as early as in the 1950s and became more prominent since the unification of East and West Germany in 1990 (Bitzan 2017). By 1980s the far-right reappeared in the political landscape in many European countries (Vieten and Poynting 2016:535). According to Roth, these right-wing formations can be understood to some degree as a counter movement to the progressive social movements in Europe and United States in the 1960s and 1970s (2018:497). The Canadian right-wing extremist Edmund Burke Society (EBS) that emerged in Toronto in the late 1960s can be understood to some extent as a reaction to the left-wing inspired counter-culture of the period (McKercher 2022). The global financial crisis and the wide-spread austerity measures that followed at the beginning of the millennium created favourable conditions for a resurgence of populist movements on the right as well as on the left. They addressed problems associated with neo-liberalism, criticized domestic and international political and financial elites, and appealed to the "people." However, the conception of "people" varied considerably between the right and the left. The right-wing

movements were racist, heterosexist, and homophobic whereas the movements on the left were inclusionary and intersectional that attempted to mobilize across race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality (Roth 2018:497,498).

The upsurge of the Golden Dawn in crisis-ridden Greece; the arrival of the English Defense League (EDL) thugs on British streets; the Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States in 2016; the mainstreaming of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) that spearheaded the Brexit campaign; the popularity of the National Front in France; the increasing electoral success of the Alternative fur Deutschland (AfD); the "protest" movement of Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) in Germany and beyond; political vibrancy and continued electoral success of the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands; the far-right populist Austrian Freedom Party candidate, Norbert Hofer's stunning performance (securing almost 50 per cent of the vote) at the Austrian presidential election in 2016; the rising popularity of anti-immigration Swedish Democrats, the Law and Justice Party in Poland, the Progress Party in Norway, and Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary are some glimpses of the far-right spectre that is haunting Europe and America (Vieten and Poynting 2016:533,534; Roth 2018:500).

As discussed above the global financial crisis and the wide-spread austerity measures that followed at the beginning of the millennium which resulted in widespread insecurities and displacements created favourable conditions for a resurgence of right-wing movements, especially at a time when there seems to be a consensus between the centre-right and traditional left social democratic parties on neo-liberalism (Kovats 2018; Roth 2018:497,498; Vieten and Poynting 2016:534,535). In this context, "status loss" and the fear of it due to the processes of globalization and Europeanization is one of the factors that draws increasingly large numbers of the population,

particularly from male and the working-class background to the far-right (Jansen 2015:201). Moreover, Jansen argues that the resurgence of the far-right in Europe directly corresponds to the expansion of the European Union (2015:197). The far-right plays two roles. On one hand, it articulates the insecurities and resentment of the so-called "left-behinds" of the neo-liberal globalization. On the other hand, the far-right provides a popular veneer to the transformations wrought by neo-liberalism, especially in relation to the dismantling of the welfare state (Davidson and Saull 2017:708).

The defeat of the organised labour movement also contributed for the revival of the far-right. This historic defeat was heralded by the transatlantic rise to power of the "New Right" in the late 1970s and the early 1980s spearheaded by Thatcher and Reagan who embarked on a project of "economic rationalism" that progressively dismantled the post-war welfare state which was based on epochal social-democratic settlements (Vieten and Poynting 2016:534). Neo-liberalism grounded in a collective social-economic insecurity revived pre-existing racialized imaginaries of solidarity, the only remaining frameworks of solidarity left intact within neo-liberal politics after it rendered unions and alternatives to capitalism irrelevant. Moreover, above forms of solidarity were strengthened by the political parties committed to implement the neo-liberal programs through their use of nationalist ideological tropes to mobilize society along their visions (Davidson and Saull 2017:716).

Far-right movements tend to be masculinist and male-dominated. Yet, women play a role in them. Women mainly play a reproductive role in the movement by bearing children and contributing to their political socialization. Moreover, they recruit men to the movement and appeal to the wider public (Roth 2018:498). In recent times, women's involvement in the far-right has increased to the extent that observers are noting a feminization of the far-right (Kottig et al.,

2017). In this context, it is interesting to note that top leadership positions of the far-right National Front in France are held by Marine Le Pen and her niece, Marion Marechal-Le Pen, transgressing conservative gender norms (Vieten and Poynting 2016:536).

The far-right makes the distinction between "we", the pure people, versus "them", the corrupt elite (Vieten and Poynting 2016:537). In the far-right imagination, "we" is a category without race, class, or gender distinctions. Yet, it is notions such as ethnicity, race and religion as identity markers that fuel the far-right discourse (Vieten and Poynting 2016:537). Vieten and Poynting argue that societies that are more heterogeneous in terms of culture and nationality are less susceptible to the "uniting" rhetoric of the far-right. For example, the UK and Spain are "negative" cases as there are many nations such as Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Catalonian and Basque that compete for the "we"/people and thus hinders that appearance of far-right populism (Vieten and Poynting 2016:537).

The contemporary far-right is characterised by its opposition to the "double liberalism," neoliberalism and multiculturalism. The enemy is conceptualized in terms of a globalized class that dominates economy, polity, and culture. This is a culturally diverse but socially homogenous class that has seceded from their home countries to the extent that "the rain that falls in their home countries does not make them wet" (Joppke 2021:962). However, their real target is not so much the cosmopolitan elite but the immigrants. According to Crouch, as the far-right favours inequality, they define their enemies in terms other than wealth and power and hence their conspicuous silence on economic elites that have brought about the present plight of the lower middle class and all the noise on the cultural changes that have brought by immigrants and minorities (2020:97).

The far-right is characterized by an ideology of "nativism." According to this ideology, states ought to be exclusively inhabited by the natives (the nation) and non-native elements

(individuals as well as ideas) are perceived as a fundamental threat to the homogenous nation-state (Joppke 2021:963). The notion of ethnopluralism, associated with the French New Right theorist Alain de Benoist, that has been influential on far-right imagination on both sides of the Atlantic, is based on the ideology of nativism. Ethnopluralism advocates the "equivalency of homogenous peoples in their indigenous territories" (Joppke 2021:963). Ethnopluralism claims to reject racism for the suppression of human variety and its notion of racial hierarchies. Nevertheless, it is a subtle form of racism without races. It denies biological foundations of race only to continue prejudice and discrimination under the cover of culture. Like classical racism, ethnopluralism unconditionally subsumes the individual, the character, and capacities to the presumed features of the origin group and advocates non-mixing peoples for the sake of purity (Joppke 2021:963). Moreover, ethnopluralism denies the notion of shared humanity in favor of ethnic group membership. Based on such a position, they advocate a right-wing version of multi-culturalism that aims to protect the interests of the majority group (Joppke 2021:963). The political slogans such as, "right of the peoples of Western Europe to their homelands" or "Denmark belongs to Danes," of the Danish People's Party, a leading far-right party in Western Europe, that has influenced Danish immigration and citizenship policies since the early millennium, or the former U.S. President Trump's foreign policy of "principled realism" that advocates culturalism and sovereignty are ideologically guided by notions such as ethnopluralism, which are articulations of the ideology of nativism (Joppke 2021:963,964).

Scapegoating the Other is a hallmark of far-right politics. This ideological manoeuvre obfuscates the real causes of the economic crisis (Vieten and Poynting 2016:534). According to Vieten and Poynting, this ideological practice is similar to "fetishism" whereby the real social relation is distorted by a form of displacement or projection (2016:534). By racializing the social,

political, and economic effects of neoliberalism, right-wing movements provide important source of popular mobilization and domestic political legitimacy for the maintenance of the neo-liberal social regime which is based on racism (Davidson and Saull 2017:714,715,719). Instead of addressing the socio-economic disparities exacerbated by neo-liberalism, the far-right attacks human rights, gender, LGBT equality legislation and discourse (Roth 2018:499). Most often their scapegoats are ethnic minorities, immigrants, and minority religious groups (Roth 2018:498). In the case of German Nazism in the 1930s, the slogan was "the Jews are our misfortune" (Vieten and Poynting 2016:534).

The constructions of enemy by far-right groups vary across Europe and the U.S. Whereas in the U.S., the Jews and non-Whites are constructed as the enemies, in Europe Islam and immigrants from Asia and Africa are framed as the enemies. However, this does not mean that anti-Semitism and racism is absent in Europe nor discrimination against immigrants is absent in the U.S. (Blee 2017). What are common to all these groups in the U.S. and Europe are that they are anti-feminist, anti-immigrant, and homophobic and they aim to "take back" the country for the native White population (Roth 2018:498, Narayan 2017).

A significant development of the revival of the far-right has been the mainstreaming and hence the "normalization" of politics and policies of white supremacy (Vieten and Poynting 2016:536). The previously banished rhetoric and programs of the far-right has entered the core of societies. They translate as the right of the (White) native and indigenous Christian Europe. The electoral success of the far-right in many European countries and the U.S. substantiate this argument. At times, it becomes hard to distinguish the far-right from the centre-right as the former, as in the case of the Dutch Party for Freedom – PVV, plays the gay-friendly and feminist

progressive card and the latter are increasingly identifying with anti-immigration, anti-Muslim and anti-EU rhetoric (Vieten and Poynting 2016:536).

The revival of nationalism in the West is not limited to the ethno-racial kind. Joppke (2021) distinguishes two types of neo-liberal era nationalisms in the West. The first type is the widely acknowledged populist nationalism that takes an ethno-racial manifestation, and which is reactive and (seemingly) oppositional to neo-liberalism (Joppke 2021:962). The second type is statist nationalism which complements or even incorporates elements of neo-liberalism itself (Joppke 2021:962). The rhetoric of "responsibilizing" the individual in a non-ethnic collective of the thrifty and hardworking is characteristic of the latter type of nationalism (Joppke 2021:962). Restrictive understandings of citizenship, not as a right but as a privilege that needs to be earned, is the other characteristic feature of state nationalism (Joppke 2021:962).

Much less studied and known is statist nationalism. There are two forms to this type of nationalism. The first form of statist nationalism compensates for the state's loss of sovereignty in the neo-liberal order. The second form of statist nationalism is a part of the neo-liberal order itself, without which the later cannot function and nationalism even may manifest neo-liberal elements in this case (Joppke 2021:964).

The compensatory form of statist nationalism is concerned with symbolic performance or performatory enactment of sovereignty (Joppke 2021:965). This compensatory logic is captured in the global trend towards wall and fence building. At the time when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, there were 15 walls and fences in the world. By 2015, the number has increased to 70. According to Brown, this is "theatricalized and spectacularized performance of sovereignty" that is taking place against the background of transnational flows of capital, people, and ideas associated with neo-liberal markets, the proliferation of transnational institutions and post-national

laws and rights that ultimately undermine the sovereignty of states (2010:22,26). The recent trend in immigration policy towards criminalization of transgressions in immigration law is another aspect of the compensatory logic of statist nationalism (Joppke 2021:965). Some have characterized the phenomenon as "penal nationalism," where coercive power of the state and the moral weight of the criminal justice system are used to address the irregular migration in the national interest (Barker 2018:89).

The second variant of statist nationalism is constitutive of or even constituted by neo-liberalism. In this case, nationalism and neo-liberalism move closer to each other. The roots of this variant are traced to the New Right thinking of Thatcher and Reagan who combined free markets with strong state and social conservatism (Joppke 2021:966). Joppke likens mature neo-liberalism to a "centaur state" that is exclusive and nationalist at the bottom but inclusive and cosmopolitan at the top obsessed with eliminating ethnic, racial, or sexual inequality but not economic (2021:966). Welfare-to-workfare social policy and restrictive citizenship policy under the title of "earned citizenship" are two sites where one can observe the dynamics of neo-liberal nationalism.

Individual "responsibilization" is the hallmark of neo-liberal social policies. The aim of the "personal responsibility crusade" is to do away with society and collective responsibility from state policy. Hence, the new policy thrust shifts away from social insurance in which risks were conceptualized in terms of the principle of shared fate to personal responsibility in which risks are associated with the individual. The whole point of this shift towards individual responsibility is to advance and protect the collectivity by not subjecting it to undue burden. This collectivity is the nation which is conceptualized in non-ethnic terms and open to all productive comers (Joppke 2021:966,967). According to British Tory Premier Cameron, the beneficiaries of his 2012 workfare policies are all of Britain's "hardworking people" which he characterized as the

"aspiration nation." According to Joppke, to associate oneself with this kind nation is a form of nationalism that can be characterised as neo-liberal nationalism (2021:967).

The implicit nationalism of the neo-liberal state is "ghost-like" against the background of a post-national European and a globalizing world. Yet, there is a collectivity to be furthered by so called "activating" or welfare-to-workfare policy. But it is rarely named. The two favourite terms used are "common good" and "society" that are nationally and ethnically anonymous. Nevertheless, nationalism is implied in these terms. This is a nationalism that idealizes civic values of work and autonomy (Joppke 2021:968).

In the current neo-liberal moment, access to citizenship in the global North has simultaneously become broader and narrower. It has become broader because group-level (i.e., ethnic, racial, or sexual) obstacles have been removed. Access to citizenship has become narrower because stringent individual-level conditions have been attached to it (Orgad 2017:352). Unlike in the liberal past, when citizenship was considered a right, the current neo-liberal context articulates it as a privilege that needs to be earned by the meritorious individual (those who are not born with it). The concept of earned citizenship was invented by the Labour government in the U.K in 2008. It stipulated that the new commers need to "earn" the right to stay in the U.K. by learning English, paying taxes, obeying the law, and contributing to the community (Joppke 2021:968).

According to Joppke, earned citizenship is neo-liberal and nationalist at the same time (2021:968). It is neo-liberal because it demands the individual to achieve and contribute. It is nationalist because citizenship is conceptualized as a privilege reserved only for selected few who contribute to enhance the value of the national community they join (Joppke 2021:968).

The community that nationalism associated with earned citizenship engenders is one of value, not descent. The new nationalism is neither ethnic nor it craves for homogeneity. Its borders are porous and includes everyone who can contribute and proven worthy. This neo-liberal nationalism, which is based on individual merit and performance, is perfectly compatible with multiculturalism in the global North (Joppke 2021:969).

The nexus between nationalism and neo-liberalism is complex. One variant of nationalism is reactive to neo-liberalism and seemingly takes an oppositional form against it. The other variant of nationalism exhibits a compensatory and a constitutive nexus with neo-liberalism. In this case, nationalism directly fulfills the needs of the neo-liberal order.

2.3. The Asian Context

2.3.1. The *Hindutva* Movement

The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), the nucleus of the *Hindutva* movement, elaborates on its mission in the following manner (Leidig 2020:215):

> The mission of reorganizing the Hindu society on the lines of its unique national genius which the Sangh has taken up is not only a great process of true national regeneration of Bharat but also the inevitable precondition to realize the dream of world unity and human welfare. Our one supreme goal is to bring to life the all-round glory and greatness of our Hindu Rashtra.

Hindutva is a project basically concerned with building a Hindu *Rashtra* or state in India. The RSS leader, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar was in search of a "living God" and he found this God in the nation. By redefining India as a Hindu *Rashtra*, the *sangh* diluted the distinction between nation

and community. The nation, the God of *Hindutva*, became the community or society of Hindus (Sarkar 2022:226).

According to Narain (n.d.:12), the first sense of Hindu consciousness is traced to the early eighteenth century and is associated with the rise of the Maratha empire. The *Hindutva* movement as a modern nationalist movement, influence by the European scholarship at the time, only originated in the nineteenth century as a resistance movement against the British colonial power in India. The British policy of creating separate electorates for Muslims in India encouraged Hindu elites to form Hindu *sabhas*[1] throughout the country that culminated in the formation of *Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha* in 1914. This organization which advocated anti-British and anti-Muslim sentiments was the first attempt to unite Hindus nationally on a political basis (Leidig 2020:221, Andersen 2017:S-10).

Since the beginning of the movement, the *Hindutva* leadership and ideologues maintained close relations with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Fascist and Nazi ideals were disseminated in the Indian society by the *Hindutva* movement, mainly through print media. In this context, the contributions of the RSS as a grassroots social movement are noteworthy. The organization was formed in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and its ideology was articulated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his text *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?,* first published in 1923. Savarkar's notion of *Hindutva* connotes a political identity of the peninsula bounded by the Himalayas to the north and the ocean to the south (Jaffrelot 2007:14). The Hindu religious element forms only a part of this political identity, which includes a common language, racial lineage, and geographical origin. Hence, *Hindutva* is a comprehensive cultural, racial, and geographic identity of which the

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[1] Associations.

practice of the Hindu religion is only a part (Abraham 2014:50). According to Sharma, Savarkar's notion of *Hindutva* is largely borrowed from European notions of ethnic nationhood (2003:1-13). More than any other leader of his time, Savarkar was in awe of Europe's achievements in relation to nation-building and state-formation. His political ideology characterized by notions of nation, national state, nationality and nationalism was aggressively European (Nandy 2014:91).

Fascist Italy as well as Nazi Germany recruited Indian students through the *Hindutva* networks. Apart from teaching Italian and German languages, they were indoctrinated into Fascist and Nazi propaganda and turned into Fascist and Nazi propaganda cells (Leidig 2020:222,225). Savarkar, who was then the President of the *Hindu Mahasabha* and a close associate of the RSS, was an admirer of Hitler and advocated the Nazi Germany's approach to Jews as a model to address the Muslim "problem" in India (Narain n.d.:13, Leidig 2020:222,223). Moreover, Golwalkar, subscribed to the Nazi view of nation and emphasized that being a Hindu was a matter of race and blood, not only a matter of culture (Narain n.d.:13,14; Leidig 2020:223). Further, it is interesting to note that certain RSS practices – most notably the physical drill exercises - were modeled on Fascist practices that were observed by Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, the mentor of Hedgewar, during his long visit to Italy where he had an audience with Mussolini (Leidig 2020:222).

The fascination with Nazi and Fascist leaders was not however peculiar to the Indian far-right. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the admiration for such horrible characters constitutes an aspect of Sinhala nationalism as well. One piece of advice given by Ven. Wendaruwe Upali, a respected and a high-ranking Buddhist monk to the President of Sri Lanka, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, is to be stern like Hitler.

While the *Hindutva* forces were inspired and influenced by Fascist and Nazi ideas, the latter also engaged with *Hindutva* to advance their ideologies and political projects. For example,

Hindutva tracts appeared in Nazi and Fascist newspapers (Leidig 2020:224). Moreover, Nazis embraced a variety of pagan, esoteric and Indo-Aryan religious doctrines to advance their racial, political, and ideological aims (Leidig 2020:224). In this context, the belief in an Indo-Aryan civilization centered in northern India is noteworthy (Leidig 2020:224). The French writer, Maximiani Portas is an interesting figure in this milieu of far-right exchange between Europe and India. She came to India in search of "truth" and metamorphosed into Savitri Devi. During the late 1930s, Devi had a very close encounter with the *Hindutva* movement in India. Subsequently, she spied with her Fascist Indian husband on American and British officers for the Axis powers during the war. In the post-war period, she came to propagate the idea that Hitler was a reincarnation of God Vishnu (Leidig 2020:225,226).

The influence of the *Hindutva* movement has been on the rise in the Indian society since independence in late 1940s. Gandhi's Hinduism, *Sanatana Dharma*, which gives space to *all* has been under gradual assault with exclusivist notions of *Hindutva* traced to Savarkar (Heredia 2009). In the 1960s and 1970s, the *Hindutva* movement witnessed a rapid political growth. In this context, the RSS spawned numerous organizations that made up the so- called *Sangh Parivar*, the family of organizations in the *Hindutva* movement. The paramilitary type violent *Bajrang Dal*, the culturally and ideologically oriented *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*, the charity-based non-governmental organization *Sewa Bharati*, the trade union *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh*, the farmer's union *Bharatiya Kisan Sangh*, the student organization *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad*, and female-only organizations such as, *Rashtriya Sevika Samiti* and *Sadhvi Shakti Parishad* are some of the organizations that make up the *Sangh Parivar* (Leidig 2020:227,228).

The RSS affiliated *Vidya Bharati* is noteworthy. This organization runs the second largest chain of schools in the country, next only to the government run schools. Except in few places like

Nagaland where the Christian missionary influence is preventing the entry of RSS, *Vidya Bharati* administered schools exist everywhere in India and over million children are educated in these schools. Apart from schools, there are *Vidya Bharati* administered colleges, pre-schools and *kendras* (Sarkar 2022:145-148). The syllabus in these educational institutions includes among other things patriotism and Indian culture (Sarkar 2022:147). The RSS education program is concerned with confronting the alienating and denationalizing colonial influence of Macaulay and his ilk and the "remaking of the nation." The RSS pedagogy is directly linked to their project of Hindu *Rashtra* (Sarkar 2022:143-157).

In the 1980s and 1990s, with the aim of recruiting popular support to *Hindutva*, the *Sangh Parivar* organized campaigns that distributed merchandise such as, calendars and stickers featuring Hindu icons, which became very popular. Moreover, *Hindutva* narratives were also disseminated through the popular cinema. A reoccurring theme in this regard was the Muslim enemy. The Muslim was constructed as a "foreigner" and an "invader," the internal enemy, who collaborated with the colonial project of the British, the external enemy (Leidig 2020:221,228; Kumar 2013). In the 1990s, *Hindutva* forces spearheaded a campaign to make Hindi the official language of the government and to revive Sanskrit (Basu 2016:12).

In the 1990s, *Hindutva* was slowly becoming a mainstream phenomenon, irrespective of the party in control of the central government. The RSS remained the nucleus of the *Hindutva* movement. With the coming to power of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) or the *Indian People's Party*, the project *Hindutva* blossomed.

Even though the RSS leadership maintained close relations with the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the Indian National Congress, it operated outside the political system as one of its main objectives was the unification of the fractured Hindu community. The involvement in politics, the RSS

leadership reasoned, would compromise the organization as a unifying force (Andersen 2017:S-11). However, the RSS leadership came under increasing criticism by its rank and file for the organization's lack of influence on the independence movement and deliberations leading to the British withdrawal from India, especially in the background of a bitter partition of British India. They questioned the RSS capacity to defend the Hindu nationalist vision for India (Andersen 2017:S-11). Hence, the RSS leadership was under increasing pressure by its membership to transform the outfit into a political organization. It is in this context that the RSS leadership loaned some of its brightest *pracharaks*[2] for the formation of a new political party named *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (BJS) under the leadership of a seasoned politician from the *Hindu Mahasabha* shortly before the first national election in 1952 as the nationalist alternative to centre-left secularist Indian National Congress (Andersen 2017:S-11, Leidig 2020:229). Before long, the loaned full-time workers of the RSS took control of the BJS.

The BJS political agenda consisted of issues such as, the protection of cows; withdrawal of the autonomy provisions in the Muslim majority state of Kashmir; reclamation of historic temples destroyed by invaders, notably the Ram Temple in the holy city of Ayodhya; a call for nuclear weapons capability; and economic self-reliance. Moreover, from late 1960s, the party became increasingly xenophobic demanding minorities to "Indianize" and assimilate into the "Hindian" nation (Andersen 2017:S-11, Leidig 2020:229).

In the late 1970s, the BJS was in an electoral alliance. In the so-called "dual membership controversy," their coalition partners, most notably, the *Janata Party*, demanded BJS officials quit the RSS as they saw it as an extra-constitutional element that could distort their message. In

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[2] Full-time workers.

response, the RSS full-time workers who held the BJS leadership withdrew from the coalition. They formed a new party named the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) or the Indian People's Party in 1980. In comparison to the BJS, the BJP program was more moderate and inclusive. This transition was possible because the RSS leadership did not oppose the move as this would make the new party more influential in Indian politics and thus would serve well the interests of the RSS in the long-run (Andersen 2017:S-12). Nevertheless, the BJP continued to assert that India is a Hindu nation and "Hindu identity and culture [as] being the mainstay of the Indian nation and of Indian society" (Leidig 2020:229).

Within a short span, the BJP rapidly expanded its support base, especially in India's Hindi-speaking heartland. In the directly elected lower house of parliament, the *Lok Sabha*, the BJP increased its strength from 2 seats (of 543) in 1984 to 85 seats in 1989 and then to 120 seats in 1991. In the 1999 elections, the BJP won 182 seats and emerged as the largest single party in *Lok Sabha*. In the 2014 elections, the BJP and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners secured 336 of 543 seats in the *Lok Sabha*. Moreover, in this election, the BJP stunned the political establishment by winning a parliamentary majority of 282 seats on its own (Andersen 2017:S-12). Further, in the 2019 election, the BJP was re-elected with even grater majority than in 2014. Hence, with the widening support for *Hindutva*, it has achieved high levels of normalcy and legitimacy and has become a mainstream phenomenon in Indian society.

In the political carrier of the BJP, especially in the popular consolidation phase of the party, two evens are noteworthy as they defined the BJP as well as the political trajectories in India. The campaigns associated with these events were conceptualized by the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP)

and the RSS provided the grass roots outreach networks. The campaigns took the form of *yatras*[3].

They were basically long road shows that stretched through several cities and states and included

a particular theme and narrative that the organizers wanted to become a part of the national-level

discourse. The two most noteworthy yatras were *Ekmata Yatra* (unity pilgrimage) in 1983 and

Ram Rath Yatra (Rama's chariot pilgrimage) in 1990 (Narain n.d.:18).

The *Ekmata Yatra* of 1983 took apolitical form and comprised of several small and long

pilgrimages that criss-crossed the country. The longest pilgrimage started from Pashupati Nath

temple in Nepal and ended in the coastal city of Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu, India. It urged all

Hindu sects of the country to come together, thus idealizing Hindu unity (Narain n.d.:18).

The *Ram Rath Yatra* of 1990 was more political and the BJP leaders, especially L.K.

Advani, the President of the BJP at the time, played a key role. The campaign centred around the

narrative of constructing a Hindu temple at the supposed birthplace of the Hindu God Rama after

demolishing the mosque known as the Babri masjid built on that place by Mughals. Advani led

the pilgrimage on a chariot through the Hindi heartland of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Uttar

Pradesh with an estimated 150,000 *kar-sevaks*[4] and more supporters who joined on the way.

Although Advani was arrested in Bihar, the *yatra* arrived in Ayodhya and attacked the Babri masjid

which triggered anti-Muslim violence throughout the country (Narain n.d.:18-20).

It is noteworthy that the dominant caste-based BJP led *Ram Rath Yatra* which stirred Hindu

nationalism took place in the context of the V. P Singh government taking action to implement

certain recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report that reserved 27% of government and

public sector jobs for oppressed castes. This was a move that had the potential of undermining the

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[3] Pilgrimages.
[4] Party workers.

growing popular Hindu support base of the BJP. The *Ram Rath Yatra* campaign, consequently, strengthened the BJP vote bank in the Hindi-speaking belt (Narain n.d.:19,20).

Over the years, the *Sangh Parivar* has become stronger. At the time of 2019 *Lok Sabha* elections, the RSS boasted 800,000 volunteers. Moreover, 2.8 million volunteers were associated with the student organization, *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad*; 20 million volunteers associated with the labour union, *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh*; 2.8 million volunteers associated with the farmers collective, the *Bharatiya Kisan Sangh*; and 3.2 million volunteers associated with the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*. Moreover, there were approximately 20,000 *Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram* projects managed by the *Parivar* which focused on education and health in tribal areas as well as 1,60,000 other *Rashtriya Sewa Bharati* projects that were concerned with social welfare in over 600 districts throughout the country (Narain n.d.:36).

Despite the attempt to downplay the *Hindutva* agenda, the BJP has failed to maintain a centrist position. In certain states, the party has directly implemented the *Hindutva* agenda in cultural and educational spheres, especially in relation to school curriculum (Leidig 2020:234). It has also carried out numerous G*au Raksha*[5] campaigns. In these cow protection campaigns, violence, that has also resulted in deaths, is directed against minorities, especially Muslims and oppressed-caste Hindus, for the possession of beef. Vigilante cow protection groups that engage in violence and who enjoy impunity from law enforcement agencies have sprung up in many parts of the country (Narain n.d.:36,37). At the India's first national convention of *Gau Rakshaks*[6] in Lucknow organized by the VHP, Yogi Adityanath, the *Hindutva* hardliner and the BJP Chief

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[5] Cow protection.
[6] Cow protectors.

Minister of Uttar Pradesh who incites violence against Muslims and make derogatory remarks about women and homosexuality, said (Narain n.d.:37, Leidig 2020:234,235):

> There is only one way to protect Indian culture: to protect *gau* (cows), Ganga, and (goddess) Gayatri…Only the community that can protect this heritage will survive. Otherwise, there will be a huge crisis of identity, and this crisis of identity will endanger our existence.

Moreover, some of the other acts that are associated with the BJP administration include (Leidig 2020:234):

> Attacks on places of worship, delegitimizing of inter-faith marriages, privileging of Hindu symbols and identities, equating of Hindu identity with national identity and, perhaps most dramatically and contentiously, challenging the right to propagate religion by running a campaign that seeks to convert Muslim and Christian families "back" to Hinduism.

The freedom of speech has been undermined. Media houses, journalists, academics, and students who are critical of the government, especially its policies of communalism, are branded anti-national and silenced through widespread censorship as well as violence. This has resulted in marginalization, self-censorship, arbitrary raids and shutdowns of media houses, arrests, physical attacks, and killings (Leidig 2020:234, Narain n.d.:37,38). Moreover, the BJP administration has renamed many streets, cities, and airports after Hindu figures. The Modi-led BJP administration's recent decision to revoke the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution which gives special status to the Muslim-dominated Jammu and Kashmir underscores the party's commitment to the *Hindutva* ideal of *Akhand Bharat*[7] (Leidig 2020:234,235).

What is remarkable is the radical shift in economic philosophy in the *Hindutva* movement under the political leadership of the BJP. The *Hindutva* economic philosophy was mainly

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[7] Undivided India.

articulated by Deendayal Upadhyaya (1916-1968). Born into a *Marwari* family from Uttar Pradesh, the academically gifted Upadhyaya rejected the offer to join the prestigious regional civil service at the completion of his higher studies and instead joined the RSS as a full-time worker. He was appointed as the General Secretary of the newly formed *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* Party in 1951 and later assumed de facto leadership after the sudden death of the party founder, Mookherjee, in 1953. Upadhyaya left behind a small corpus of writings and his works, *The Two Plans* (1958) and *Integral Humanism* (1965), elaborate his thoughts on the economy (Abraham 2014:54-56).

Upadhyaya's economic philosophy basically consisted of a synthesis of a Gandhian critique of modern economic systems and the proposal of a holistic alternative. He argued that modern economic models dehumanized individuals through a narrow conception of human nature and misdirected the proceeds of production and, in the case of capitalism, reversed the natural relationship between human needs and production. In place of this modern economic system, which is inherently unstable, Upadhyaya proposed an alternative system that emphasized self-reliance (*swadeshi*) and decentralization (*vikendrikaran*). He reasoned that the above economic principles would engage India's own abundant resources while allowing space for individuals to grow without the limitations of a restrictive state or inverted economic priorities (Abraham 2014:68). In concrete terms, these principles envisioned an economic system based on decentralized production and self-sufficiency. Such an economic framework, which he termed *Integral Humanism*, would create the possibilities for human beings to blossom in all their dimensions. The BJS economic program was largely based on the above discussed ideas of Upadhyaya (Abraham 2014:100).

When the BJS morphed into BJP in 1980, as discussed earlier, its program shifted somewhat to the centre. What began as a gradual reassessment of economic policies while the BJP was on the way to power developed into a neo-liberal economic program once the party captured power. In 1998, the BJP formed its first National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition government. The economic program that followed marked a radical shift from BJS policies based on Upadhyaya's notions of self-reliance and decentralization. The BJP led NDA government's economic program clearly incorporated a neo-liberal capitalist policy framework. Characteristic markers of this policy shift were the deregulation of the economy; an openness to foreign investment, goods and services; the shrinkage of the government; and a policy of privatization over job security and full-employment (Abraham 2014:115). Moreover, this policy change was achieved despite vehement criticism of fellow members of the *Sangh Parivar*, most notably, the *Swadeshi Jagaran Manch* (SJM), which was founded in 1991 to respond to the economic liberalization policies of the then Indian National Congress government (Abraham 2014:138-141,150).

The *Hindutva* movement, and its political agent, the BJP, represent the interests of a variety of constituencies. Some of them are: dominant-caste Hindus, Hindi-speakers, the "neo-middle class," the progeny of neo-liberal globalization, white-collar workers, professionals, merchants, middle to upper class groups, big-business, and elements of the Indian diaspora (Narain n.d.:39; Leidig 2020:232,233; Abraham 2014:153,158,165,271; Sarkar 2022:144). The common denominator of all these social groups is that they are all located at the upper levels of the hierarchy of wealth, power, and prestige. Hence, *Hindutva* is a social movement from above.

2.3.2. Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar

Myanmar's ethnic composition is highly diverse and complex. The British colonial administration, based on late 19th century notions of scientific racism, classified and categorized the people they encountered on the geo-political landscape that came to be known as Burma. These so-called ethnic groups were perceived as immutable and biologically determined. Currently the state recognizes 135 ethnic groups based on the dubious categories compiled about hundred years ago by amateur colonial linguists and physiognomists (International Crisis Group 2020:2,4).

Burman or Bamar are the majority ethnic group in the country. Burmans are mainly Theravada Buddhists and Burmese is their language, the only official language in the country. Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan are some of the other major ethnic groups recognized by law and who have their own state (International Crisis Group 2020:6). In Myanmar, ethnicity is central to conflict, politics, citizenship, and rights. For example, according to the 1948 citizenship law, an ethnic group is considered indigenous only if they made Myanmar the permanent home prior to 1823, the year before the first Anglo-Burmese War started (International Crisis Group 2020:6) In the 1990s, the government published a list of "indigenous races" based on the dubious lists of ethnic groups compiled by amateur colonial sources. This list which included an odd mixture of ethnic groups, languages, clans, village names, and errors (listing the same group twice with different spellings), and exclusions such as Rohingya became the basis for determining citizenship, franchise, and other rights in contemporary Myanmar (International Crisis Group 2020:6-8). The state in Myanmar is dominated by majority Burman interests and country experiences many long-running armed conflicts along ethnic lines due to its failure to forge a more inclusive national identity and meaningfully address minority grievances (International Crisis Group 2020).

Contemporary Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar, spearheaded by organizations such as, the 969 Movement and *MaBaTha* or the Association for Protection of Race and Religion, is part of a long historical militant Buddhist tradition associated with anti-colonialism. For example, Buddhist monks were involved in armed resistance against British colonial power as early as 1880s and against various insurgent movements of non-Buddhist minority ethnic groups who ended up within the borders of Burma or Myanmar after independence (Lehr 2019:159).

Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar can be traced back to the Mon Kingdom of Thaton, 9th to 11th century CE. Overtime, with royal patronage, Theravada Buddhism successfully established itself as the dominant religion on top of animism, ghost or *nats* worship and traces of Brahmanism and Hinduism and became a major pillar of the Myanmar state. Today, Theravada Buddhists make up about 87.9 per cent of the population. Hence, the slogan of the independence movement, "to be Burmese means to be Buddhist" (Lehr 2019:157,159,160).

After three campaigns (1824-1826, 1852-1853 and 1885), the British colonial forces were able to conquer Burma and was administered as part of British India. The monarchy was abolished after forcing the last king to abdicate in 1885 (Lehr 2019:163). With the disappearance of the monarchy, the *Sangha*[8] lost the patronage it enjoyed historically. This feeling of unease is well captured in a poem written by a senior Buddhist monk at the time (Thant 2007:25):

> No more the Royal Umbrella. No more the Royal Palace. And the Royal City, no more. This is indeed an Age of Nothingness. It would be better if we were dead.

The vacuum left by the end of monarchy was filled to a certain extent with numerous Buddhist lay associations, with local as well as national reach, that emerged during late 19th century

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[8] The community of Buddhist monks.

and early 20ᵗʰ century. Of these, the political associations known as *wuthanu athin* or heritage preservation groups, are noteworthy as they played a sustained role in the anti-colonial struggle. These organizations were founded in urban centers in colonial Burma by the old elites and the rising new middle classes. Many of these political associations were modeled on nationalist organizations in the sub-continent such as, the Indian National Congress or the Young Men's Buddhist Association in colonial Ceylon. A good example for such a Burmese political association is the General Council of Burmese Associations or the Great Burma Association founded in 1920 after splitting from the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Burma (Lehr 2019:166-168). Moreover, according to Sein, many of these organizations enjoyed the support of rural women who lost their occupations and legal rights due to changes in rural economic structures and legal codes under colonialism (1972:294).

Buddhist monks played a significant role in the anti-colonial struggle. Smith recognizes *pongyis[9]* as the "first nationalists" in the anti-colonial struggle (1965:85). There are numerous examples to substantiate the above assertion. Monks U Thawbita and U Tiloka are well known for their advocacy against the payment of taxes to the colonial authorities and advocating violence – breaking legs- against tax collectors (Smith 1965:99-100). U Ottama is another noteworthy anti-colonial militant monk who associated anti-colonial struggle with the ultimate goal of Buddhism, *Nirvana.* His argument was that to achieve *Nirvana*, colonial subjects first need to free themselves of slavery that is associated with colonial subjugation. Only then, it will be possible to achieve liberation. In this anti-colonial struggle, U Ottama never rejected revolutionary violence. On the contrary, he doctrinally justified it by arguing that even Buddha in his previous lives resorted to violence (Smith 1965:96,97). Not surprisingly, he was jailed several times for attempted

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[9]Buddhist monks.

insurrection and eventually died in jail and became one of the most famous martyrs of the Burmese independence struggle (Smith 1965).

Buddhist monks also played a leading role in the anti-Indian Indo-Burmese riots of 1938 (International Crisis Group 2017:4,5). What triggered the riots was a procession, of which as many as half the participants were monks, that took place after a peaceful protest meeting held against a pamphlet written by an Indian Muslim that was said to denigrate Buddhism. According to the final report of the Riot Inquiry Committee, most of the monks who participated in the riots belonged to *Tathana Mamaka Young Monks Association* and the fiery sermons of some of these monks whipped the crowds into a frenzy (Lehr 2019:170,171). The final report of the Riot Inquiry Committee describes the role of the monks in the following manner (Lehr 2019:170,171):

> In our evidence we have the mournful record of these so-called *pongyis*…up and down the country promoting meetings in their *kyaungs* for political or subversive ends, participating in rioting and, arms in their hands, leading or accompanying crowds of hooligans, committing assaults, looting and even murder and in general breaking the civil laws of their country and the laws of their own order.

The riots led to the formation of a new organization called *Yahanpyu Aphwe* or All Burma Young Monks Association with the objective of uniting the monks to protect Buddhism and Burmese culture against the threat posed by Indian Muslims (Smith 1965:189). The monks continued to play a prominent political role in post-colonial Burma until the military coup in 1962 that severely restricted their political space.

Following certain historical precedents in Myanmar, most notably King Thohanbwa (1527-1542) who executed several thousand monks, the military junta initiated a "*Sangha* reform" process to "clean-up the *Sangha*" that resulted in smear campaigns, raids on monasteries, arrests, torture, and disrobing of politically activist monks. The most notable in this campaign of

suppression of politically activist monks was the relentless persecution of monks who participated in the *8888 Uprising* of August 1988 and the *Saffron Revolution* of August and September in 2007 (Lehr 2019:173).

However, the military junta allowed a certain amount of space for politically oriented monks in the restive border areas in Myanmar where separatist and autonomist movements of ethnic minorities challenge the notion of a unified Myanmar under Burman hegemony. The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), founded by an ethnically Karen monk U Thuzana in 1994, with the objective of weakening the Christian-dominated Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and establishing a Buddhist "holy land" in Karen State and the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), founded in 1968 and led exclusively by monks and former monks, with the objective of chasing out Muslims (Arakanese Rohingyas) from "sacred" Buddhist land are two good examples in this connection (Lehr 2019:174, Gravers 2012).

The efforts of the military junta and successive political authorities to suppress and marginalize politically active monks, especially the nationalists, have not been very successful. Their message, Buddhism under threat, is widely shared by Myanmar Buddhists who make up much of the population of the country. Hence, Buddhist nationalists enjoy popular support in Myanmar, especially among the majority Burman Buddhist community (International Crisis Group 2017:1,3).

The political transition from authoritarianism to democracy, since the start of 2011, opened political opportunities for nationalist mobilization. The new telecommunication infrastructure and greater access to social media in Myanmar greatly enhanced the above process in the form of nationalist narratives, rumors (most often sexual violence committed by Muslim men against Buddhist women) and hate speech. This in turn created a conducive environment for the

flourishing of Buddhist nationalist groups and anti-Muslim violence (International Crisis Group 2017:6). Several factors contributed to the making of this very toxic environment.

Perceived demographic and religious threats greatly contributed to the formation of a siege mentality among the majority Burman Buddhists. There is a fear that Muslim Bengal will flood Myanmar and Buddhist South-East Asia and turn them Islam if not on guard. In this context, protecting Rakhine, the interface between Buddhist and Muslim Asia and the "Western Gate" to Myanmar, against such demographic and religious pressures is considered crucial. Hence, the campaign of Buddhist nationalists to deny rights to Muslim Rohingya minority in Rakhine and consider them and Muslims in general in Myanmar as interlopers. Moreover, Muslims are also perceived as hoarding capital, buying up real-estate in urban centers, and using this wealth to woo and marry Buddhist women only to convert them and their children to Islam. (International Crisis Group 2017:7).

Increasing competition between Buddhists and others, especially Muslims, over opening market economy is a major contributory factor for the rise in Buddhist nationalism (Schonthal and Walton 2016:82). Economic and cultural anxieties are experienced by many Burman Buddhists in relation to business communities of South Asian and Chinese origin. These trading communities are perceived as closed, who share markets and capital only amongst themselves. The 969 boycott movement arose in this context. Against this backdrop, Buddhist nationalists are increasingly becoming concerned over issues such as, Buddhist religious and cultural education, inter-religious marriage and so on (International Crisis Group 2017:8).

Myanmar Buddhist nationalists are informed and influenced by regional and global dynamics. Militant Islam in southern Thailand, Taliban's destruction of Buddhist monuments, and the violence of the Islamic State reinforce fears among Myanmar Buddhist nationalists. Moreover,

religious exchanges with Sri Lanka, particularly with the *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS) with whom they maintain close relations, have reassured the seriousness of the global Islamic threat. Further, Sri Lanka and the BBS have provided Myanmar Buddhist nationalist with a model for political participation of Buddhist monks and doctrinal justification of defensive violence. (Gravers 2015, International Crisis Group 2017:8,9).

Contemporary Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar was spearheaded in part by the 969 Movement that first came to prominence in the southern city of Mawlamyine in 2011 and gained notoriety throughout the first half of 2013. The movement was led by prominent monks such as, Wirathu and Wimala and was basically a lose network of monks and lay Buddhists. 969 is a symbolic representation for Myanmar Buddhists of the 9 great qualities of the Buddha, the 6 great qualities of the *Dhamma*[10], and the 9 great qualities of the *Sangha*. 969 functioned as a riposte to the number786, a folk Islamic representation among the Muslims of Myanmar and elsewhere used to identify halal restaurants and Muslim-owned shops (International Crisis Group 2017:10, Schonthal and Walton 2016:84).

The agenda of the 969 Movement centered around raising awareness on the supposed threats to Buddhism by Muslims and Islam and, in response, to strengthen Buddhism and Buddhist practices. It engaged in activities such as, the distribution of Buddhist materials and teaching Buddhism, especially to children (Schonthal and Walton 2016:85-89). However, the most notable activity of the movement was the boycott campaign of Muslim-owned businesses which received wide support from the majority Burman Buddhist community. Wirathu gave perspective to the boycott of Muslim-owned business in the following manner (Lehr 2019:179,180):

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[10] The teachings of the Buddha.

[We] must do business or otherwise interact with only our kind: same race and same faith. [Your] purchases / money spent in 'their' (Muslim) shops will benefit the Enemy. [They] take our women. [In] Rakhine State, with their population explosion they are capturing it. And they will capture our country in the end. [So], do business with only shops with '969'signs on their facets.

The State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SSMNC), the government appointed body of monks that oversees and regulates Buddhist monks banned the 969 Movement in late-2013. The basis for the ban was not the virulent Islamophobia the movement was stirring and the accompanying anti-Muslim violence but the unauthorized use of Buddhist symbolism, specifically the 969 symbol (International Crisis Group 2017:10,11; Schonthal and Walton 2016:84). This ban transformed the loose and diffused 969 Movement into the more formally organized *MaBaTha*, the Association for Protection of Race and Religion, which came to prominence in early 2014.

The *MaBaTha* organizational structure gave laity and women official positions and created ambiguity over the SSMNC authority to oversee and regulate it (International Crisis Group 2017:11). According to the founding monks of the organization, the *MaBaTha* was intended to rein in outspoken younger monks like Wirathu who were stirring criticism (International Crisis Group 2017:11). Moreover, the *MaBaTha* received recognition and support from the SSMNC as well as the political authority. For example, several members of the SSMNC held leadership positions in the *MaBaTha*. Further, in response to international criticism of Wirathu and associates and the 2013 Time magazine cover characterization of him as "The Face of Buddhist Terror," the Myanmar President defended the controversial monk by referring to Wirathu as a "son of Lord Buddha" (Schonthal and Walton 2016:85,102).

The *MaBaTha* was an ideological and programmatic continuation of the 969 Movement. The most noteworthy of its activities is the campaign for the adoption of race and religion laws.

After a sustained campaigned by the organization, the following four laws were enacted in May and August in 2015 (International Crisis Group 2017:11,12; Schonthal and Walton 2016:86):

- The Population Control Law. This law gave the government the authority to implement population control measures targeting the Muslim population.

- The Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Law. The main objectives of this law are to discourage inter-faith marriages and the prevention of religious conversion of spouses and children in the context of marriage.

- The Religious Conversion Law. The law aims to discourage religious conversion. For example, a person interested in religious conversion is required to apply to a township Religious Conversion Scrutinizing and Registration Board for permission. This board shall interview the person to ascertain whether he or she has "genuine" belief in the religion among other things.

- Monogamy Law. This law makes it a criminal offence to have multiple spouses or to live with a person who is not the spouse or to engage in marital infidelity. The punishment for this offense is seven years imprisonment without the provision for bail. The law was aimed at the polygamous practices in the Muslim community. However, most of the cases under this law were filed by Buddhist women against unfaithful husbands.

The SSMNC declared in mid-2016 that the *MaBaTha* was in violation of the *Sangha* Law and hence, unlawful. This declaration banned the use of the *MaBaTha* name and logo (International Crisis Group 2017:16). The ban took place in the context of the landslide electoral victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD), a party which is not closely associated with Buddhist nationalism, in late 2015. Several developments took place as a result of the SSMNC

declaration. Firstly, the *MaBaTha* name was dropped in favor of the *Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation* as the declaration only banned the use of the name *MaBaTha* and not the organization. However, not all regional chapters agreed with this decision of the leadership and most of the chapters continued to identify with the *MaBaTha* name and logo. Secondly, a more militant Buddhist nationalist political party known as the "135 Nationalities United" was formed under the leadership of the editor of the *MaBaTha* journal (International Crisis Group 2017:17).

The *MaBaTha* or the *Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation* function as an umbrella organization for many smaller nationalist outfits such as, the remnants of the 969 Movement, *Dhamma Wunthanu Rakhita*, and various *myo-chit*[11] youth groups. Despite the NLD landslide electoral victory in late 2015, there is continuing broad support for Buddhist nationalist narratives articulated by organizations such as, the *MaBaTha* (International Crisis Group 2017:14,19). This is because, the *MaBaTha*, the leading Buddhist nationalist organization, enjoys widespread grassroots support as it is associated with many community-level activities. Some of them include, the promotion of shared Buddhist cultural values, social work targeting vulnerable sections in communities, disaster relief, education, advocacy of (Buddhist) women's rights, and legal aid services. Moreover, organizations like the *MaBaTha* provide a channel for different sections in the society like the youth and the women to achieve a sense of meaning and direction to their lives by associating themselves with the work of the organization (International Crisis Group 2017:20-22,27).

Myanmar Buddhist nationalism basically represents the interests of the dominant Burman or Bamar ethnic community who are overwhelmingly Theravada Buddhists. Hence, Buddhist

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[11] Literally, "love for one's own race."

nationalism in Myanmar is a social movement from above which aims to reproduce and expand the power of the Burman community and its hegemonic position in the Myanmar social formation (Nilsen 2009:115). This process becomes most intense in the context of opening market economy in Myanmar (Schonthal and Walton 2016:82).

2.4. Conclusion: Right-Wing Movements as Social Movements from Above

The contemporary far-right is not monolithic. It occupies a spectrum ranging from fascism at one end to extreme conservatism on the other. Yet, all currents of the far-right are united by two features. They all enjoy a membership and support base in one or more fractions of the middle-class (i.e., the petty bourgeoisie, traditional middle-class professionals, or the technical-managerial new middle class). The other common feature is an attitude of extreme social conservatism (Davidson and Saull 2017:709).

Right-wing movements have an intimate relationship with powerful business interests and their political projects are elite driven. Donald Trump, a property tycoon in the USA, who projected himself as the anti-elitist champion of the people, is the best example in this connection. His policies of cutting corporate tax rates, undermining health care reform introduced by President Obama, weakening regulatory measures on Wall Street, and tough anti-environmentalist positions illustrate the powerful business interest that undergird his politics (Onis and Kutlay 2020:111).

The neo-liberal political economy is based on racialized notions. Racialized stereotypes of welfare recipients, acceptable and unacceptable notions of immigrants and refugees, and criminal and penal regimes that are biased against Blacks are some of the elements that fuel the neoliberal economy in the global North. Stereotyped and demonised ethno-religious minorities are pervasive

in the global South. These neo-liberal ideological positions have revived and nourished right-wing movements. With their narratives of homogenous "nations," the latter obscure fundamental class relations in social formations and reinforce above assumptions by racializing the social, political, and economic effects of neoliberalism (Davidson and Saull 2017:714,715). Right-wing movements provide important source of popular mobilization and domestic political legitimacy for the maintenance of the neo-liberal social regime (Davidson and Saull 2017:719).

Right-wing movements are basically social movement from above. Through offensive and defensive strategies, they attempt to maintain or modify dominant structure of needs and capacities in ways that reproduce and/or extend the power of dominant groups and their hegemonic position in the social formation (Nilsen 2009). Even though in certain contexts right-wing movements may be perceived as destabilizing the accumulation strategies of capital, they nevertheless contribute to the reproduction of the system by diverting attention from real sources of social anguish onto scapegoats. The ruling classes are willing to put up with the temporary malfunctions caused to the system by these movements as they supress the revolutionary possibilities (Davidson 2013:297, Davidson 2014:148).

The far-right in the Euro-American context is characterized by an ideology of "nativism." According to this ideology, states ought to be exclusively inhabited by the natives (the nation) and non-native elements (individuals as well as ideas) are perceived as a fundamental threat to the homogenous nation-state (Joppke 2021:963). Ethnopluralism, one manifestation of "nativism," denies the notion of shared humanity in favor of ethnic group membership. Further, it advocates a right-wing version of multi-culturalism that aims to protect the interests of the majority group (Joppke 2021:963).

A significant development of the revival of the far-right in the Euro-American context has been the mainstreaming and hence the "normalization" of politics and policies of White supremacy (Vieten and Poynting 2016:536). The previously banished rhetoric and programs of the far-right has entered the core of societies. They translate as the right of the (White) native and indigenous Christian Europe. The electoral success of the far-right in many European countries and the U.S. substantiate this view.

The revival of nationalism in the West is not limited to the ethno-racial kind. Joppke (2021) distinguishes two types of neo-liberal era nationalisms in the West. The first type is the widely acknowledged populist nationalism that takes an ethno-racial manifestation, and which is reactive and (seemingly) oppositional to neo-liberalism (Joppke 2021:962). The second type is statist nationalism which complements or even incorporates elements of neo-liberalism itself (Joppke 2021:962). There are two forms to this type of nationalism. The first form of statist nationalism compensates for the state's loss of sovereignty in the neo-liberal order. The second form of statist nationalism is a part of the neo-liberal order itself, without which the later cannot function and nationalism even may manifest neo-liberal elements in this case (Joppke 2021:964).

The compensatory form of statist nationalism is concerned with symbolic performance or performatory enactment of sovereignty (Joppke 2021:965). This compensatory logic is captured in the global trend towards wall and fence building. The second variant of statist nationalism is constitutive of or even constituted by neo-liberalism. In this case, nationalism and neo-liberalism move closer to each other. Welfare-to-workfare social policy and restrictive citizenship policy under the title of "earned citizenship" are two sites where one can observe the dynamics of neo-liberal nationalism.

Hindutva is a project basically concerned with building a Hindu *rashtra* or state in India. Since the beginning of the movement, the *Hindutva* thinking was heavily influenced by European far-right ideologies such as, Fascism and Nazism.

The influence of the *Hindutva* movement has been on the rise in the Indian society since independence in late 1940s. In the 1990s, *Hindutva* was slowly becoming a mainstream phenomenon, irrespective of the party in control of the central government. With the coming to power of the BJP, the project *Hindutva* blossomed.

Despite BJP's centrist pretensions, the party adheres to the *Hindutva* agenda. The *Hindutva* fanaticism is displayed most notably in cow protection campaigns which are most often associated with violence directed against Muslims and oppressed-caste Hindus. The BJP continues to assert that India is a Hindu nation and "Hindu identity and culture [as] being the mainstay of the Indian nation and of Indian society" (Leidig 2020:229).

What is remarkable is the radical shift in economic philosophy in the *Hindutva* movement under the political leadership of the BJP. What began as a gradual reassessment of economic policies while the BJP was on the way to power developed into a neo-liberal economic program once the party captured power. Moreover, this policy change was achieved despite vehement criticism of fellow members of the *Sangh Parivar* (Abraham 2014:138-141,150).

The *Hindutva* movement represents the interests of a variety of constituencies such as, dominant-caste Hindus, Hindi-speakers, the "neo-middle class," the progeny of neo-liberal globalization, white-collar workers, professionals, merchants, middle to upper class groups, big-business, and elements of the Indian diaspora (Narain n.d.:39; Leidig 2020:232,233; Abraham 2014:153,158,165,271; Sarkar 2022:144). The common denominator of all these social groups is

that they are all located at the upper levels of the hierarchy of wealth, power, and prestige. Hence, the *Hindutva* is a social movement from above.

In Myanmar, ethnicity is central to conflict, politics, citizenship, and rights. The state in Myanmar is dominated by majority Burman interests and country experiences many long-running armed conflicts along ethnic lines due to its failure to forge a more inclusive national identity and meaningfully address minority grievances (International Crisis Group 2020).

Contemporary Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar, spearheaded by organizations such as, the 969 Movement and the *MaBaTha* or the Association for Protection of Race and Religion, is part of a long historical militant Buddhist tradition associated with anti-colonialism. Buddhist monks played a significant role in the anti-colonial struggle. Smith recognizes Buddhist monks as the "first nationalists" in the anti-colonial struggle (1965:85). The monks also played a leading role in the anti-Indian Indo-Burmese riots of 1938 (International Crisis Group 2017:4,5).

Despite the NLD landslide electoral victory in late 2015, there is continuing broad support for Buddhist nationalist narratives articulated by organizations such as, the *MaBaTha* (International Crisis Group 2017:14,19). This is because such organizations enjoy widespread grassroots support as they are associated with many community-level activities (International Crisis Group 2017:20-22,27).

Myanmar Buddhist nationalism basically represents the interests of the dominant Burman or Bamar ethnic community who are overwhelmingly Theravada Buddhists. Hence, Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar is a social movement from above which aims to reproduce and expand the power of the Burman community and its hegemonic position in the Myanmar social formation

(Nilsen 2009:115). This process becomes most intense in the context of opening market economy in Myanmar (Schonthal and Walton 2016:82).

Totalitarianism is a form of rule in which appeared what Arendt called "radical" and "absolute" evil. It is against this background of evil that her notion of right to have rights becomes a high priority of democracy (Arendt 1966).

3. The Historical Context of the Sinhala National Movement

3.1. The Colonial Context of Emergence

Arbitrary and artificial creation of states under colonialism brought together diverse people under a single state system. Subsequently, the post-colonial states were appropriated by elites of dominant "ethnic" or "tribal" groups and came to reflect their sectional interests while taking the form of ethnic or tribal states. In relation to Uganda, Goldthorpe asserts that government ministers as well as senior civil servants were considered as tribal agents who functioned to safeguard tribal interests in matters of appointments, distribution of development projects, and social services (1984:255). Fanon further illuminates this peculiar post-colonial condition in the following manner (2004:126):

> It is a veritable ethnic group which has transformed itself into a party. This party which readily proclaims itself national, which claims to speak in the name of the people as a whole, secretly and sometimes openly sets up a genuine ethnic dictatorship. We are no longer witness to a bourgeois dictatorship but to a tribal one. The ministers, private secretaries, ambassadors and prefects are chosen from the leader's ethnic group, sometimes even directly from his family.

Since independence in 1956, Northern Sudan's Arabic and Islamic political hegemony was resented by the Southern Sudanese who were mostly Black and adherents of Christianity and native religions. In 1968, when a new constitution was adopted that proclaimed the Republic of Sudan a unitary state, Arabic the official language, and Islam the state religion, the Black African South called for the complete session from the North and the formation of a new state known as the Azania (Perera 1984:101). Moreover, the hegemony of the Urdu language in the newly created

state of Pakistan led to a resurgence of Bengali identity among the Bengali speaking majority in East Pakistan. This ultimately resulted in the formation of a new state in 1971 in East Pakistan known as Bangladesh (Perera 1984:100).

When the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505, the island had several kingdoms. These kingdoms had complex political relations with South and Southeast Asian polities, a phenomenon described as "galactic polity," where political power of kingdoms expanded and contracted over other kingdoms (Tambiah 1973:3-31). This pre-modern state was defined by the centre and not by the boundaries. Power radiated out from the centre. When the centre was powerful, its power diffused further out subjugating neighbouring kingdoms. When the centre was weak, units that were under its authority became autonomous or came under another powerful centre (Nissan and Stirrat 1990:25). Under the British rule, through the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission led by W.M.C. Colebrooke and C.H. Cameron in 1833, the entire island was brought under one administration based on the arbitrary territorial division of the island into five provinces (Rambukwella 2018:30,31). Modern day Sri Lanka was thus constructed by the British colonial administration.

"The *anthropos* inhabiting non-European places discovered that s/he had been invented, as *anthropos,* by a locus of enunciations self-defined as humanitas" (Mignolo 2009:161). Colonialism not only created artificial states in places where they colonized but they also constructed "races," "tribes," and "ethnicities" in these spaces which the subject populations came to faithfully believe in. According to Anderson, the immediate genealogy of nationalism in the colonized worlds of Asia and Africa should be traced to the imaginings of the colonial state, specifically to three institutions of power: the census, the map, and the museum (2006:163).

Together, these institutions profoundly shaped the perceptions of the colonial state as well as the colonized about the colonial domains and the people who inhabited them.

The colonial structure of power engaged in social discrimination that later codified into racial, ethnic, anthropological or national categories in relation to the times, agents and populations involved. These European colonial intersubjective constructions were accepted as objective and scientific. This is the framework within which other social relations such as, class and estate still operate (Quijano 2007:168).

The objective of indirect rule was to remake the subjectivities of colonised populations. "It endeavoured to shape the present, past, and the future of the colonized by casting each in a nativist model, the present through a set of identities in the census, the past through the driving force of a new historiography, and the future through a legal and administrative project" (Mamdani 2012: 45). Hence, some have come to characterize the colonial state as "the ethnographic state" (Mamdani 2012:44).

In India, the colonised were classified and reclassified in response to political necessity. This was always accompanied by the language of cultural difference and cosmopolitan tolerance. The survey of 1872 classified the Indian society first and foremost according to a single identity of cast while locating it within a larger setting of village, race, and religion (Mamdani 2012:29, 30). Over time, cast identities such as non-Brahmin, scheduled castes as well as tribal and Muslim identities become the basis of quotas and reservations in state employment, entry to educational institutions, and representation in legislative assemblies (Mamdani 2012:30).

The socio-cultural heterogeneity in Sri Lanka encountered by the British colonial authorities was initially rationalised in terms of caste and religion. The main principles of

categorization of census in 1818 and 1824 were caste and religion   However, by the 1881 census, race became the dominant category of classification (Rambukwella 2018:33). By the end of the 19th century, the colonial state constructed many races along with corresponding customary laws. Thus, some of the main races constructed by the colonial state were Sinhalese (further divided into up-country and low country), Tamils (further divided into Ceylon and Indian Tamils), Moors (further divided into Ceylon and Coast Moors), Veddas, Burghers (further divided into Dutch and Portuguese Burghers), Malays, Eurasians, and Europeans. Moreover, the Mukkuvars, the Vagga, the Rodiya were at times considered races (Nissan and Stirrat 1990:27). These racial categories of the late 19th century became the foundation of the island's official identity discourse, and they continue to do so in the post-colonial period with some minor variations and with substitution of the term race with ethnicity (Rambukwella 2018:34).

The British colonial state extrapolated the racial constructs into the structures of governance in the form of communal representation. This took the form of nomination by the colonial state of elite members of races to represent such groups in the legislative council. Apart from the ideals of participatory governance, this strategic practice enabled the colonial state to enlist the support of the powerful local elite (Rambukwella 2018:34). In 1833, the Governor appointed one Burgher, one Tamil and one Low-Country Sinhalese as unofficial members of the Legislative Council. In 1889, the Governor appointed two more unofficial members to the Legislative Council to represent the Upcountry Sinhalese and Moors (Nissan and Stirrat 1990:28). Thus, the colonial state played a key role in politicizing the races they constructed.

One of the most significant events in colonial historiography is the "discovery" and translation of Pali language *vamsa*[12] literature, especially, the *Mahavamsa* or the Great Chronicle in the 19th century. The *Mahavamsa* is a heroic mytho-historical account which chronicles the Sinhala kingship on the island, written in the sixth century C.E. by a Buddhist monk named Mahanama. The text is one of the well-springs of contemporary Sinhala nationalist imagination. Moreover, it is considered as a source of historical legitimacy for Sinhala nationalism in post-colonial Sri Lanka (Kemper 1991). The contemporary powerful nationalist imaginary of the historical nexus among the island, Buddhism and Sinhala people is based on the *Mahavamsa*. According to the *Mahavamsa,* Sinhala people are a chosen race who will safeguard Buddhism in the island of Sri Lanka long after the death of Buddha. Moreover, apart from this "charter myth," episodes from the *Mahavamsa* are interpreted as historical "evidence" for the longstanding enmity between Sinhalese and Tamils (Rambukwella 2018:37).

The earliest translation of the *Mahavamsa* was done by a British amateur philologist named Edward Upham in 1833. Soon thereafter, many versions of it were translated by British Pali scholars and specialists (Rambukwella 2018:36). One such translation of the *Mahavamsa* done in 1837 by George Turnour, a civil servant and a Pali scholar, became the basis for the pre-colonial history of the island for some of the very influential historical accounts of Sri Lanka produced in the 19th century such as, William Knighton's *History of Ceylon from the Earliest Period to Present Time* (1845) and Sir Emerson Tennent's two-volume *Ceylon* (1860). These works became the standard reference material in the nineteenth century and consequently elevated the *Mahavamsa* to an authoritative historical text in the perceptions of the English educated nationalist elite (Rambukwella 2018:36). The historical narrative constructed by the British scholars closely

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[12] Chronicle.

followed the European model of history. It depicted an advanced classical civilization which fell due to South Indian invasions and natural causes such as, disease and drought. This was followed by a dark age. And finally, the European colonization brings an end to this dark age (Rambukwella 2018:36).

While the "discovery" and the translation of *vamsa* literature such as, the *Mahavamsa,* provided textual details of a bygone glorious classical Sinhala civilization, the colonial archaeology of 19th century contributed to substantiate such notions with the excavations that revealed ancient ruins in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka such as, the city of Anuradhapura, the heartland of the classical Sinhala civilization (Jeganathan 1995:56-106, Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 32). Hence, the newly found ruins enhanced the plausibility of the *Mahavamsa* narrative in the minds of the colonial historiographers and the nationalist elite. The above discussed orientalist scholarship and colonial archaeology provided nourishment for the budding Sinhala nationalist imagination.

For the smooth functioning of the colonial state, the British improved the transportation infrastructure. A network of railway lines and roads connected the entire island. This enabled large numbers of locals to visit historic centers which were "discovered" by colonial archeology, and which have now become imbued with a sense of Sinhala national past as royal capitals and Buddhist centres (Nissan and Stirrat 1990:35). The pilgrimages and visits to these historic centres ingrained in the popular Sinhala imagination the *Mahavamsa* ideology.

The notion of northern Indian *Aryan* roots of the Sinhalese, one of the hallmarks of the Sinhala identity in the early national movement, was popularized in the early 1900s by the vibrant Sinhala dramatic tradition associated with the Tower Hall theater, especially in the plays produced by John de Silva (de Mel 2001). This notion of *Aryan* roots of the Sinhalese was based on the European philological thinking of the time. The 19th century Orientalists such as, Wilhelm Geiger,

classified Sinhala as an Indo-European language and Tamil as a Dravidian language. Max Muller's notions on Indo-Aryan migration were based on Geiger's linguistic classification (Rambukwella 2018:38). This kind of European philological scholarship and the *Mahavamsa* narrative played a key role in constructing Sinhalese as a Northern Indian *Aryan* race (Rambukwella 2018:38).

Sri Lanka had a high literacy rate, mainly because of the expansion of education, both before and after independence (Nissan and Stirrat 1990:34). The printing press and publishing were introduced in the island in 1736 as a joint venture of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Dutch East India Company (Kularatne 1995:65-77). Consequently, the early twentieth century witnessed the flowering of Sinhala literary activity in print form: newspapers, journals, and novels. In the early twentieth century secular publishing in Sinhala language became a burgeoning industry (Rambukwella 2018:32). The nationalist imagination and notions of Sinhala identity, history, and culture were circulated through these newspaper and novels. The early twentieth century newspapers such as, the *Sinhala Jatiya*[13] founded in 1903 by the nationalist novelist Piyadasa Sirisena and the *Sinhala Bauddhaya*[14] founded by the Buddhist reformer Anagarika Dharmapala in 1906, were very popular (Rambukwella 2018:39). Moreover, Piyadasa Sirisena wrote more than twenty popular novels which had nationalist themes such as, defending the Sinhala identity by resisting Westernisation. Some of these novels were serialized in newspapers at the time (Rambukwella 2018:39). In Anderson's terms (2006), this "print capitalism," whose technology and logic were inherited from the colonial encounter, laid to a large part, the foundation of the Sinhala imagined community.

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[13] Sinhala race.
[14] Sinhala Buddhist.

One of the most significant consequences of colonialism was the formation of a Sinhala bourgeoisie, who in turn gave leadership to the Sinhala national movement. In this regard, the implementation in 1833 of recommendations of the Royal Commission led by W.M.C. Colebrooke and C.H. Cameron are significant. These reforms marked the passage from feudalism to modernity. The colonial economy opened opportunities, mainly to low-country Sinhalese, to accumulate capital in sectors of the economy such as, liquor renting, graphite mining, plantations, and trading (Jayawardena 1984:122). Consequently, these sections of the bourgeoisie in the Sinhala society became the major financiers, ideologues, and the political leaders of the burgeoning Sinhala national movement.

The Sinhala identities that fueled the national movement, which would be discussed in the rest of the chapter, are not recent fabrications and illusions. There is continuity at some level with the archeological record, ancient chronicles, and inscriptions. However, these old materials are used in new ways as the conditions, ideas and institutions have changed. (Nissan and Stirrat 1990:40).

3.2. The Genesis of the Sinhala National Movement

The roots of the modern Sinhala national movement can be traced to the Buddhist revival of the mid-19th century that took place in low-country, coastal, and urban areas in Sri Lanka. The 19th century Buddhist revival was basically a religious and cultural revival among the Sinhalese with strong anti-colonial political underpinnings. It was guided by the leading *bhikkus*[15] of the day and their close lay associates such as: Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala, Ven. Ratmalane Dhammaloka,

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[15] Buddhist monks.

Ven. Ratmalane Dharmarama, Ven. Migettuwatte Gunananda, Ven. Dodanduwe Piyaratana, Pundit Batuwantudawe, M. Dharmaratna, Anagarika Dharmapala, Piyadasa Sirisena, John de Silva, Walisinha Harischandra, C. Don Bastian and D. B. Jayatilaka (Dharmadasa 1992). The Buddhist revival took the forms of voluntary associations, scholarship, literature (i.e., newspapers, journals, and novels) and theatre. They were in fact both the product as well as the engine of the revival.

Numerous voluntary associations started to appear among the Sinhalese Buddhists to promote their interests from mid-19th century onwards. One of the earliest such voluntary associations is the *Sarvagna Sasanabhivruddhi Dayaka Dharma Samagama* or the Association for the Upliftment of Buddha's Dispensation founded by Ven. Migettuwatte in 1862 (Dharmadasa 1992:130). A notable voluntary association that consisted of Buddhist businessmen in Colombo and major towns was the *Bauddharaksaka Samagama* or the Buddhist Defense Committee formed by Olcott in 1883 soon after Kotahena riots to defend and promote Buddhist interests (Dharmadasa 1992:109,110). The *Bauddha Mahajana Sangamaya* or the Association of the Great Buddhist Populace formed by English-educated Buddhists such as D. B. Jayatilaka in 1903 with the objective of uniting Sinhalese to present their grievances to the colonial government, was an ambitious project with an all-island focus (Dharmadasa 1992:133). Many of these emerging nationalist organizational forms were borrowed from Christian missionaries. A good example in this regard is the Young Men's Buddhist Association which was modelled on the Young Men's Christian Association (Nissan and Stirrat 1990:32).

Framing is an important aspect of collective action (Beck 2008:1570). Framing is instrumental in constructing collective identities. "Crucial aspect of mobilization is the creation of an identity that allows for a broad and motivated base of participants" (Beck 2008:1571). The

ideology of the Buddhist revival revolved around the *Arya*-Sinhala identity for which as discussed above the Orientalist scholarship contributed much. It is an ideology that basically emphasized the Indic origins of the biology and culture of the Sinhalese. Moreover, Buddhism was framed as the essence of the Sinhala identity by the ideologues of the revival. According to this ideology, entirety of Sri Lanka is considered the homeland of the Sinhalese Buddhists while all other groups living in it are perceived as exploitative aliens. Further, there is the perception that there is a constant need to guard the Sinhalese people and Buddhism against alien forces (Dharmadasa 1992:260, Jayawardena 1984:117). Moreover, this *Mahavamsa* ideology conceives Sri Lanka as a *dammadvipa,* the island of Buddhist teachings, with a destiny to protect and preserve the purest form of Buddhism. Hence, this mission of protecting Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been entrusted to *Arya*-Sinhala people by Buddha himself (Jayawardena1984:120).

A central theme in Sinhala nationalism is the notion of a "beleaguered nation," a vision of a nation under siege. This thinking can be traced to the *Mahavamsa,* the historical source of modern Sinhala national consciousness. The passage in the *Mahavamsa* on the crouched sleeping posture of Prince Gamunu, the future warrior-king Dutugamunu, articulates this sense of Sinhala beleaguerment. Queen Vihara Mahadevi inquires from Prince Gamunu why he is sleeping crouched on such a large bed when he could stretch his limbs and rest comfortably. Prince Gamunu responds by asking his mother how he can stretch his limbs and sleep comfortably when across the river there are Tamils and on the other side there is the great dumb ocean (2008: 95).

The above ideological stimulus eventually led to conflicts with other religious and ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka. The first outbreak of communal riots in the modern history of Sri Lanka took place in April 1883 in Kotahena, between Buddhists and Catholics. Ven. Migettuwatte Gunananda, a leading monk in the Buddhist revival, whose temple was near St. Lucia's Cathedral,

organized Buddhist ceremonies during the Easter week. This provoked the Catholics and led to riots in which one person died and thirty were injured, including twelve policemen (Jayawardena1984:121). Furthermore, the campaign for the protection of sacred Buddhist sites in Anuradhapura in June 1903 led by revivalist leaders such as, Anagarika Dharmapala and Walisinha Harischandra also resulted in anti-Christian rioting (Jayawardena1984:121).

According to Jayawardena, competition in trade is a key to understand communal and ethnic rivalry in Sri Lanka (1984:122). The Sinhala trading class historically played a key role in the Sinhala national movement. The idea of the "alien traders" as opposed the "sons of the soil" was a popular theme in the Sinhala press during the early 20th century. Buddhist revivalist leader, Anagarika Dharmapala, was a key propagandist of this line of thinking. His father was H. Don Carolis, a leading Sinhala merchant at the time. In 1915 Dharmapala wrote (Jayawardene1984: 124):

> The Muhammedans, an alien people…by Shylockian methods became prosperous like the Jews. The Sinhalese sons of the soil, whose ancestors for 2358 years had shed rivers of blood to keep the country free from alien invaders are in the eyes of the British only vagabonds. The alien South Indian Muhammedan comes to Ceylon, sees the neglected villager, without any experience in trade…and the result is that the Muhammedan thrives and the son of the soil goes to the wall.

Moreover, the editor of the popular *Sinhala Jatiya* newspaper, the novelist Piyadasa Sirisena, appealed to Sinhalese not to transact with the Coast Moor, the Cochin, and the foreigner (Jayawardene1984:124). Another Sinhala language daily, *Lakmina[16]*, in reference to coast Moors thus wrote, "a suitable plan should be adopted to send this damnable lot out of the country" (Jayawardene1984:124).

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[16] The Jewel of Lanka.

This explosive ideological climate erupted in anti-Muslim rioting in 1915 in many parts of the country. Many hundreds died in the rioting or at the hands of the British troops under martial law. Many budding nationalist leaders with kinship ties to the Sinhala merchant class were arrested or executed by the British authorities. D.E. Pedris, the son of a wealthy Sinhala merchant in Pettah[17], was executed on the charge of inciting crowds in Pettah to attack Muslim shops; Edmund Hewavitarana, a son of the Sinhala merchant H. Don Carolis, died in jail; and N.S. Fernando Wijesekera, who was Pedris' brother-in-law and the son of Pettah stationer, N.S. Fernando, was also sentenced to death (Jayawardene1984:124).

The fist wave of Sinhala nationalism, starting with the Buddhist revival in the mid 19th century, was led by sections of the emerging low-country Sinhala bourgeoisie. They accumulated their capital in the sectors of the economy such as, liquor renting, graphite mining, plantations, and trading (Jayawardene 1984:122). Moreover, as explained above, the commercial rivalry with businessmen of other ethnicities fueled the Sinhala national movement during this time.

The Buddhist reformer Anagarika Dharmapala lamented the predicament of Asia in the following manner: "Asia is full of opium eaters, *ganja* smokers, degenerating sensualists, superstitious and religious fanatics. Gods and priests keep the people in ignorance" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere: 1988:213). On the other hand, he said, "Europe is progressive. Her religion is kept in the background for one day in the week, and for six days her peoples are following the dictates of modern science. Sanitation, aesthetic arts, electricity, etc. are what made European and American people great" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere: 1988:13,14). Dharmapala admired Japan as an Asian country for its achievements in technological progress and modernity while preserving

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[17] The commercial area of Colombo.

its spirituality (Rambukwella 2018:53). The mission of these Buddhist reformers like Dharmapala was the embourgeoisement of the society. They introduced bourgeois ideals such as, hard work, industry, rationality, science, technology and so on and paternalistically admonished peasants who were a part of the web of feudal social relations.

In this context, the popular pamphlet Dharmapala authored and published in 1898 titled *Gihi Vinaya*[18] is insightful. There are 200 rules that guide behaviour under twenty-two headings such as, "the manner of eating food" (25 rules), "Sinhala clothes" (6 rules), "how servants should behave" (9 rules), and "how females should conduct themselves" (30 rules) (Gombrich and Obeyesekere: 1988:214). It is noteworthy that the most regulated subject of this code is women. Some of these rules are as follows: keeping the house, personal belongings, and the body clean; gardening of flowering plants; and wearing of the *sari*[19] and shunning the blouse that exposes the midriff.

These rules confined women to domesticity and controlled their sexuality. Gender codes such as these that define proper womanhood provide a meaning of the world and the nature of social order and they underpin the control of women by men. Moreover, in hegemonic cultures women are often constructed as the collectivity's cultural symbols, the borders of the community, as the embodiments of its honor, and as the collectivity's intergenerational reproducers of culture (Yuval-Davis 1997:39-67).

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[18] The Daily Code for the Laity.
[19] A garment consisting of a length of cotton or silk elaborately draped around the body.

Dharmapala's social reforms campaign formulated a new value system for the emerging class of Sinhala bourgeoisie. Moreover, as in many other colonial contexts, these newly formulated values reflected the 19th century Victorian values (Gombrich and Obeyesekere: 1988:215).

The Buddhist revival and the associated developments such as, the temperance movement, and the movement for political reforms, were manifestations of the political awakening of the fledgling Sinhala bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, this Anglophone elite was ultra conservative and servile towards the British Raj. Even the fiery Dharmapala is known to have purchased British war bonds to support the colonial masters during the First World War (Rambukwella 2018: 54).

3.3. The *Sinhala Maha Sabha* (SMS)

The *Sinhala Maha Sabha* (SMS) or the Great Association of the Sinhalese was formed in November 1936 (Russell 1982:141). The SMS is the first island-wide formation that gave political expression to exclusively Sinhalese ethnic interests (Dharmadasa 1992:258). In a way, SMS symbolises the political awakening of the Sinhala middle classes of rural origins. Certain scholars characterize this social force as an intermediary elite of rural middle-class backgrounds positioned between the peasantry and the Anglophone elite (Rambukwella 2018:68).

At the time of the formation of the SMS, politicians like S.W.R.D Bandaranaike from Sinhala bourgeois backgrounds, opposed the name. For them, it sounded too communal. Bandaranaike proposed the name *Swadeshiya Maha Sabha* or the Greater Congress of the Indigenous Peoples as a more inclusive name for the association. But the name, *Sinhala Maha Sabha*, proposed by nationalist novelist Piyadasa Sirisena and supported by figures like Munidasa

Cumaratunga, who advocated a more Sinhala nationalist line, won the day. Unhappy with the communalist outlook, bourgeois politicians like Dudley Senanayake, walked out at the inaugural meeting (Russell 1982:141,142).

The SMS was not a tight knit organization. It consisted of three panels. The majority in the religious panel were *bhikkus*. The literary panel was made of scholars and literati. These were the organic intellectuals, in Gramscian sense, who were involved with the revival of Buddhism and Sinhala language. Moreover, they were instrumental in framing the national-popular collective will or the nation (Nimni 1991:96-118). The political panel, which soon became the dominant panel, was headed by Bandaranaike who also functioned as the President of the organization (Dharmadasa 1992:255,256). By July 1941, weeklies such as, The Nation (English) and the *Sinhala Bauddhaya* (Sinhala) were initiated by S.W.R.D Bandaranaike to propagandize the politics of the SMS and boost his image as the establishment publications that came out from the Lake House served the interests of the Anglophone Sinhalese bourgeois power elite and were unfavourable to the SMS line of politics (Russell 1982:305).

The Marxist State Councillor, Philip Gunawardene, characterized the SMS as "the most rabid, the most narrow minded, most chauvinist organization...not a national organization but a tribal one...appealing to the basest instincts of the people" (Dharmadasa 1992:259). The SMS maintained extensive links with rural areas. Furthermore, it attempted to unite the Sinhalese by forging links between the up-country and low-country and among different caste groups. According to Russell, the backbone of the SMS was the middle-level Sinhala educated local elite (1982:224). The SMS was thus instrumental in laying the foundation for the massive electoral triumph of Sinhala nationalism in the mid-1950s.

1930s was a decade that was very receptive for the spread of Sinhala nationalist ideas. The world economic depression had a devastating impact on the country's exports. This in turn led to retrenchment and unemployment and the general impoverishment of the people who were also battered from a malaria epidemic in 1934 which caused about 100,000 lives (Jayawardena 1984: 133). In this context of retrenchment and unemployment, Sinhala nationalism crept into the labour movement which up to that point maintained ethnic solidarity and class consciousness. Consequently, the main target of the Sinhalese workers and trade union leaders became the Malayali workers, who were migrants from Kerala, India (Jayawardena 1984:133,134). The *Viraya*[20], the leading newspaper of the labour movement, stated in its 31 March 1936 editorial (Jayawardena 1984:136):

> On many occasions we have heard how one Malayali creeps into a factory…then proceeds to threaten the livelihood of the other workers by using all types of tactics to fill that factory with his countrymen. Because the Malayalis are able to work for a very low wage and live in a state of deprivation they…are a threat to the Ceylonese workers.

Another emotionally charged nationalist theme in the 1930s was the need to protect the purity of the Sinhala race, the burden of which fell on the shoulders of Sinhala women. This occurred in the context of intermarriages between Malayali workers and Sinhala women.

In hegemonic cultures, women are often constructed as the collectivity's cultural symbols, the borders of the community, as the embodiments of its honor, and as the collectivity's intergenerational reproducers of culture. In this context, women are not seen as individuals, workers and /or wives but members of national collectivities (Yuval-Davis 1997:22,67).

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[20] Hero.

When nation is conceptualized in terms of genealogy and origin, the national collectivity imagined tends to be more exclusionary. In this context, fear of miscegenation, expressed at times in extreme forms such as, "the one-drop rule," according to which, one drop of blood of an "inferior race" can contaminate and pollute the "superior race," leads to the control of marriage, procreation, and sexuality (Yuval-Davis 1997:22,23). The *Viraya,* in the 1930s, often commented that the Sinhalese are not only loosing their jobs to the Malayalis but also their women and urged women not to shame the race by consorting with Malayalis (Jayawardena 1984:137,138). In the *Viraya* of 17 April 1936, a letter inspired by Hittler's anti-Jewish policies appeared that advocated the prohibition of marriages between *Aryan* Sinhala women and Malayalis (Jayawardena 1984:138):

> Everyone says that unions between Sinhalese women and Malayalis-whether legal or illicit-should be prohibited. If this practice, which is certain to lead the nation to slavery and servitude, is prohibited, it will be a timely step for the cause of the Sinhala nation. It is the duty of all Sinhalese to advocate this measure.

3.4. The *Hela* Identity

Framing is a very important aspect of collective action as it constructs collective identities that sustain social movements (Beck 2008:1570,1571). For Melucci, "people's propensity to become involved in collective action is tied to their capacity to define an identity in the first place. It also means that the social construction of collective identity is both a major prerequisite and a major accomplishment of the new social movements" (Buechler 1995:446). Moreover, Melucci insists that "new social movements be seen as ongoing social constructions rather than as unitary empirical objects, givens or essences, or historical personages acting on a stage" (Buechler 1995: 446). In this light, the Sinhala identity should be seen as a work in progress and not a given or essence.

The *Hela* movement or the pure Sinhala movement was very active from the late 1930s to mid-1940s and gave ideological leadership to the Sinhala national movement. The *Hela* movement was made up of organic intellectuals of the rural Sinhala middle classes who framed the national-popular collective will (Nimni 1991:96-118). The key figures associated with this movement were: Munidasa Cumaratunga, Raipiel Tennakoon, Jayantha Weerasekera, and Jayamaha Wellala (Dharmadasa 1992:272). The *Hela* movement produced literary as well as grammar texts. Moreover, it attempted to discover the authentic *Hela* industry, *Hela* cuisine and *Hela* theatre and *Hela* music (Dharmadasa 1992:271-273). The founding of the Sinhala language journal *Subasa*[21] in 1939 and the English language journal *The Helio* in 1941 and the founding of the *Hela Havula* or the pure Sinhala fraternity in 1941 are important milestones of the evolution of the Sinhala national movement (Dharmadasa 1992:262).

In a similar manner to the Brazilian nationalists who sought the essence of Brazil by eliminating anything that was not considered indigenous (Schwarz 1992:236), the *Hela* movement reformulated the Sinhala ethnic identity in a way that marked a clear rupture with the *Arya*-Sinhala identity of the Buddhist revival, which emphasised Indic connections such as, the island's Buddhist heritage, Pali and Sanskrit influence on Sinhala language and the theory of Vijayan colonization. The *Hela* ideologues conceptualized the Sinhala identity as purely an indigenous phenomenon free of all foreign influences. Consequently, they denounced all foreign influences on Sinhalese. Repudiating the dominant discourse on the influence of Pali and Sanskrit on Sinhala language, *Hela* ideologues argued that "Pali, one of the so-called mothers of the Helese language has been

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[21] Good language.

fathered by the Helese themselves. How far the Sanskrit language has been enriched by the ancient Helese language, only time will disclose" (Dharmadasa 1992:265).

Likewise, they denounced Prince Vijaya, the mythological founding figure of the Sinhala nation who had purportedly arrived from Northern India, as an arch robber and articulated on pre-Vijyan glorious *Hela* empires (Dharmadasa 1992:263). Moreover, Buddhism was considered as a foreign influence and hence underemphasized. Pure Sinhala (*Elu* or *Hela*) was conceived as the essence of the Sinhala ethnic identity. Land, nation, and religion (*rata, jatiya, agama)* formula of the Buddhist revival was reconfigured by Cumratunga as language, nation, land (*basa, rasa, desa*) by replacing religion with language and giving language precedence over nation and land by placing it first in the formula (Dharmadasa 1992:266).

According to Dharmadasa, since the 1920s the significance of Buddhism in the Sinhala identity was receding and broader ethnic cohesion that transcended religion, creed, caste, and region was emphasized (1992:222,223). Against this background, young Christians started to assert their Sinhala identity by becoming prominent in organizations like the Sinhalese Young Men's Association (Dharmadasa 1992:224). The fluency of Sinhala language (written and spoken) was becoming the hallmark of the Sinhalese ethnic identity in the 1920s (Dharmadasa 1992:233). In the 19th century, before the Buddhist revival, Sinhala Christian scholar James D'Alwis, tried to define Sinhala identity in terms of the Sinhala language. But his lone attempts were drowned in the popular Buddhist revival.

The main support base of the *Hela* movement was Sinhala school teachers (Dharmadasa 1992:275). Moreover, the Sinhala Christian school teachers also played an active part in the movement (Dharmadasa 1992:286). This was facilitated by the inclusive Sinhala identity of the movement. Identities, most often, tend to have shifting boundaries (Appiah 2006).

By playing a lead role in the campaign to make Sinhala the only Official Language in Sri Lanka, which would have severe consequences on ethnic relations in post-colonial Sri Lanka, the *Hela* movement represented the interests of the bulk of Sinhala literati who came from the middle classes of rural Sri Lanka: Buddhist monks, Sinhala school teachers, notaries public, *ayuervedic*[22] physicians and Sinhala journalists (Dharmadasa 1992:303).

The British dominated the economy of the island during this time. Major plantations as well as the bulk of the import-export trade were in their hands. Coveted positions in public and private sectors were a European monopoly. After Europeans, the Moors and the Indian Tamils controlled the import-export trade. Moreover, in the government service, especially in professions such as, law, medicine, engineering and surveying, the Sinhalese presence was minimal compared to their proportion in the total population (Dharmadasa 1992:241).

Unlike the Anglophone Sinhala bourgeoisie, who benefited from the colonial political, economic, and social system, the Sinhala middle classes with rural roots were alienated and marginalized in all these spheres. The Sinhala Only language policy was seen by these sections as a means to upward social mobility. Wriggins, who interviewed many Sinhala teachers, summarised their perceptions (Jayawardena 1984:166):

> Most of these disadvantages would disappear, it was argued, if Sinhalese were made the sole official language. All the status that previously adhered to English when it was the 'official language' would become associated with the Sinhalese language and thence to Sinhalese teachers. They were, after all, the experts in Sinhalese culture and language, and if their proficiency received state recognition, naturally they themselves would rise in status. If Sinhalese were made the state language, differential pay, educational facilities and job opportunities would no longer favour the English speaking elite. And, as it was seen from the village, vast

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[22] Indigenous medicine.

numbers of government jobs would immediately be opened to their students if English were displaced and Sinhalese promoted.

The class interests of above nature were ideologically couched as the need to address the historical injustice perpetrated over four centuries against the rightful heirs of the nation. As discussed earlier, a central trope in the Sinhala nationalist imagination is the notion of a "beleaguered nation." Dharmapala said, "think that you are now surrounded by a host of enemies who encompaseth [sic] your destruction, who is trying to make you a slave in your own land…" (Rambukwella 2018:64). The imaginary of the "beleaguered nation" is also invoked to package the class interests of rural Sinhala middle classes. Hence, the Sinhala only language policy advocates reasoned that (Dharmadasa 1992:308):

> if Tamil is placed on an equal footing with Sinhala concerning its use in government administration, education, job opportunities, and so on, Tamil, having the advantage of a massive base in neighboring Tamilnadu, with the support of over fifty million speakers and having large literary and scholarly resources, will soon become the dominant language, eventually eliminating Sinhala, which has only ten million speakers who are confined to the island of Sri Lanka.

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the future Prime Minister, articulated the ideological trope of the "beleaguered nation" in the following manner during the language debate in the House of Representatives in October 1955 (Wilson 1974:25):

> I believe there are a not inconsiderable number of Tamils in this country out of a population of eight million. Then there are forty or fifty million people just adjoining, and what about all this Tamil literature, Tamil teachers, even the films, papers, magazines, so that the Tamils in our country are not restricted to the northern and eastern provinces alone; there are a large number, I suppose over ten lakhs, in Sinhalese provinces. And what about the Indian labourers whose return to India is now just fading away into the dim and distant future? The fact that in the towns and villages, in business houses and in

boutiques most of the work is in the hands of Tamil-speaking people will inevitably result in a fear, and

I do not think an unjustified fear, of the inexorable shrinking of the Sinhalese language...

The *Hela* movement collided with the British colonial administration and the local elite. The local scholarly establishment and the political elite were severely criticized by *Hela* activists as frauds and obstacles to the emancipation of the Sinhala nation (Dharmadasa 1992:277). According to Dharmadasa, the failure of the Hela movement to attract the bulk of the Sinhala literati and the population was due to the opposition to the movement shown by their influential opponents, the *Sangha* and the lay hierarchy in the country (1992:278).

3.5. The Rise to Power of Rural Sinhala Middle Classes

For the most part of the post-colonial period, Sri Lanka experienced low growth rates which resulted in a somewhat stagnant economy. Based on the GNP, some economists have classified Sri Lanka as a "fourth world" country. In these depressed economic conditions, competition over scarce economic resources such as, employment opportunities, educational opportunities in institutions of higher learning, and land intensified (Coomaraswamy 1984:180). The intense competition over these resources increasingly took an ethnic configuration. This is the context within which Sinhalization of the state occurred.

Since independence in 1948, the numerically strong Sinhala bourgeoisie led a process of Sinhalization of the state, the benefits of which tricked down to the Sinhala community. Soon after independence, through the Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949, the ruling elite disenfranchised most of the Up-country Tamils (Cheran

2009:24). Subsequently, large numbers of Up-country Tamils, who were initially brought by the British from India to wok in the tea plantations, were repatriated.

Another policy measure of the post-colonial state was the colonization of the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka where jungle land was cleared for resettlement and irrigable paddy cultivation. Soon after independence in 1948, under this program, landless Sinhala peasant families were resettled in the arid North Central and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. The entire program was guided by the nationalist vision of reviving the classical Sinhala hydraulic civilization (Rambukwella 2018: 139). Moreover, the policy also envisaged to alter the demographic balance of the areas traditionally inhabited by the Tamils – transform these areas from Tamil majority to Sinhala (Cheran 2009:25). According to Manogaran, more than any other factor, the government's land settlement policy contributed to the escalation of the ethnic conflict since the early 1980s (1993:24). The consequence of this colonization policy has been the "maintenance of Sinhalese Buddhist colonies at the price of massacres by Tamil separatist guerrillas" (Peebles 1990:52).

The Sinhala ethnic interests were to a large extent institutionalized with the coming to power of the *Mahajana Eksath Peramuna* (MEP) or the People's United Front led by S.W.R.D Bandaranaike in 1956 that promised to restore Buddhism to its rightful position in the island and make Sinhala the only Official Language within 24 hours. The MEP was a coalition which included the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) of S W R D Bandaranaike, Philip Gunawardene's *Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Pakshaya* (VLSSP) or the Revolutionary Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the *Bhasa Peramuna* or the Language Front led by W Dahanayaka and a group of independent MPs led by I M R A Iriyagolle (Wilson 1974:140). The capture of political power by the MEP was the culmination of the political awakening process of the rural Sinhala middle classes that started with the formation of the *Sinhala Maha Sabha*. This is a good example of what Appiah

calls politicization of identities – how political agents mobilize feelings or associations of belonging to certain identities for political gain (2006). This watershed event also marked the ouster from power the Anglophone conservative Sinhala bourgeois class by the Sinhala rural middle classes. The social and political context of the transfer of power is described in the following manner by Nissan and Stirrat (1990:35):

> There was a growing tension between a ruling elite and what might be called a 'rural elite' or an 'indigenous elite'; between the Colombo-based, English-speaking, westernized class from which the MPs and the top bureaucrats came, and the Sinhala-speaking, non-westernized class of the village teacher, small-time traders, ayurvedic physicians, monks and students. For the latter, the dreams of Dharmapala's nationalism held forth a promise of power and status, yet Independence had meant little more for them than the replacement of the British by British-educated 'brown sahibs'.

Instead of granting parity of status to Sinhala and Tamil languages, which was the demand of the Tamil political leaders supported by the left movement, the MEP kicked English out and made Sinhala the only Official Language in Sri Lanka within 24 hours after coming to power. The Sinhala Only Act combined the Sinhala nationalist notion of the vitality of the Sinhala language and its key role in maintaining and defending Buddhism with the economic appeal which blamed the low economic status of the Sinhalese on the low status accorded to the Sinhala language (Cheran 2009:27).

The 1956 "revolution" was a continuation of the policy of Sinhalization of the state. But the dimensions and the quality of the policy radically changed in 1956. The policy became broader, deeper, and totalizing, a total takeover of the state by Sinhala nationalism without any Western liberal pretensions. According to Cheran, the MEP government initiated two parallel processes: the desecularization of the state and the statization of the economy. These processes consolidated an exclusive Sinhala Buddhist identity coterminous with a Sri Lankan identity. In effect, this meant

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the making of a Sinhala-Buddhist state and representing the interests of the Sinhala petty bourgeois – an alliance consisting of middle-class officers, small landowners and Sinhala intelligentsia (Cheran 2009:26).

The Sinhala Only language policy led to anti-Tamil violence and sowed the seeds of the future civil war in post-colonial Sri Lanka. The opposition to Sinhala Only language policy by Tamil politicians and activists drew violent responses from the Sinhalese that gradually led to large-scale anti-Tamil riots in 1958. Rioting went on for four days before a state of emergency was declared. The government agent's report described the situation in Colombo during the riots in the following manner (Jayawardena 1984:172):

> Passing vehicles were stopped and their occupants mercilessly assaulted. Moving trains were halted at several places and the passengers ruthlessly attacked. There were many instances of arson and such brutal scenes as men being burnt alive. Looting was rampant. The police were helpless against these marauding rioters.

Even though Bandaranaike gave political leadership to Sinhala middle class forces of rural origins, he was never an organic part of this social force. Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike was born to wealth and privilege of the colonial bourgeoisie. His father, Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike, who styled himself in the image of a British country squire, was the *maha mudaliyar,* the head of the native administration of the colony. Young Bandaranaike was educated by a British tutor at home before attending St. Thomas' College in Colombo, the leading Anglican school which was modeled on the British public-school tradition. After completing studies at St. Thomas' College, Bandaranaike joined Christ Church, Oxford University, where he read classics. Upon his return to Sri Lanka, he did not join the colonial civil service to the great disappointment of his father, who came from a lineage with a long history of colonial service. Instead, he joined politics, projected himself in the image of an anti-colonial politician. Bandaranaike adopted the

native dress, one of the first political figures in Sri Lanka to do so, renounced his Anglican faith and embraced Buddhism, and learnt the Sinhala language ((Rambukwella 2018:73-76). The following excerpt is from a speech Bandaranaike made soon after his arrival from England completing his studies (Rambukwella 2018:73):

> The first thing that I must do is to apologise to you for speaking to you in English. Owing to my long absence from my country, I am not sufficiently fluent in Sinhalese to be able to address you in Sinhalese at length. That is a fault that can be easily remedied. What is more important is that my heart should be sound. And I can assure you that my heart is Sinhalese to the core.

In a context of continuing resistance by Tamil politicians and activists, the Oxford educated liberal Bandaranaike attempted to accommodate the aspirations of the Tamil political leaders through the Banda-Chelva Pact of 1957. The pact envisaged to recognize Tamil as the language of a national minority and the language of administration in the Northern and Eastern provinces, where Tamils constitute the majority and devolve a measure of power to Regional Councils with authority over education, agriculture, and the selection of persons for schemes of colonization (Jayawardena 1984:171). The Sinhala national forces, which basically constituted the MEP, vehemently resisted these attempts.

The *Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP) or the National Liberation Front was a prominent Sinhala nationalist organization that resisted the Banda-Chelva Pact. It came to limelight during 1957-9. The JVP was led by K.M.P. Rajaratna and his wife Kusuma Rajaratna. F.R. Jayasuriya, the Ceylon University economist, was the advisor of the party (Wilson 1974:169,170). Jayasuriya led a fast unto death in 1958, the first one in post-independence Sri Lanka, against the clause on the reasonable use of Tamil in the proposed Official Language Act bill of the MEP government.

In the end, the Prime Minister surrendered to the nationalist pressure and unilaterally abrogated the agreement he entered with Tamil leaders. Not so long after this event, when the Prime Minister Bandaranaike came to be perceived as an obstacle to the Sinhala nationalist agenda, he was assassinated by the very same movement that brought him into power.

3.6. Turbulent 60s and 70s

The Dudley-Chelva Pact also experienced a similar fate in the mid 1960s. It was entered by the United National Party (UNP) to get the support of the Federal Party (FP) to establish a solid parliamentary majority. The pact included the use of Tamil language in the North and the East in administrative matters and in courts and a framework for devolution of power in the form of District Councils. Moreover, it included issues involving the Land Development Ordinance and colonization giving priority to landless Tamils in the resettlement in the North and the East. The pact was resisted by the SLFP, the *Lanka Sama Samaja Pakshaya* (LSSP), the Communist Party (CP), *Sangha* and Muslim groups fearful of the impact of the political balance in the Eastern province (International Crisis Group 2007:6).

The nationalization of schools was another key demand of the Sinhala national movement in the mid 1950s. The All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress was formed in 1918 to promote the revival of Buddhism and to protect the interests of the Buddhists. This organization appointed a Buddhist Commission of Inquiry in 1954 to investigate the state of Buddhism in the island. The report of the commission, *The Betrayal of Buddhism* (1956), a key text that articulated the Sinhala nationalist imagination of the period, urged the nationalization of all state-aided schools (C. R. de Silva 1998:109, Matthews 1988-1989:624). However, it was only in 1960-1, under Mrs.

Bandaranaike's SLFP government that most denominational schools were nationalized (Wilson 1974: 20,21).

The above demand for the nationalization of schools was a part of the Sinhala nationalist campaign to redress the alleged historical injustice they suffered. With the colonial conquest of Sri Lanka, an aggressive campaign of proselytization was carried out by colonial powers. The schools set up by Roman Catholic and Protestant missionary organizations became an instrument of religious conversion. The best schools in the country were owned by the Christians and the alumni of these schools had better opportunities of securing employment in the public and private sectors. Moreover, important positions in the public services and armed forces were held by Christians, particularly Roman Catholics. (Wilson 1974: 20).

The nationalization of all state assisted schools proceeded despite the resolute Catholic opposition to the policy. The Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No. 5 of 1960 and the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act No. 8 of 1961 made way for the transfer of ownership and administration of all state assisted schools and training colleges to the state (C. R. de Silva 1998:110). Consequently, most schools previously run by Christian organizations came under the state. However, the Christian organizations decided to retain some of their best schools as private schools without state assistance. Prohibited by law to levy fees from students, these schools functioned under severe financial hardships (de Silva 1981:528). In contrast, the private schools administered by Buddhist organizations enthusiastically cooperated with this policy as their Sinhala Buddhist identity would be further enhanced with the association with the state (Tambiah 1992:65). The bitterness of Catholics over the takeover of schools morphed into an abortive anti-government *coup d'état* in January 1962 led by certain elements in upper echelons in the security establishment. However, it only helped to generate

sympathy for the Sinhala nationalist agenda pursued by the government in power (de Silva 1981:528). According to Tambiah, the takeover of schools and the change of the medium of instruction to mother tongue in primary and secondary schools substantially ensured the religious and language rights of the majority community, the Sinhalese (1992:65).

There was a determined Sinhala nationalist propaganda campaign in the 1970s and early 1980s that appealed to all sections of the Sinhala society. This campaign targeted specific segments of the Sinhala society such as, traders, peasantry, youth, etc. Specific grievances were constructed to mobilize these sections (Jayawardena 2003:101-104). Cyril Mathew, an UNP politician and a Minister, was a key figure in this virulent Sinhala nationalist propaganda campaign that mainly targeted the Tamils. In a book authored by Mathew titled *Diabolical Conspiracy* in 1980, he asserted that there is a diabolical conspiracy of Tamils to deprive Sinhalese of access to higher education and prestigious employment opportunities (Jayawardena 2003:103-104). Such propaganda convinced Sinhalese about favoritism of Tamil examiners and administrators towards Tamil students in the form of overmarking answer scripts and prior leaking of question papers, etc. Such suspicions and allegations became acute in a context of intense competition to get into limited places in universities, especially into science faculties such as, medicine and engineering. For example, this issue came to a head when it was rumored that one hundred out of one hundred and sixty-two students selected for the course in engineering were Tamil medium candidates (C. R. de Silva 1998:114).

In the 1970s, Sinhala nationalist forces under the political leadership of the United Front government, took steps to change the university admission policy which was hitherto based on academic merit. Thus, the government accepted the Sinhala nationalist argument that there was a too great a number of Tamil medium students who had qualified to enter science faculties,

especially medicine and engineering, and arbitrarily raised the entry requirements for Tamil medium students in comparison to Sinhala medium students to ensure a "politically acceptable" proportion of Sinhalese in science faculties (C. R. de Silva 1998:114, Bastian 1985:220).

Since then, the government has introduced several different schemes for university admissions. Each scheme brough further gains for the Sinhalese and loses for the Tamils. For example, the total share of Tamil admissions to science faculties fell to 20.9% in comparison to 25.9% in 1973 and 35.3% in 1970. Moreover, there was a substantial reduction in absolute numbers of Tamils entering science faculties despite a continued expansion in the total intake for programs in the science faculty. And the situation of Tamil medium students deteriorated further with newer schemes of university admissions such as, the District Quota System. In contrast to the above situation of Tamil medium students, the share of Sinhala medium students in science faculties rose to 75.4% in 1974 and more in the following years (C. R. de Silva 1998:114,118).

1970s is also noteworthy because during this decade the Sinhala nationalist movement was able to incorporate the Sinhala Buddhist hegemony to the Constitutions of the country. This turned Sri Lanka in constitutional terms to the *Sinhaladvipa* and the *Dharmadvipa* – the land of "chosen" people, the Sinhalese, who shall preserve and protect the "chosen" faith, Buddhism (Jayawardena 2003:101).

The Sinhala nationalist ideology was incorporated into the two post-independent Constitutions of the country, 1972 Constitution of Bandaranaike government and the current 1978 Constitution of the Jayawardene government. The Constitution that was in force since independence in 1948 till 1972 did not make any declaration on language or religion. Under Section 29 (b & c) of this Constitution, the Parliament was prevented from enacting laws that would make "persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which

persons of other communities or religions are not made liable" - or neither could Parliament "confer on persons of any community or religion a privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religion" (Jayawardena 2003:105,106).

The 1972 Constitution abrogated the above provision which protected minority rights. The principle of "Sinhala Only" language policy was enshrined in the Constitution by a provision that stated, "The Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala as provided by the Official Language Act of 1956" (Jayawardena 2003:106). Moreover, the 1972 Constitution stated that "all laws shall be enacted or made in Sinhala" with Tamil translations and that "the language of courts…shall be Sinhala" with provision for the use of Tamil in the North and East which are predominantly Tamil speaking provinces (Jayawardena 2003:106).

Sinhala continued to be the only Official Language of the country in the 1978 Constitution. In addition, Sinhala and Tamil were made "National Languages." Hence, Sinhala remained the language of administration and language of the courts throughout the country, provision was made for the use of Tamil for administrative purposes and transaction of businesses in public institutions. Moreover, the laws were to be published in both languages and provision was made for use of Tamil in the exercise of original jurisdiction in North and East provinces. (Jayawardena 2003: 106). Despite these changes, Sinhala continued to enjoy a privileged and hegemonic status while the minority language, Tamil, was relegated to a subordinate position.

Making a clear break with the secular constitutional tradition in the country, the 1972 Constitution accorded special privileges to Buddhism. The Section (6) of the 1972 Constitution declares that "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Section 18(1) (d) that all citizens had the right to freedom of thought,

conscience and religion" (Jayawardena 2003:107). With this provision to the 1972 Constitution, the Sinhala nationalist movement was able to decisively change the hitherto existed secular state of Sri Lanka.

In addition to the special mention of Buddhist religious institutions, the 1978 Constitution reaffirmed the privileged status accorded to Buddhism in the previous 1972 Constitution. Hence, Article 9 of the 1978 Constitution states, "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the *Buddha Sasana*[23], while assuring to all religions the rights guaranteed by certain freedoms including the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, speech, expression" (Jayawardena 2003:107). Thus, by according privileged and hegemonic status to Sinhala language and Buddhism, the 1972 and the current 1978 Constitutions incorporated the Sinhala nationalist ideology to the supreme law of the land.

This period gave rise to several short-lived Sinhala nationalist political formations. The *Dharma Samaja Pakshaya* (DSP) or the Righteous Society Party was formed prior to the general election of March 1960. It was led by L. H. Mettananda, the leader of the *Bauddha Jathika Balavegaya* or the Buddhist National Force, a prominent political formation in the 1950s. DSP campaigned for Buddhist rights and was in alliance with Philip Gunawardene's MEP. The party disappeared after the general elections of July 1960 (Wilson 1974:170,174). Another short-lived political formation was the *Sinhala Mahajana Peramuna* (SMP) or the Sinhala People's Front. It was formed prior to the general elections of May 1970 by R G Senanayake. The party stood for

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[23] Buddha's dispensation.

Buddhist rights and Sinhala middle class interests. The SMP was routed out in the elections (Wilson 1974:174).

According to de Silva, the two Bandaranaikes, the husband and wife, established a new equilibrium of political forces in the country to which their associates as well as their opponents were compelled to accommodate themselves. The primary feature of this new equilibrium was the acceptance of Sinhala Buddhist hegemony in the Sri Lankan polity and a sharp decline in the status of ethno-religious minorities (1981:526).

4. *Jathika Chinthanaya*: Historical Context and Political Impact

Lenin reflected on national culture in the following manner:

> …the slogan of 'national culture' is a clerical or bourgeois deception – no matter whether it concerns Great Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Polish, Georgian or any other culture. A hundred and twenty five years ago, when the nation had not been split into bourgeoisie and proletariat, the slogan of national culture could have been a single and integral call to struggle against feudalism and clericalism. Since that time, however, the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has gained momentum everywhere. The division of the 'single' nation into exploiters and exploited has become an accomplished fact (Nimni 1991:86).

A significant development in the Sinhala national movement in the early 1980s was the emergence of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* (JC) or the School of National Thinking spearheaded by Gunadasa Amarasekera and Nalin de Silva, who came from rural middle-class backgrounds in Sri Lanka. It is mainly an intellectual movement. Even though Sinhala nationalist politics has a quite a long history in Sri Lanka and there have been outspoken champions of the "Sinhala cause" like Anagarika Dharmapala and Cyril Mathew, a well-articulated and sophisticated nationalist discourse was lacking throughout. Such a discourse only emerges in the writings of the two leading thinkers of this school: Amarasekera and de Silva. According to Uyangoda, only the JC was able to penetrate the intellectual formation in the Sinhala society and gain legitimacy (2021d:92). According to Goonewardena, the JC is the discursive ether through which cultural-political debate moves in Sinhala-Buddhist milieus (2007). The JC re-framed the nation in very significant ways. The contemporary Sinhala nationalist imagination is to a large part articulated within the master frames constructed by the JC since the 1980s.

Since its formation in the 1980s, the school is singularly instrumental in ideologically guiding the Sinhala national movement up to the present times. The JC is a multifaceted discourse that addressed everyday political issues as well as abstract epistemological themes. Moreover, the school was the major intellectual stimulus behind the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces in the south of Sri Lanka between 2004-2005 that brought to power the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa (Dewasiri 2018:41,42).

In this chapter, I attempt to trace the development of the JC ideology over time with reference to selected texts of the school. I will engage in a critical discussion on the major features and themes of the JC discourse. Moreover, in this chapter, I try to understand the emergence of the JC and attempt to assess its impact on the political landscape in Sri Lanka.

4.1. *Jathika Chinthanaya*: The Historical Trajectory

Nilsen describes the concept of organic crisis "as a complex field of force where defensive and offensive forms of movement activity flourish as opposing social forces seek to win hegemony over the imminent changes in the social organization of needs and capacities" (2009:133). Further, he defines a social movement from above in the following manner: "the organization of multiple forms of skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organized by dominant social groups, which aims at the maintenance or modification of a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities in ways that reproduce and/or extend the power of those groups and its hegemonic position within a given social formation" (2009:115). Social movements from above draw on and mobilize economic, political, and cultural (ideological) resources in projects that seek to reproduce and expand the hegemonic position of the dominant social groups (Cox and Nilsen 2005).

Gramsci reflects on social hegemony in the following manner: "the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (1998:12). Such general consent is based on the acceptance of representations of the dominant groups impose on social life as being in the universal interest of the society (Nilsen 2009:119). Gramsci says, "it (historic bloc) must broaden the narrow corporative interests of the leading class…to the point at which it inspires popular support and is understood to be representing the aspirations of the community as a whole" (Nimni 1991:102). In this context, Gramsci underscores the key role played by intellectuals in weaving the "fabric of hegemony" (Sassoon 1983:201).

The hegemony of dominant social groups is exercised in the social formation through ideologies of dominance. The central feature of such ideologies is that the key premises are presented as natural and purposive and therefore legitimate (Nilsen 2009:119). In nationalist narratives, nation is most often articulated in above terms. Moreover, one mode in which ideology operates is through unification. The strategy of symbolization of unity constructs symbols of unity and of collective identity that bind individuals together in a way which overrides differences and divisions (Thompson 1990:64,65). Such practises construct hegemonic identities that mystify power relations and thus sustain them. Nationalism constructs horizontal communities and obscures social cleavages.

Ideology constitutes concrete individuals as subjects. (Althusser 1971:162-170). According to the Gramscian approach to hegemony, historical acts can only be performed by "collective man" who have achieved cultural-social unity on the basis of a common understanding of the world (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:67-68). The fundamental function of nationalism in modern

political formations is the construction of this "collective man" to attain "cultural-social unity" (Dewasiri 2000:26).

Nationalism as an ideology has played a key role in constructing the modern political subject. The JC is an ideological practice of radical intellectual elements associated with the Sinhala ruling elites aimed at constructing hegemonic notions about the Sinhala nation. According to Dewasiri, Sinhala nationalism as a hegemonic formation has constructed the "collective man" (i.e., the Sinhalese / *Sinhalaya*) by constructing a "cultural-social unity" between "multiplicity of dispersed wills and heterogeneous aims" (2000:27). It is in these hegemonic discursive formations of nationalism that the "imagined community" (Anderson 2006) of Sinhalese is constituted. Nations do not exist as an ontological fact outside nationalist articulations and institutional practices that reify it (Brubaker 1996). Not only nations, but all social space is discursive (Laclau and Mouffe 1987).

The following JC texts would be approached as hegemonic articulations of the nation by a social movement from above, a key product of the ideological apparatus (Althusser 1971) of the Sinhala establishment, and I will read them in the spirit of critical discourse analysis. There seem to be many variations in critical discourse analysis and what is characteristic of all these approaches is that they all explore the role discourse plays in the production and reproduction of power relations in social structures with a focus on how discourse sustains and legitimizes social inequalities (Wooffitt 2005:5).

The germinal ideas of the JC discourse which took shape and form in the mid 1980s can be traced to an article written by Gunadasa Amarasekera titled (in translation), *The Future of this Country Belongs to the Educated Rural Youth*, which was published in a magazine known as *Sanskruti* in 1962. The embryonic form of the emerging JC ideology can be seen in this article.

Amarasekera scorns the rural Sinhala petty bourgeois of his generation for attempting to adopt Western values and norms. The first part of the following passage may be a self reference since he claims to be a sort of a "born-again" Sinhala- Buddhist nationalist (in translation);

> The son of the middle class Sinhala teacher who entered the medical college, tried hard to learn ball-room dancing by attending fee-levying classes while studying to become a doctor....The village girl who came to the university memorized with great effort English songs by writing them on pieces of paper (1996:51).

One of the major themes of the JC ideology is its hostility towards cultural borrowing for fear that this process will result in the loss of the Sinhala cultural identity. The practice of cultural borrowing is characterized with derogatory terms such as *thuppahi*, meaning impure and *anukaraka*, meaning imitation. This theme is still at an embryonic stage in the article.

In *Abuddassa Yugayak* (*A Dark Age*) first published in 1976, Amarasekera further develops the ideas of the above discussed article. He constructs Anagarika Dharmapala[24] in the image of a national liberation hero (1996:25). The author at the same time realizes the limitations of cultural nationalism of Dharmapala as a political ideology capable of social transformation and views Marxism as a potential ally. According to Amarasekera, Marxism has the potential to complement Dharmapala's politics. The left movement in Sri Lanka is severely admonished by the author for the non-materialization of this politico-ideological cohabitation. This apparent failure on the part of the left leadership in Sri Lanka is explained as due to their Eurocentric outlook. Amarasekera goes onto portray the pioneer Marxists in Sri Lanka as a gang of brown sahibs who did not understand the heart and mind of the indigenous population (1996:41). What emerges in

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[24] A lead figure in the Buddhist revival in the mid-19 century.

Abuddassa Ugayak is a yearning for a new kind of political thinking, a politics that attempts to synthesize Sinhala nationalism and Marxism.

Dharmapala embodied a highly exclusionary form of Sinhala nationalism which very quickly degenerated into a virulent form of anti-minority communalism supported mainly by the Sinhalese merchant capitalist class (Jayawardena 1985). How a cohabitation is possible between the above form of nationalism and the Marxist movement in Sri Lanka with a strong internationalist outlook, at least in the early stages of the movement, is challenging to comprehend. Nevertheless, over the years, once in 1956, again in the mid-1960s and again in the early 1970s, such political cohabitation between Sinhala nationalism and Marxists took place. Hence, Amarasekera's criticism is unsubstantiated. Furthermore, Amarasekera's assertion that the Marxist leaders in Sri Lanka were alien to the local culture is again unfounded. Until the late 1970s the left political parties in Sri Lanka had a strong electoral base, especially in rural areas in Sabaragamuwa and Southern provinces. If the left leaders did not understand the heart and mind of the local people, how does one explain the enormous electoral success they enjoyed in these areas?

Amarasekera attempts this synthesis in a book titled *Anagarika Dharmapala Marxvadida?* (*Was Anagarika Dharmapala a Marxist?*), which was published in 1980. According to the author of the book, it is this particular book that turned Nalin de Silva, the other leading thinker of the JC school, away from Marxism (The Island, 2001 March 25). Until that time, de Silva was a central committee member of the radical Trotskyite *Nava Sama Samaja Party* (NSSP).

In this essay, Amarasekera's approach to Sinhalese nationalism takes a Buddhist orientation. The Sinhalese national identity is conceptualized as essentially based on Buddhism. He begins the synthesis between Sinhala nationalism and Marxism by first reinterpreting Buddhism, the essence of Sinhalaness. Ironically, Amarasekera's reinterpretation of Buddhism is

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based on the work of Trevor Ling, a Western scholar. Amarasekera, at times is very scornful of the *suddho* (whites) who try to teach "us" about "our" culture (Amarasekera 1991:159). Amarasekera asserts, based on the work of Ling, that Buddhism is a social religion as opposed to a private religion that has as its objective the transformation of man and society (1980:33). Moreover, he says that the Buddha was concerned with building a society that would be conducive to extinguish ideas of "me" and "mine", the primary source of suffering (1980:47). Amarasekera underscores that a society of the above nature conceptualized by Buddha and the communist society envisioned by Marx are basically the same (1980:54,55).

Interestingly, Amarasekera rejects the view of Marxism as an anti-religious violent political discourse and asserts that Marxism is a humanistic discourse like Buddhism, concerned with human liberation (1980:55). Yet, he does not accord philosophical superiority to Marxism over Buddhism. Marxism is seen as a necessary revolutionary practice in a modern class-based society to prepare the ground for the installation of the virtuous Buddhist state of the *Asokan* and *Devanampiyatissa* model.

In *Anagarika Dharmapala Marxvadida?*, the author views Marxism as a means (i.e. establishment of socialist property relations) for the triumph of Sinhalese nationalism, the installation of the virtuous Buddhist state, that encourages the development of the supreme man who attempts to detach from "me" and "mine". Moreover, this is an exclusive state of the Sinhalese where the Other does not exist. This is the nature of the partnership or the cohabitation between Buddhism and Marxism that the author envisions in the above book. The theme of a socialist Buddhist state runs throughout Amarasekera's political imagination. For example, in the (in translation) *End of a Journey,* first published in 2010, the concluding part of the semi-autobiographical long novel started with the (in translation) *Beginning of a Journey,* first published

in 1984, the protagonist, Piyadasa the academic, is on a quest to theorize the socialist Buddhist state model that could replace the decadent post-colonial state structures in Sri Lanka and other states in the region with a Buddhist heritage.

Mage Lokaya (*My World*), first published in 1986, authored by Nalin de Silva, is a significant text. Written from an anti-colonial and cultural essentialist perspective, it gives a post-modernist epistemological foundation to the developing JC discourse. However, de Silva denies any knowledge of post-modernism till mid 1990s (1999:ix). The author in this work attempts to culturally relativize knowledge by employing the post-modernist critique of science.

de Silva terms his perspective n*irmanathmaka sapekshathavadaya* (creative relativism). He asserts that the concept was entirely formulated within the Sinhala Buddhist culture (1999:viii,ix), which is portrayed as a natural entity. Naturalization and de-historicization are central features of ideology (Gramsci 1998:157) Creative relativism is the idea that due to ignorance of *anithya, dukkha, and anathma* (impermanence, suffering, and soullessness), humans create knowledge relative to their senses, mind, and culture (1999:viii,ix).

According to de Silva, except *nirvana,* that needs to be *seen* devoid of any concept or perspective (1999:54,55)*,* all other knowledge, including the so-called scientific knowledge, is relative (1999:49). Hence, knowledge is relative to time, society, culture and individual. (1999:53). According to the author, contrary to the claims of objectivity of scientific knowledge, it is one system of knowledge among many to perceive and understand the world. When we use so-called science, we come to see the world through the Western cultural eyes which are rooted in Judaic views (1999:69).

de Silva subscribes to a much essentialized and static perspective about societies and cultures. In *Mage Lokaya*, he talks about the "Westerners" and "Easterners", "Indian science" and "Chinese science" and so on. The author assumes that every nation or tribe has a monolithic *jathika chinthanaya* or civilizational consciousness, which is unique to it (1999:115). Moreover, according to de Silva, this pre-existing consciousness in a society is only a matter of discovery (1999:121).

As discussed earlier, unification – the construction of symbols of unity and collective identity - is one mode in which ideology operates (Thompson 1990:64,65). Articulation on pre-discursive "civilizational consciousness" waiting to be discovered is an exercise in ideology aimed at constructing hegemonic notions of the nation.

Societies and cultures are not homogenous entities without internal contradictions that tend to fragment social and cultural "wholes." Even if one hypothetically accepts the existence of such a priori and monolithic entity as *jathika chinthanaya* in a society, it is impossible to accept that this consciousness does not change over time. Ironically, the insistence on such an essentialist understanding of culture is antithetical to Theravada Buddhism, which is claimed to be the philosophical foundation of creative relativism.

The "West" is portrayed by the JC school as a monolithic Judeo-Christian cultural space. The complexity of this social landscape in an interconnected world characterized by mobility of people, ideas, and capital is glossed over. Instead of perceiving culture as a dynamic phenomenon that is constantly negotiated by internal and external social forces, the JC articulates an essentialist and static view about society and culture.

Throughout *Mage Lokaya*, what the reader feels is an overwhelming fear of the author over loss of much essentialized cultural identity. It is interesting to observe the author's use of Western

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post-modernist critiques of science and cultural relativism of Western anthropology to legitimise the JC project.

Unlike Amarasekera, who engages with Marxism, de Silva is puritanical in his dealings with the "West". In a sense, de Silva's epistemic critique is somewhat like the decolonial thinking of Quijano. According to Quijano, in the beginning, colonialism involved systematic repression of ideas and knowledge of the dominated. He further says, "the repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual" (2007:169). This was followed by the imposition of the use of rulers' modes of expression and ideas, especially in relation to the supernatural. This colonization of the imagination of the dominated not only impeded their cultural production but also served as a very efficient means of social and cultural control of the colonized when the immediate repression ceased to be constant and systematic (Quijano 2007:169).

In the preface to the first edition of *Mage Lokaya*, de Silva scorns the youth of Sri Lanka who go after drugs, dollars, and fashions that come from the West, and the youth who are intoxicated with Western discourses. For him, Marxism is a manifestation of the Western Judaic thinking (1999:61). But a well-developed critique of Marxism comes later with the publication of the two booklets, *Marxvadaye Daridratavaya* (*Poverty of Marxism*) published in 1993 and *Apohakaye Rupikaya* (*Symbolism of Dialectics*), published in 1994. However, de Silva's initial critique of Marxism is based on Karl Popper's famous critique of Marxism (Dewasiri 2017:3). In the preface to the third edition of the *Mage Lokaya* (1999), de Silva asserts that Western discourses like Marxism only tie "us" further to Western cultural imperialism and liberation from Western cultural hegemony lies in the production of knowledge within "our" cultural concepts and

paradigms. Throughout the following texts, the critical reader confronts many hegemonic notions of the above type. These texts need to be understood as ideological interventions in the construction of the Sinhala imagined community. This effort is most noteworthy in the following text of the school.

Ganaduru Madiyama Dakinemi Arunalu (*I See Rays of Dawn Amidst Darkness*) is a collection of articles written by Amarasekera in late 1986 and was published as a book for the first time in mid 1988.This particular book is the culmination of the ideas he began to articulate with the *Abuddassa Yugayak*.

The book came out during the second *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP) insurrection. Not surprisingly, it had a significant impact on the politically conscious educated youth in the south of the country at the time. It was a book which youth talked about, including the ones who were opposed to Sinhala nationalism. All the copies of it were sold within two months of the first publication. Perera says;

> Almost all university undergraduates and many students who were interviewed strongly recommended that I read the book, which was what initially led me to it. A number of low ranking J.V.P. activists suggested the same thing. Later it became clear that the book had become a primary vehicle of political socialization for some J.V.P. recruits… (1995:74).

Malinda Seneviratne, a Sinhala nationalist political activist, characterizes the book as "a veritable handbook of those who found answers to some of their burning questions with regard to civilization and social–political crisis they were undergoing…" (The Island, 2001 March 25).

The same line of reasoning found in *Anagarika Dharmapala Marxvadida?* – Marxism as means for the triumph of Sinhalese nationalism – is further developed in *Ganaduru Madiyama Dakinemi Arunalu*. The author portrays Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions as victories of

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nationalism through the means of Marxism (1998a:56, 57,116,117). However, his ideological critiques dismiss the argument as a blatant corruption of Marxism. Bolshevism, according to them, is the fruit of the uncompromising ideological and theoretical struggle of Lenin against the reactionary, feudal, romantic, and rural populist (*Narodnik*) currents of the traditional Russian national thinking. Lenin never attempted to theorize a national thinking which idealised the backwardness in thinking and culture of the rural Russian village (Uyangoda 2021c:120,121).

Amarasekera portrays Sri Lanka as the exclusive homeland of the Sinhalese Buddhists. According to him, the *jathika chinthanaya* or the civilizational consciousness of Sri Lanka is exclusively associated with the Sinhala people, the builders of the civilization of Sri Lanka. Since the civilization of Sri Lanka is exclusively a creation of the Sinhalese, only they can be considered a nation. Other ethnic groups are accorded outsider status (1998a:150).

One of the hallmarks of the JC ideology is its attack on the plural society. In the text, Sri Lanka is constructed as a Sinhala Buddhist society throughout history (Amarasekera 1998a:45,46). At times, the author attempts to assimilate the so-called outsiders into the Sinhala Buddhist culture. Identities and cultures of Other are portrayed as a subordinate part of the greater culture and identity of the Sinhala-Buddhists (1998a:45). Amarasekera says "we have amongst us Sinhalese-Buddhist Muslims, the Tamils in the north are better Sinhalese-Buddhist than us" (1998a:45). However, Amarasekera's view of the contemporary Sinhala culture as a continuation of an unbroken tradition that goes back to the Anuradhapura period (377 BC - 1017AD) is contested. According to Gunasinghe, the roots of present Sinhala culture are found in the recent Kandyan period (1597 – 1815) while Abeysekera interprets it as a product of the political and economic changes that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Sri Lanka (Tennekoon 1998:9,10).

In some ways, the JC in Sri Lanka, as articulated above by Amarasekera resembles the *Hindutva* ideology articulated by Savarkar. The central premise of this ideology equates authentic Indianness with Hindu culture. In other words, India's historic and cultural identity is reduced to Hinduism, broadly conceived as a cultural ethos. Thus, Hindus are a nation consisted of a shared 'race', culture, and territorial origin. However, this imagined community which is simultaneously a nation, a 'race' and a cultural community does not include Indians of different faiths such as, Muslim, Christians, Parsis and Jews. They are outsiders. They could never be genuinely Indian since their faiths originated outside the subcontinent. Nevertheless, at the same time, non-Hindu groups are forced to publicly acknowledge Hinduism as the historical and cultural ground of their identity (Chopra 2006:192,193).

Contrary to the hegemonic narrative of Amarasekera, diverse cultural traditions and social groups, including the diverse colonial powers that ruled Sri Lanka, contributed to the civilization of Sri Lanka in varied ways. This has given a distinct multicultural character to the island. The deep multicultural character of the island is a very basic observation and cannot be obscured by a monolithic Sinhala Buddhist cultural construct. Historians like Gunawardana (1990) have traced back the plural nature of the Sri Lankan society to the times of *Brahmi* inscriptions (3rd century B.C to 4th century A.D), the earliest written records in the island.

The political and material backing the Tamil national movement received from India and the Indian government's insistence on a political solution to the ethnic question in Sri Lanka made Sinhala nationalists apprehensive. It is the JC school which articulated and popularised the notion that the Tamil national question is not a genuine issue, but a complete fabrication tied to the agendas of Indian expansionism and foreign imperialism which would ultimately result in the dismemberment of Sri Lanka (Uyangoda 2021c:117).

The Tamil national question is interpreted for the first time by the author in the book as a Western imperialist conspiracy (Amarasekera 1998a:24,25). Any form of political accommodation of Tamil political interests is interpreted as siding with neo-colonialism. A military solution to the Tamil insurgency is proposed and this military engagement with Tamils is interpreted as a heroic national liberation struggle against neo-colonialism (Amarasekera 1998a:26). Amarasekera's initial sketches on the Tamil insurgency are turn into an elaborate narrative by de Silva in years to come.

In *Ganaduru Madiyama Dakinemi Arunalu*, the author's approach to nation is cultural than biological (1998a:61). The culturalist definition of nation is a hallmark of the thinking of the school. This is why the Tibetan Buddhist monk Ven. Mahinda is considered a Sinhalese Buddhist by the school (de Silva 1998:13). Amarasekera suffers from the very same essentialist and static approach to culture that is seen in de Silva's *Mage Lokaya*. The reason for the very culturalist orientation and especially the essentialist and static approach to culture in the thinking of the school may be the influence of the Sinhala literati Martin Wickramasinghe, who was in turn influenced by the anthropological literature in North America and Western Europe of his time, especially Ruth Benedict's notion of cultural configurationalism, according to which, each culture is dominated by a particular theme or ethos that shapes all institutions in the society.

Ganaduru Madiyama Dakinemi Arunalu text is significant in the sense that it attempts to sketch the contours of the so called *jathika chinthanaya* for the first time. The author spells out the *jathika chinthanaya* of Sri Lanka as the two-thousand-year-old Sinhala-Buddhist thought (Amarasekera 1998a:31). The essence of this thinking is contained in the Sinhala Buddhist cultural notion of the human being. According to this view, a human is capable of attaining a higher state

of being through the transformation of consciousness, the *arahat*[25] ideal of Theravada Buddhism (Amarasekera 1998a:39). Amarasekera portrays this thought as historically tied to a collectivist peasant society in Sri Lanka (1998a:31,32,38).

The above essentialist construction of the civilizational consciousness of the "Sinhalese", if there is any such monolithic entity, is problematic. A more realistic approach to social consciousness of any formation is to conceive it as a complex network consisted of many social layers and sources (Uyangoda 2021c:129). Sinhala Buddhism, which is considered as the foundation of the *jathika chinthanaya* in Sri Lanka, has never been a monolithic entity or a static phenomenon. It has been a fissured and dynamic institution throughout history. The historical rivalry between the two monastic centres, the conservative *Mahavihara* and the heretical *Abhayagiri,* is a case in point. Moreover, even today, caste affiliation plays a significant role in the organization of institutional Buddhism in Sri Lanka. What we broadly term under the rubric, Sinhala Buddhism, continues to transform (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, Seneviratne 1999). Therefore, a claim of a homogenous civilizational consciousness of the Sinhalese is more a contemporary hegemonic ideological articulation than a historical reference.

Contrary to the assertions of the JC school, what was practised as Buddhism in Sri Lanka differed from canonical Buddhism. These practices were influenced by folk religiosity as well as Hinduism. Moreover, even the Theravada Buddhist ideal of *nirvana* was only pursued by a handful of forest-dwelling medicant monks. Buddhism in Sri Lanka was historically tied up with the state and became an important ideological force that legitimized state power (Smith 1978, Uyangoda 2021c:130,131).

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[25] The enlightened being who has extinguished all desires.

Ganaduru Madiyama Dakinemi Arunalu is a noteworthy ideological intervention in the hegemonic construction of a Sinhala Buddhist subject position. One major function of ideology is the interpellation of individuals as subjects (Althusser 1971:170). The book was an appeal to educated youth of rural origins in the Sinhala-speaking south for a new kind of politics, the politics of National Socialism (Amarasekera 1998a: 145,146). This is the social force Amarasekera has great faith in since 1962, when he wrote the article titled, *The Future of this Country Belongs to the Educated Rural Youth.* He once characterized these youth, who functioned as the motor force of the JVP, in one of his short stories titled, *Amatige Asweema* (*Quitting of the Minister*) (2012), as an army sent by God Vishnu, the guardian of the Sinhala nation and Buddhism in Sri Lanka, to re-establish the righteous order.

A somewhat similar attempt at synthesising nationalism and Marxism can be seen in the thinking of Amilcar Cabral and Regis Debray. One of the central concepts of Cabral was the 'nation-class', the broad alliance of nationalist forces that would lead the anti-colonial struggle. The revolutionary petty bourgeoisie would assume the leadership in this class bloc due to the underdeveloped character of the working class. Cabral said:

> In order to play completely the part that falls to it in the national liberation struggle, the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie must be capable of committing *suicide* as a class, to be restored to life in the condition of a revolutionary worker completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which he belongs (Munck 1986:109).

Cabral thus advised the petty bourgeoisie the re-immersion in the national culture or a re-Africanization process. For Cabral, the seeds of resistance against colonialism and the national liberation struggle are found in the national culture. He said:

Whatever the conditions of subjection of a people to foreign domination and the influence of economic, political and social factors in the exercise of this domination, it is generally within the cultural factor that we find the germ of challenge which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement (Munck 1986:110).

According to Debray, the foremost theorist of the Latin American revolution, Marxism's underdeveloped theoretical understanding of the nation stems from the tendency to overemphasise the universal at the expense of the particular. He underscored the importance of recognizing the dialectical relationship between these two levels. If socialist struggles are to endure within political consciousness, proletarian internationalism must come to terms with the specificity of the particular. To emphasise this point, Debray said, "socialist victories have always been linked in one way or another to movements of national liberation" (Purvis 1999:229).

The emergence of the JC school must be understood as an intellectual fellowship of two thinkers, Gunadasa Amarasekera, the Sinhala literati and Nalin de Silva, the professor of mathematics. The first gathering of the individuals that made up this school was held at Piyasena Dissanayake's house in the early part of 1987. This meeting was attended by de Silva accompanied by Gevindu Cumaratunga, a student activist at the time, G.I.D. Dharmasekera with an associate known as Kuliyapitiye Prananda, and Ven. Maduluvawe Sobitha. Amarasekera did not participate in this and subsequent meetings of this group as he was working in the Middle East during this time. Individuals such as Ranga Wickramasinghe, a son of Martin Wickramasinghe, Dharmadasa Wanniarachchi and H. A. Susil Perera were also involved in the activities of the group. After several rounds of such meetings, the publication of a magazine known as *Kalaya* (*Time*) was started towards the latter part of 1987. de Silva functioned as the chief editor of the magazine. Amarasekera contributed

articles on a regular basis to this journal from abroad. *Kalaya* became a discursive space for like-minded individuals to exchange ideas and was instrumental in developing the ideology of the school.

The *Divaina* Sunday newspaper, founded in 1982, functioned as a more popular discursive space for the JC in its formative stages. Some of the notable contributors were, Gunadasa Amarasekera, Nalin de Silva, Suriya Gunasekera, Kuliyapitiye Prananda, and G.I.D. Dharmasekera (Dewasiri 2018:43,44). The student group named *Gaveshakayo* (*Explorers*), mainly made up of students from the Science Faculty at the University of Colombo, led by de Silva, also played a significant role in disseminating the JC ideas among university students and mobilizing them along such lines in the 1980s (Amarasuriya 2020:23).

By the time *Arunalunuseren Arunodayata* (*Towards Dawn*) was published in mid-1991, the JC school known as the *Chinthana Parshadaya,* had become firmly established with a well-formed nationalist ideology. During this time, the JC had a minor following among the youth, some of whom were recent breakaways of the JVP. Notable among them is Champika Ranawaka, who is now a well-known nationalist politician. *Chinthana Parshadaya* never took the form of a formal centralized organization. It always had an informal and fluid nature to it, like the informal, decentralised and fluid organizational style characteristic of new social movements (Buechler 1995:446).

Arunalunuseren Arunodayata can be seen as a total negation of the line of reasoning the author, Amarasekera, developed since his *Abuddassa Yugayak*. The new thinking reflects somewhat the postcolonial theorizations of nationalism in South Asia. Partha Chatterjee argued that it was in the cultural domain, "uncontaminated" by the colonial gaze, that Indian nationalism radically imagined an alternative to colonialism, the well-spring of resistance to

colonialism. According to Chatterjee, it was in the cultural sphere where a structure of feeling was cultivated that the East was morally and spiritually superior to the West which legitimised independent nationhood (1986). Like the Brazilian right-wing nationalists who branded Marxism as an alien influence in 1964 (Schwarz 1992:236) as well as figures like Ali Shariati in Iran, who saw Marxism as ultimately a Western import that is antithetical to the anti-colonial struggle (Goonewardena 2020:9), Amarasekera, is labouring in the book to show the incompatibility between Sinhala nationalism and Marxism (1991:74-83,90,143,144).

This development may be due to the influence of de Silva who was sceptical about "intoxicating" Western discourses as far back in 1986 (in *Mage Lokaya*) and who wrote a review about *Ganaduru Madiyama Dakinemi Arunalu* to *Kalaya,* questioning the cohabitation with Marxism (1988). The fall of international communism and left politics in Sri Lanka as well as the horror of the recently suppressed second JVP uprising, a political party that identifies with Marxism, may have had an impact on his dissociation with Marxism. The break-up with Marxism gave the JC school the "uncontaminated" indigenous image it was seeking.

The emphasis in the book is to reject imitation (i.e., Western knowledge) and to look at things from "our own eyes", meaning the Sinhala-Buddhist cultural perspective (Amarasekera 1991:156). Again, we confront hegemonic constructs of "ourness" and "Sinhala Buddhists" and so on which mystify relations of power and gloss over complexity in social formations. They are presented as extra-discursive objective and monolithic structures, as things awaiting to be discovered. According to Dewasiri, the power of nationalism as an ideology lies in its ability to de-historicise and naturalize (2000:33). Moreover, as with the earlier formulations of the school, the above notions are highly essentialist and static.

In *Arunalunuseren Arunodayata*, Amarasekera attempts to show a non-Marxist Sinhalese Buddhist form of socialism as an alternative to neo-liberal capitalism. The author sketches the contours of an alternative economy. Amarasekera's alternative economy is modelled on the feudal village-based peasant agriculture (1991:165-177). For Amarasekera, this is an economic and social order that encourages humanism, collectivism and minimalism and discourages the development of desires. This is presented as the future path for Sri Lanka.

Romanticization of the Sinhala village in contrast to the "corrupt", "oppressive" and "demonic" city is a main feature of Amarasekera's thinking. His retrospective romanticism may be due to the influence of Martin Wickramasinghe, who idealized rural Sinhala life. This aspect is evident in Amarasekera's fiction such as, *Palu Welle* (*The Lonely Shore*) (1998b) and *Asatya Katavak* (*A False Story*) (1994). In his imagination, the Sinhala village is made up of lush-green paddy fields, forests, and Buddhist stupas, where there still exist the remnants of "Sinhalaness", characterized by the collectivist and minimalist life. Amarasekera says (2003):

> It (modernity) has been imposed on us and as such it is emotionally and spiritually an alien world for us Asians. Emotionally and spiritually, we live in our traditional world.

Amarasekera's picturesque, tranquil, and collectivist Sinhala village reflects the perspective of the rural elite such as, the landowners. This is not the world of the oppressed and exploited villager. Such hegemonic constructs obscure structures of power and in turn reproduce them. Moreover, the Sinhala village found in Amarasekera's writings is a social formation that was peculiar to the southern part of Sri Lanka more than a century ago. As such, it cannot be taken as the normative Sinhala village, if there is any such thing. Features such as, collectivism, mutual help, selflessness, and minimalism, which the author articulates as essential elements of Sinhalaness are however commonly found structural features in many pre-capitalist agrarian social

formations (Uyangoda 2021c:127,128). According to academic historians, great social complexity is also associated with the history of the Sinhalese. The historic cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa are examples for complex urban and cosmopolitan social spaces (de Silva 1981:3-78). Hence, the so-called Sinhala society is fissured, dynamic, and complex. The portrayal of this social formation throughout history as a harmonious Buddhist collectivist village is an ideological practice of Sinhala middle-class intellectuals aimed at constructing a hegemonic notion of a community – a community of "deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 2006:15,16).

Nalin de Silva develops the initial sketches of Amarasekera on the Tamil national question in his book *Prabhakaran, Ohuge Seeyala, Bappala Ha Massinala* (2000) (*Prabhakaran, his grandfathers, uncles, and brothers-in-law*) published for the first time in 1995. He reaffirms Amarasekera's notion in *Ganaduru Madiyama Dakinemi Arunalu* that the identity of Sri Lanka is essentially the identity of Sinhala Buddhism and argues that all other ethnic groups on the island should accept the Sinhala Buddhist hegemony in Sri Lanka. de Silva justifies the Sinhala Buddhist hegemony on the following counts: Sinhalese constitute 75 per cent of the population, Sinhalese have a longer history (2000 years and therefore the legitimate owners of the island) than other ethnicities on the island, and the civilization of Sri Lanka is entirely the creation of the Sinhalese (2000)**.**

de Silva introduces a novel conceptualization of the Sinhala identity in his booklet, *Nidahase Pahan Tamba: Sinhala Bauddha Rajyaya Pilibanda Hadinweemak* (*The Lamp of Freedom: An Introduction to the Sinhala Buddhist State*) (1998) with the intention of giving the Sinhalese indigenous roots in the island. The traditional Sinhala nationalist discourse viewed Sinhalese as *Aryan* migrants from north India. de Silva constructs the ethnogenesis of the Sinhalese in terms of interbreeding that took place between the *Aryan* as well as non-*Aryan* tribes (but not

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Tamils) that came to Sri Lanka and the indigenous tribes of Sri Lanka such as *Yaksha*, *Naga* and *Deva* (1998:5,6). He associates the formation of the Sinhala nation during the *Hela* phase under the reign of King Pandukabhaya (437 BC – 367 BC) (Dewasiri: 2017:19).

In the third preface to the *Prabhakaran, Ohuge Seeyala, Bappala Ha Massinala* (2000), de Silva argues that there are no Tamil grievances in Sri Lanka but only aspirations, aspirations to deny the rightful place of the Sinhalese on the island. The Tamil question is explained in the book as the unreasonable unwillingness of Tamils to accept the Sinhala Buddhist hegemony in Sri Lanka. de Silva goes on to associate the Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka with Western cultural imperialism. The author portrays Western imperialism as engaged in a project to unmake cultures throughout the world and impose its Judaic-Christian culture in their place. This job in Sri Lanka, according to de Silva, is carried out by Tamil chauvinism, which is under a Christian leadership ever since S.J. Chelvanayagam assumed its leadership. The objective of Western imperialism, argues de Silva, is to unmake the Sinhala Buddhist identity in Sri Lanka by giving the northern and the eastern provinces of the island to Christian Tamil political control (2000). According to the JC, left-wing political parties, Non-Governmental Organizations and civil society organizations concerned with human rights, academics with left and liberal orientations, especially social scientists and historians, and the Christian clergy as well as certain sections of Buddhist monks who sympathise with the political aspirations of oppressed ethnic minorities and advocate devolution of political power are branded as agents of Western cultural imperialism (de Silva 2000:54-56).

Jingoism is a central characteristic of the JC ideology. According to de Silva, challenges to the Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony should be dealt with militarily (2000). Way back in *Anagarika Dharmapala Marxvadida?,* Amarasekera justified violence as a necessary evil of the virtuous

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Buddhist state. de Silva rationalizes the apparent contradiction between *maha karuna* (great compassion) of Buddhism and the jingoism of the JC school with the hero of the Sinhala nationalist imagination, Dutugamunu, the warrior-king who fought the Tamils to defend the Buddhist dispensation on the island (1998:9).

The Westerners use Western science and knowledge to perpetuate their hegemony throughout the world (de Silva 2016:7). However, the project of Western Christian modernity along with its science which is based on individualism, gratification of senses and exploitation of the environment is falling apart. The world is in need of an alternative way of thinking and living (de Silva 2016:5). As argued by de Silva in *Mage Lokaya* (1999), Marxism is part of this Western intellectual edifice, and is an accomplice in the project to impose Western cultural hegemony among non-Western peoples. Thus, Western knowledge cannot be used to liberate from Western hegemony (1999:xii). The alternative knowledge must be produced within the Sinhala Buddhist thought in order to liberate from Western Christian colonialism (2016:5,7). According to de Silva, it is the Sinhala Buddhist knowledge on Tamil chauvinism and terrorism that defeated the Western knowledge on this subject (2016:6).

In the context of the chronic kidney disease (CKD) that is prevalent in the dry zone of Sri Lanka, de Silva and his followers, many of whom are Western trained scientists like him, claim to have produced a spiritual knowledge within a Sinhala Buddhist paradigm on the causes and treatment of CKD. This Sinhala Buddhist knowledge on CKD was produced in two ways. The Buddhist God Natha (the future Buddha) and other Buddhist Gods such as, Vipassaka, revealed this knowledge to the investigators. The other method of accessing this knowledge was through spiritual development (i.e., meditation, etc.). Moreover, it is asserted that the *Sinhala nila wedekama* (a form of traditional Sinhala medicine based on stimulating pressure points in the

body) is successfully used to treat CKD patients. According to de Silva, this is a significant achievement amidst the failure of Western medicine to identify the causes of CKD and successfully treat patients (2016:6,7,209).

de Silva and his followers have come under severe criticism from the scientific establishment in the country. de Silva's discourses spanning over decades and his epistemology of creative relativism are held responsible for laying the philosophical foundation for intellectual anarchy in the country where truth cannot be distinguished from falsehood and science from myth. Thus, de Silva is considered as the father and the wellspring of mythology in the country by these sections (Amarasinghe, Perera and Harischandra 2021). It is one of his faithful disciples, Channa Jayasumana, a Professor of Medicine and the State Minister of Production, Supply and Regulation of Pharmaceuticals, who was the main sponsor of *Dhammika paniya*, a herbal syrup made to cure Covid–19 patients by a carpenter named Dhammika who was divinely inspired by Goddess Kali.

de Silva argues that traditional knowledge systems in the island such as, medicine, agriculture, carpentry, irrigation, and philosophy were developed within the Sinhala Buddhist thought. Moreover, this Sinhala Buddhist knowledge could be further developed in the future with the assistance of Buddhist Gods and other supernatural beings such as, *bambhun* and *nagas*. This knowledge will enable humans and other beings to live in harmony with the environment and ultimately guide them to realize *nirvana*. As king Asoka introduced *Asokan* Buddhist thought to Asia some two thousand three hundred years ago, Mahinda Rajapaksa should introduce this Sinhala Buddhist thought to the world which is in crisis due to Western Christian modernity and thereby make Sri Lanka not only the wonder of Asia but of the world (de Silva 2016:134,135,208,209).

Everything is constituted in discourse (Daly 1999:61-84). "It is in the concept of hegemony that those exigencies which are national in character are knotted together" (Gramsci 1971:241). The above discussed texts were ideological practices aimed at constructing a hegemonic notion of the nation. This nation is an imagined community (Anderson 2006). The function of texts was the interpellation of individuals as Sinhala Buddhist subjects (Althusser 1971:170). Hence, the critical reader comes across many notions such as, Sinhala Buddhists, Sinhala Buddhist consciousness, and so on as extra-discursive, natural, and ahistorical. The meaning of the term Sinhalese as it is used today only took form in the 19th century, mainly due to the Orientalist scholarship (Gunawardana 1990). Before the 19th century, it had different connotations.

The JC texts omit (Huckin 1997) the social cleavages in the purported community of Sinhalese. Yet, this social formation, as any other, is structured within relations of power. There were two armed uprisings by the Sinhala-speaking youth of oppressed class and caste backgrounds that were brutally suppressed by Sinhala dominated governments. Nevertheless, in these texts, we come across a community of 'deep horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 2006:15,16). Ideology is an imaginary relationship of individuals to their real condition of existence (Althusser 1971:162).

4.2. Making Sense of *Jathika Chinthanaya* and Its Impact

Nilsen defines social movements in the following manner: "the organization of multiple forms of materially grounded and locally generated skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organized by (would-be) hegemonic actors, and against the hegemonic projects articulated by other such actors to change or maintain a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities and the social formation in which it inheres in part or in

whole" (2009: 132). Moreover, he makes a distinction between social movements from above and social movement from below. Thus, Nilsen defies social movements from above as "the organization of multiple forms of skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organized by dominant social groups, which aim at the maintenance or modification of a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities in ways that reproduce and/or extend the power of those groups and its hegemonic position within a given social formation" (2009:115). Moreover, the movements from above would draw on the directive position of the dominant social groups in economic organization, differential access to the state, and leading position in moulding everyday routines and common sense to reproduce and expand their hegemony. The strategies they employ could be either defensive or offensive in response to social movements from below (2009:115-124).

Nilsen describes the concept of organic crisis "as a complex field of force where defensive and offensive forms of movement activity flourish as opposing social forces seek to win hegemony over the imminent changes in the social organization of needs and capacities" (2009:133). What animates this historical process of structuration is agency of the opposing social forces and not any "objective historical laws." (Nilsen 2009:117)

In the age of imperialism, Lenin said the primary contradiction is between imperialism, the core group of national states in the centre and the large mass of oppressed peoples in the periphery in the world capitalist system (Nimni 1991:82,83; McLellan 1979:95-98). Many places in Asia, Africa and Latin America had an encounter with colonialism and neo-colonial relations persisted following formal independence. Hence, politico-social movement in these regions had to address the colonial legacy as well as the neo-colonial relations that followed formal political independence. Therefore, one can

observe a coupling of nationalism and Marxism in many liberation movements in the global South in the middle of the 20th century. In this context, the Chinese revolution stands out as a textbook example of coupling class and nation.

In 1938 Mao wrote how "Chinese communists must…combine patriotism with internationalism" (Munck 1986:104). Liu Shao-ch'i reported to the seventh congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1945 that:

> The Thought of Mao Tse-tung is a further development of Marxism in the national-democratic revolution in the colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal countries of the present epoch. It is an admirable model of the *nationalization of Marxism*…(emphasis added) (Munck 1986:104).

The national factor played a major role in the success of the Chinese revolution. The struggle for national independence was crucial for the success of the socialist revolution in China. Also, the decisive break with Moscow and the pursuit of an independent strategy which was not tied to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union – to a large part the result of Chinese nationalism- ensured the success of the revolution.

Mao showed the path of "nationalized Marxism" to the colonized peoples in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon in Africa; Che Guevara and Regis Debray in Latin America became some of the leading spokesmen of this brand of Marxism that came to be also known as Third Wordism. The hallmark of this brand of Marxism was the synthesis between Marxism and nationalism. Fanon, however, was more cautious with nationalism. He said, "we have switched from nationalism to ultranationalism, chauvinism, and racism…If nationalism is not explained, enriched, and deepened, if it does not very quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into humanism, then it leads to a dead end (2004:103,144).

As discussed above, Amarasekera who was influenced by Marxism, attempted this synthesis between nationalism and Marxism at the formative stages of the JC. He underscored the importance of the nation in addition to the class, and the national liberation struggle in addition to the class struggle, in post-colonial societies (2016:72,73). Amarasekera was a regular contributor to the *Aththa* (*Truth*) newspaper of the CP and the *Samajawadaya* (*Socialism*) journal of the LSSP, the pioneer Marxist-Trotskyist party in Sri Lanka (Dewasiri 2017:9). Once he wrote a poem eulogising the leader of the LSSP, N. M. Perera, at the time of his death as a great sage and admonishing the masses to seek his forgiveness at his feet for not heeding his call (Bandara 2020). However, due to a host of factors such as, the fall of international communism, decline of left-wing politics in Sri Lanka, the intensification of Tamil militancy in the north, and the intellectual influence of Nalin de Silva, the tenuous association between the radical intellectual elements of the Sinhala establishment and Marxism, which now came to be perceived as a Western discourse, came to an end in favour of an "indigenous" perspective. Thus, over the course, the JC as well as the Sinhala national movement it ideologically led, unequivocally took the spirit and form of a movement from above.

According to the orthodox Marxist perspective, the JC reflects the class interests of the economically marginalised middle-level Sinhala businessmen of the post-1977 period and their semi-feudal moral concerns. In 1977, the Sri Lankan economy was liberalized, one of the first in South Asia. Hence, the country witnessed the encroachment of global capital and its consumerist culture on a massive scale, fundamentally transforming the structure of society.

Gunasinghe describes the period from 1956 to 1977 as a state-regulated economy.

Some of the distinguishing features of this economic system, according to him were the rise of a stratum of Sinhala entrepreneurs to the status of industrialists with state patronage, protection of middle-level Sinhala entrepreneurs who engaged in light industrial production for the domestic market, and extensive job creation for predominantly Sinhalese through the expansion of the public sector (1984:202).

The introduction of the Open Economic Policy in 1977 had a disastrous impact on the middle-level Sinhala entrepreneurs who engaged in light industrial production, who until that time were pampered with many privileges (i.e., easy access to bank loans, quotas, permits, licenses) and cushioned from international competition through a closed economy by successive Sinhala dominated governments (Gunasinghe 1984:197-214). With the removal of import controls under the Open Economic Policy, every conceivable consumer item under the sun was imported from abroad thus effectively denying the hitherto captured domestic market for the middle-level Sinhala entrepreneurs.

The post-1977 period also challenged and undermined the hitherto semi-feudal normative order prevalent in Sri Lanka with an ideology of consumerism. This process is documented by Hettige (2000:173):

> The decline of local arts under the influence of intruding Western mass media, alleged decline of human bonds under the growing influence of naked materialism, deterioration of sexual morals under the influence of tourism and overseas travel by female workers and the spread of Western life styles and behaviour patterns which allegedly undermine or devalue native (*deshiya*) ways of life (i.e. widespread consumption of alcohol, abuse of drugs, gambling, production and sale of Western style comic, cartoon and semi-pornographic material, disrespect for elders and parents, spread of Western music, films and fashion, growing demand for imported consumer goods, etc.).

The post-1977 period undermined the hitherto hegemonic position enjoyed by the elitist Sinhala vernacular literati and intelligentsia of rural middle-class origins. Like the middle-level Sinhala businessmen, the above social group was nurtured and protected by successive Sinhala dominated governments, especially since 1956. According to Uyangoda, members of this intellectual strata were Sinhala-English bilinguals and university educated. They came from the rural petty bourgeoise and entered middle-class urban occupations, working as university lecturers, civil servants, graduate teachers, and journalists (2021d:97,98). The post-1977 challenge came in the form of a consumerist popular culture, the impact of which became overwhelming with the introduction of the television in the early 1980s. Violating the hitherto existing social contract, the right-wing government of 1977 declined to patronise the elitist Sinhala vernacular literati and intelligentsia. Its laissez-faire ideology opened the doors of the ideological state apparatus to more populist sections of the culture industry (Uyangoda 2021d:101,102).

According to the orthodox Marxist view, the JC is a reaction to the economic, social, and cultural changes introduced in the late 1970s in Sri Lanka. Its ideology of isolationism and paternalistic Sinhala Buddhist domination, articulated by the now marginalized vernacular Sinhala literati and intelligentsia, reflects the class interests of the economically marginalised middle-level Sinhala businessmen of the post-1977 period and their semi-feudal moral concerns. Gunasinghe must have had in his mind these particular social layers when he interpreted the JC in the following manner (1996:231):

> The so called 'national thinking' as expressed by the dentist and the mathematician earlier referred to, is merely a cry of agony by certain sections of the rural petty bourgeoisie who experienced upward social mobility during the 1956-1977 period, but who also felt that the new elements of the bourgeoisie

were acquiring greater amounts of wealth beyond even their dreams.

The Marxist scholar, Kumari Jayawardena, locates Sinhala nationalist ideology in a much wider socio-economic context which involves elements of Sinhala workers, peasants, students and youth, and the bourgeoisie (of large merchants, entrepreneurs, and professionals). Moreover, she goes on to underscore the hegemonic nature of Sinhala nationalism by emphasising that it covered all classes among the Sinhala Buddhists and all major political parties in the south (2003:101,104,105).

According to Anderson, nationalism is the most universally legitimate political phenomenon in contemporary times. The nation is perceived by Anderson as an imagined community (2006:15,16):

> Imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion [and] a community, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, it is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings.

The JC cannot be reduced to an epiphenomenon of the transformations that took place in the economic structure in the late 1970s in Sri Lanka. No doubt, it was contributory for the emergence of this intellectual movement, but not the determining factor. Purvis argues that "failings of Marxists in dealing effectively with the national question have stemmed, at least in part, from unwillingness to grant an adequate measure of autonomy to social relations of identity irreducible to class or economic relations. In so far as class occupies a central place in Marxist theory, this centrality must not impede the attempt to understand the ways in which other social identities such as gender, nation and race are articulated *with* class: the point

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being to highlight the specificity of other social relations which cut across those of class…" (emphasis added) (1999:235,236).

There are no immutable truths or objectivities at the level of economy or anywhere else. Nothing can be identified in a positivistic manner independent of the context or systems of belief (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). "No causal theory about the efficacy of one element over another is necessary…historical movement is explained not by laws of motion of History but by the organic link *between* base and superstructure" (Laclau and Mouffe: 1987:91). Economy is not separate from politics and ideology but is articulated with these phenomena in relational and non-causal terms (Daly 1999:69). Laclau and Mouffe characterize this as radical relationalism (1987:91).

The JC characterizes the third phase of the Sinhala national movement. First phase is associated with pioneering figures of the Buddhist revival such as, Dharmapala, in the first two decades of 1900s while the second phase is associated with the nationalist mobilization that took place in the 1950s (Uyangoda 2021d:91). The JC emerged at a juncture when the Sinhala establishment was in an existential crisis with the rising militant Tamil nationalism which aimed to establish a separate Tamil state in the northern and eastern parts of the island. The Sri Lankan state came under physical attack by numerous Tamil militant groups. Moreover, the Sinhala establishment came under moral attack, especially after the Black July, the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom, as well as intellectual attack from domestic and international quarters. There is a large corpus of scholarly works that subject Sinhala nationalism to critical inquiry (Dewasiri 2018:41).

The state's inability to provide an official militant nationalist ideology to counter the above situation undermined the hegemonic relationship it maintained with the Sinhala society

(Uyangoda 2021d:100). In this context, the JC rose to the occasion. The school provided the much-needed intellectual stimulus to Sinhala nationalism which was under heavy attack from all quarters and constructed a counter discourse which became highly attractive to young Sinhala intelligentsia (Dewasiri 2018:41,42). Hence, the JC also needs to be understood in the context of physical, moral, and intellectual attack on the Sinhala imagined community which the JC to a large part constituted through its discourses.

Social movements from above use offensive as well as defensive strategies. Offensive strategies are used with the objective of eliminating whatever concessions that movements from below have gained thus far (Nilsen 2009:122) "Offensive strategies thus take aim at either attainment of hegemony for new dominant social groups, or the extension or restoration of the power of extent dominant social groups, and tend to be deployed at conjunctures where an extant social formation – in whole or in part – enters into crisis and starts to show signs of breakdown" (Nilsen 2009:122). The deployment of defensive strategies take place in response to significant challenges from social movements from below. These strategies, which are not mutually exclusive, can be accommodative or repressive in character (Nilsen 2009:121).

The Sinhala establishment was in ideological disarray in the mid-1990s. While the liberal oriented sections of the government led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga adopted a defensive strategy of carrot and stick in addressing the Tamil militant movement, the more conservative forces in the state and civil society were ideologically led by the JC for an offensive strategy. The political opportunity opened for the JC when the People's Alliance (PA) government proposed a political reforms package to address the long-standing Tamil grievances in the mid-1990s. It is in this context that de Silva's book *Prabhakaran, Ohuge*

Seeyala, Bappala Ha Massinala became very popular in the south (Dewasiri 2018:51). During this time, the school laid the ideological foundation to a host of extreme Sinhala nationalist formations such as, the National Movement Against Terrorism, the *Sinhala Veera Vidahana*, the *Jathika Sangha Sabhawa,* the *Sihala Urumaya,* the *Eksat Sinhala Maha Sabhawa,* the *Sinhalaye Maha Sammatha Bhooomiputra Pakshaya* and most importantly the National Joint Committee which spearhead the anti-reforms campaign. Even though these extremist political outfits do not have much electoral success, their presence tend to push the mainstream Sinhala political parties into taking hard-line positions during times of political reforms and as a result attempts at political reforms are defeated. Moreover, overtime Sinhala extremist ideas tend to become part of the thinking of mainstream Sinhala political parties. For example, Robarts discusses how the appearance of the *Sihala Urumaya* (SU) forced the PA and the United National Party (UNP) to shift its rhetoric to hard-line right. Moreover, he goes on to claim that the above two major parties in the south as well as the Marxist JVP adopted ideas espoused by the SU (Robarts 2001:17,18). Moreover, most Sinhala transnational political formations such as, the Sri Lanka United National Association of Canada (SLUNA), Sri Lanka Defence Alliance in USA, Society for Peace, Unity and Human Rights for Sri Lanka (SPUR) in Australia were ideologically inspired by the JC. The political reforms initiative of the PA government which aimed to address the ethnic conflict in the country was thwarted by the nationalist mobilization spearheaded by these organizations.

The peace process, which envisaged a political solution to the Tamil national question, initiated by the United National Front (UNF) government in 2002 provided the explosive political opportunity structure for the triumph of Sinhala nationalism in 2005. Even though the ceasefire agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers

of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) improved macro-economic indicators, the peace dividend did not reach the poor and low-income groups. Moreover, reduction in government subsidies for staple goods created favourable conditions for nationalist political mobilization (International Crisis Group 2007:19). The JC played the key role in framing the ceasefire agreement with the LTTE and other aspects of the peace process as a great betrayal of the Sinhala nation and its security forces. The popular Sinhala nationalist media, especially the *Divaina* newspaper, provided the discursive space for the ideologues of the JC. Their discourses reverberated in the Sinhala society and led to mass apprehension about the peace process in the south of the island.

The JC in the late 1990s, especially Amarasekera, worked closely with the JVP to win over its carders to the Sinhala nationalist cause (Dewasiri 2018:51). Amarasekera always had faith in the social base of the JVP, the rural educated youth, as a decisive factor that would change the course of the country. He once characterized these youth of the JVP in one of his short stories titled, *Amatige Asweema* (*Quitting of the Minister*) (2012), as an army sent by God Vishnu, the guardian of the Sinhala nation and Buddhism in Sri Lanka, to re-establish the righteous order. The efforts of Amarasekera and the JC activists pushed the JVP towards a Sinhala nationalist position and a close political association between Amarasekera and Wimal Weerawansa, the public face of the JVP in the late 1990s, blossomed.

The *Deshahithaishee Jathika Vyaparaya* or the Patriotic National Movement (PNM) was a key mobilizing structure that ensured the electoral victory of Sinhala nationalism in 2005. It was officially established in 2003 but the movement was started a year earlier as a series of public rallies that criticized the ceasefire agreement and the peace process (International Crisis Group 2007:19). PNM was ideologically guided by Amarasekera who

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functioned as the president of the movement while the JVP and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) constituted the two main political parties of the movement. The PNM laid the foundation for the formation of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) that brought together the SLFP and the JVP and several smaller parties that came to power in April 2004 general elections (International Crisis Group 2007:19).

The Sinhala nationalist hegemonic project which began in the mid-1980s as the JC, blossomed in 2005 with the victory of Mahinda Rajapaksa as the President of Sri Lanka. Since its inception in mid-1980s, the JC singlehandedly gave ideological leadership to the above discussed Sinhala nationalist mobilization which culminated in victory in 2005 presidential election. According to Dewasiri, the JC was the major intellectual stimulus of the emerging Sinhala Buddhist nationalist political front in the early 2000s. Moreover, de Silva and Amarasekera were the two major intellectual figures who hitched Sinhala Buddhist nationalism to the popular political force in the south that brought to power the UPFA under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa and thereafter continued to provide intellectual and moral justification to the regime as the saviour of the Sinhala nation (Dewasiri 2018:52,53).

In the cover story of *Muragala* (*Guard stone*) (2005), the journal of the PNM, the 2005 presidential election is characterized as a battle between national and anti-national forces. It declares that the *Mahinda Chinthana* (the election manifesto of Mahinda Rajapaksa) and the *Jathika Chinthanaya* are so compatible like "a bark to the tree and the tree to the bark." Moreover, the commentary praises the unequivocal rejection of Tamil separatist concepts such as, the traditional homeland and the self-determination right in the *Mahinda Chinthana*. Further, it commends the manifesto for rejecting the market economic policies in favour of a national economy based on local production (*Muragala* 2005).

The ascendency to power of Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005 firmly re-established the hitherto tenuous hegemonic relationship that existed between the ruling elite and the Sinhala society. According to keen observers, Mahinda Rajapaksa regime was qualitatively different from previous ones, "which had been forced to adopt highly nationalist stances by the dynamics of party politics or in response to mobilization by non-party forces such as Buddhist monks. The discourse and logic of Sinhala nationalism are central to Rajapaksa's governance and conduct of the war" (International Crisis Group 2007:21). The peace process initiated by the UNF government gradually withered away while the new regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa relaunched a ferocious military campaign which ultimately annihilated the LTTE in May 2009 as well as many Tamil civilians during the final stages of the war. Addressing the issue of accountability for these civilian deaths and disappearances remains a major challenge faced by post-war Sri Lankan governments.

4.3. The Post-war Sinhala Nationalist Imagination

In the post war period, one of the biggest challenges the Sinhala ruling elite faced was to maintain its hegemonic hold over the Sinhala society. Nilsen defies social movements from above as "the organization of multiple forms of skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organized by dominant social groups, which aim at the maintenance or modification of a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities in ways that reproduce and/or extend the power of those groups and its hegemonic position within a given social formation" (2009:115). In this struggle, the movements from above would draw on the directive position of the dominant social groups in economic organization, differential access to the state, and leading position in moulding everyday routines and common sense to reproduce and expand

their hegemony. The Sinhala national movement, as a movement from above, functioned to reproduce and extend the hegemonic position of the Sinhala ruling elite within the society.

The defeat of the LTTE resulted in an existential crisis for Sinhala nationalism and the need for a new enemy for its survival. It is in this context that we observe a new wave of militant Sinhala nationalism that attacked minority ethnic and religious communities through mob violence. The ruling Sinhala elite patronised this project as it ensured their hegemonic leadership in the Sinhala society.

Most of the leaders and cadre of these new militant outfits have their roots in the *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU) or the National pure-Sinhala Heritage Party politics. The crises in political parties such as, the JHU and to a lesser extent the JVP, which traditionally mobilized politically oriented monks flushed out a large contingent of radical monks from these organizations and made them available for new enterprising political projects (Dewasiri 2016:36,37).

The JHU, a political party of Buddhist monks, formed in March 2004 is a significant development in Sinhala nationalist politics. Its roots are with the *Sihala Urumaya* (SU) or the Sinhala Heritage party, formed in 2000. The JHU is the culmination of the *Vidyalankara* school of thought, which legitimised and promoted the active participation of Buddhist monks in politics.

Anagarika Dharmapala, a lead figure in the Buddhist revival in the mid-19th century, was a key ingredient in the making of political Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the mid-20th century. According to Seneviratne, Dharmapala's vision was twofold, first, economic and pragmatic; and second, political and ideological and different groups appropriated and combined these

two elements differently that led to fateful consequences in Sri Lanka (1999:36). The monks associated with the *Vidyodaya Pirivena*[26] pursued Dharmapala's vision of rural development while the monks at the *Vidyalankara Pirivena* pursued Dharmapala ideal of a Sinhala Buddhist hegemony (Seneviratne 1999:56-188).

Like Ali Shariati who created *Alavid* Shiism or the so-called political Islam in Iran, which is based on action, resistance, and martyrdom (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2016:25), Ven. Walpola Rahula, the foremost theoretician of the *Vidyalankara Pirivena,* laid the foundations of political Buddhism in Sri Lanka in mid-20th century. The book Ven. Rahula authored, *The Heritage of the Bhikku*[27] (1946), is a milestone in the development of political Buddhism in Sri Lanka. *The Heritage of the Bhikku* is a justification of and charter for monks to engage in politics. It legitimised and promoted the active participation of Buddhist monks in politics, a *bhikku* politics informed by Dharmapala's vision of a Sinhala Buddhist hegemony (Seneviratne 1999:137).

The *Vidyalankara* line of thinking culminated with the formation of the JHU. The JHU was heavily influenced by the thinking of the JC. Some of the founding members of the party were once close associates of the JC school. Following the JC ideological line, the JHU rejected Marxism outright as an alien ideology and advocated an indigenous path based on the civilizational consciousness of the island. Their ideal was conceptualized as the *Dharma Rajya* (Righteous State), the Buddha's teachings on statecraft. Buddhist statecraft is based on the *dasarajadharma* (the ten virtuous deeds of the righteous king) which consists of charity, morality, liberality, honesty, mildness, religious practice, non-anger, non-violence, patience,

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[26] Institution of higher learning for Buddhist monks.
[27] Buddhist monk.

and non-offensiveness The above is thought to be the underlying public policy of ancient Buddhist politics of the island (Deegalle 2004:88,94,100). Like the *Hindutva* ideology, which has a predominantly urban and middle-class social base (Chopra 2006:194), the JHU in general is an urban and middle-class political phenomenon. The party was a member of the ruling UPFA and held influential posts in the government, including a cabinet portfolio.

According to Yuval-Davis, the mythic notion of shared blood or genes generates the most exclusive vision of nation (1997:26-38). One of the distinguishing features of the newly emerged Sinhala nationalist groups in the post-war context is the more biological articulation of the nation and therefore its Fascist orientation. The *Sinha Le* or the pure Sinhala blood movement embodies this spirit of the times.

The main target of these post-war Sinhala nationalist groups was the Sri Lankan Muslim community and their business interests (Zuhair 2016). Apart from the Muslim community, their violence was unleased at evangelical Christian sects. Ven. Gangodawila Soma, an unconventional and very popular Buddhist monk- preacher, played a key role in the late 1990s in depicting Muslims and evangelical Christians as existential enemies of Sinhala Buddhists (T. Gunasekara n.d:409,410) and was a major inspiration for the new wave Sinhala nationalist groups (Dewasiri 2016:20).

The new wave of Sinhala nationalism is very active in the social media and to a large extent their framing practices as well as mobilization take place in social media. Their organizations are very informal and fluid. In this sense, the new wave of Sinhala nationalism resembles very much the organizational forms of new social movements (Buechler 1995:459). The following vignette of a Sinhala youth in his early 20s gives a flavour of the intensity of the on-line nationalism of the new wave (Ivarsson 2018:11):

There are a lot of postings about the Muslims now. For the Muslim people, religion is their life, they are always with their religion. We are not like that. Someone has said that in the end there will only be Buddhism, all people of other religions will die and only the Buddhists will remain. I like the FB pages on Buddhism; I am always there. A lot of important news is coming from these pages. The things I see and read on Facebook are very important for my life. I believe that within ten years there will be a big fight between Sinhala people and the Muslims. This problem is becoming bigger every day.

The most prominent among the new wave groups is the *Bodhu Bala Sena* (BBS) or the Buddhist Power Force. The organization emerged after a bloodcurdling campaign in cyberspace against the Muslim community. The BBS was founded in 2012 by Ven. Kirama Wimalajothi and Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara who were members of the JHU sometime back and left the party because it was not militant enough in protecting Buddhism. The BBS maintains close links with the 969 movement in Burma which spearheads anti-Muslim violence in that country through the large contingent of Burmese monks who study in Sri Lanka. The leader of the 969 movement, U Wirathu, attended a conference of the BBS in Sri Lanka in September 2014 as the guest of honor (Gravers 2015).

Islamophobia of the BBS as well as other similar new wave groups took a number of forms. They include questioning the practice of *Sharia,* the Islamic law, in Sri Lanka and its recognition in the country's legal codes; lobbying to ban *Halal* certifications and opposition to the consumption of *Halal* foods; protests focused on animal slaughter for human consumption; opposition to Islamic dress codes; and opposition to practices based on Islamic religious norms and duties (Sarjoon, Yusoff, and Hussin 2016:4). The contested ownership over sacred sites is also another issue which fuels Islamophobia of these nationalist groups. Some of these protest action took very dramatic forms as in the case of Ven. Bowatte Indaratana who committed suicide in May 2013 as a protest against cattle laughter by self-

immolation in front of the temple of the sacred tooth relic in Kandy, a place of great religious significance for Buddhists (Stewart 2014:255).

The above Islamophobia also took the form of physical violence against Muslims and their places of worship. Interestingly, Muslim owned commercial establishments were also attacked and Sinhalese were urged to boycott them (Sarjoon et al. 2016:4, Stewart 2014:247). According to Jayaraj, the primary objective of rioters was to destroy or undermine the economic power of the Muslims. Hence, Muslim owned places of businesses, shops, houses, and vehicles were attacked (n.d:259). Such attacks against Muslim commercial interests need to be understood in relation to the program of the BBS. One of the 12 foundational goals of the organization is "the protection and building of Buddhist businesses/entrepreneurships" (Stewart 2014:247). As Jayawardena correctly says, competition in business is a key to understand the ethnic conflict in the country (1984:122).

Melucci emphasises that much collective action in new social movements is nested in networks of submerged groups which from time to time come together for collective action as opposed to collective action determined by formal and centralised organizations (Buechler 1995:446). The new wave of Sinhala nationalism embodies the informal, decentralised and fluid organizational style characteristic of new social movements. This particular organizational structure seems to facilitate their collective action which is primarily geared towards political violence. For example, the BBS instigated anti-Muslim riots in Aluthgama-Beruwela in June 2014. The riots resulted in four getting killed and eighty getting injured. Moreover, 8000 Muslims and 2000 Sinhalese were displaced by the mayhem that took place in south-western Sri Lanka. In this and other instances of collective action of the new wave of Sinhala nationalism, mobs coalesce together from submerged networks which are

mobilized in social media and blend back into the mundane social life after collective action. According to Jayasekera, technology such as mobile internet and SMS messaging have played a key role in directing riots instigated by the BBS (Stewart 2014:257).

There is a correlation between eruptions of anti-Muslim violence and the political opportunity structure (Beck 2008:1568,1569). The new wave of Sinhala nationalist groups emerged under a political regime that unequivocally identified itself with Sinhala nationalism. The then powerful Defence Secretary and the current President of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, attended one of the events of the BBS and praised them for carrying out "nationally important task" and advised the public not to fear or doubt the BBS (Gunasekara n.d:411). Hence, many eyewitness accounts of riots point to the inaction as well as connivance on the part of state security forces (Jayaraj n.d:256-267, Gunasekara n.d:407-413). According to K. Perera (personal communication, 12 February 2021), the military elements of the "deep state" either organised and maintained these militant outfits or coordinated their activities. For example, it came to light that the leader of one such outfit calling itself the Anti-Corruption Brigade, Namal Kumara, who was arrested in connection with anti- Muslim mob violence in Hettipola, Kurunegala in April 2019, is an air force and army deserter and a police informant.

The state patronage is not the sole reason for the presence of the new wave Sinhala nationalist groups. These groups address deep desires in the Sinhala nationalist imagination and therefore generate sympathy and support in the Sinhala society for them. A central theme in the Sinhala nationalist imagination is that non-Sinhala-Buddhists in Sri Lanka misuse and take advantage of the benevolence shown by the Sinhalese. The Sinhala benevolence is perceived as a weakness by non-Sinhala Buddhists with malevolent agendas. Further, this

Sinhala Buddhist benevolence is viewed to be detrimental to the very survival of the Sinhala Buddhists on the island. This state of mind has given rise to a surreptitious desire in Sinhala Buddhists to cross the threshold of this zone of benevolence and sternly address the threat of evil forces of non-Sinhala Buddhists (Dewasiri 2016:28,29). Therefore, the post-war manifestations of extreme Sinhala nationalist groups are not an illegitimate or marginal aspect of hegemonic Sinhala nationalism but part and parcel of it. It is in this context that the Buddhist ecclesiastical hierarchy in Sri Lanka openly endorse organizations such as, BBS. For example, the Chief Prelate of the prestigious *Asgiriya* chapter of the *Siyam nikaya*, Ven. Tibbatuwawe Sumangala, publicly endorsed the BBS by stating that he is "pleased with the aims and aspirations" of the BBS, and they emerged "at a time when Buddhism and the country were facing challenges" (Dewasiri 2016:36). The continued patronage for Sinhala nationalism, in all its shades, by the Sinhala ruling elements is crucial for their hegemonic hold over the society. Nationalism serves as a powerful hegemonic ideology and practice for the Sinhala ruling elite. At a press conference held in January 2021, the leader of the BBS, Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, stated that they would launch a campaign in the Eastern Province shortly to tame the "dog chauvinism"[28] that prevail there and would expect the President to assure the security of the BBS activists (Bodhu Bala Sena 2021).

The post-war President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, quickly morphed into a dictator. Capitalizing on the unprecedented popularity in the Sinhala south over the war victory, Rajapaksa removed the term limits on the office of powerful Executive Presidency through the eighteenth amendment to the constitution in 2010. In the post-war period, he

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[28] The Muslim political power, as there is a high concentration of Muslims in the Eastern Province.

came to embody the Sinhala nation in himself and projected himself as the great patriarch of the nation, a reincarnation of Dutugamunu, the Sinhala warrior-king who vanquished the Tamil king Elara and unified the island, according to the sixth century epic *Mahavamsa*. Rajapaksa came to be publicly addressed as the *maharajano (*great king) and *appachchi* (father).

Another noteworthy development during this time was the formation of a political dynasty made up of Rajapaksa family. According one source, about 75 per cent of government revenue was under the ministries and institutions controlled by Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brothers (International Crisis Group 2007:21).

Sinhala supremacism, authoritarianism, mega corruption, nepotism, and complete disregard of the rule of law came to characterise the post-war Mahinda Rajapaksa governance. These developments further alienated the already battered ethnic and religious minorities as well as a sizeable liberal section in the Sinhala constituency which led to the defeat of Mahinda Rajapaksa, the undisputed political leader of the Sinhala national movement, and the pollical alliance he gave leadership to at the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015.

5. Conclusion: The Return to Power of Sinhala Nationalism

Arbitrary and artificial creation of states under colonialism brought together diverse people under a single state system. Subsequently, the post-colonial states were appropriated by the elites of dominant "ethnic" or "tribal" groups and came to reflect their sectional interests, thus taking the form of ethnic or tribal states. In relation to Uganda, Goldthorpe asserts that government ministers as well as senior civil servants were considered as tribal agents who functioned to safeguard tribal interests in matters of appointments, distribution of development projects, and social services (1984:255). Fanon further illuminates this peculiar post-colonial condition in the following manner (2004:126):

> It is a veritable ethnic group which has transformed itself into a party. This party which readily proclaims itself national, which claims to speak in the name of the people as a whole, secretly and sometimes openly sets up a genuine ethnic dictatorship. We are no longer witness to a bourgeois dictatorship but to a tribal one. The ministers, private secretaries, ambassadors and prefects are chosen from the leader's ethnic group, sometimes even directly from his family.

5.1. The Civilizational State

Sabyathva Rajya Kara (*Towards the Civilizational State*) was authored by Gunadasa Amarasekera and first published in September 2016, little less than two years after the ouster of the Sinhala nationalist regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa from power in Sri Lanka. The author considers this book as the conclusion of the JC discourse he pioneered with Nalin de Silva in the mid 1980s. The *Sabyathva Rajya Kara* (2016) is an ideological guide to the defeated and disoriented Sinhala national movement. The book articulates an unsettling vision of an ethnic dictatorship.

In *Sabyathva Rajya Kara* (2016), Amarasekera extensively uses Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) and Martin Jacques's *When China Rules the World* (2009) texts to advance his argument. His extensive references to the American right-wing ideologue, Huntington, and the thesis in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996), which ideologically advances the U.S. imperial project, to articulate the JC is ironic as the very same Amarasekera alludes to an American conspiracy for the fall of the Sinhala nationalist regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa (Amarakeerthi 2016:11,12,60,61).

The main argument of the *Sabyathva Rajya Kara* (2016) is that the British colonial legacies of Westminster parliamentary system, party politics, and democracy have failed Sri Lanka miserably and these institutions and practices are leading the country and the nation to extinction. This crisis is due to the incompatibility of these foreign ideas and practices with the civilizational consciousness of the island. Hence, the task is to find an alternative path, a path towards the indigenous civilizational state. The authoritarian Chinese civilizational state provides the stimulus on this journey (Amarasekera 2016).

According to Amarasekera, the parliament has turned into a theatre of the absurd. Party politics has fragmented the Sinhala society and given undue advantage to minority communities at the expense of the majority Sinhalese. The individual oriented Western democracy has taken mutant forms in collectivist civilizations such as, Sri Lanka. The gross abhorrent forms that Western democratic ideals and practices have taken place in Sri Lanka underscore the urgent need to restore the indigenous civilizational state on the island (Amarasekera 2016:37-41). This realization is "the silver lining amidst the dark clouds," the theme of the book.

Amarasekera sees many similarities between the Chinese civilizational state and the

civilizational state that existed in Sri Lanka continuously for 2000 years, from 3ʳᵈ century BC until the fall of the Kandyan kingdom to the English in 1815 (2016:33-36). According to the author, the urgent political task of the moment is to re-establish a contemporary form of the civilizational state that existed on the island. This state is made up of three pillars: a righteous king who rules according to *dasarajha dharma* (ten virtuous deeds), the *sangha* (Buddhist monks) who guide the government and society according to Buddhist teachings, and the public who adhere to Buddhist ethics. Moreover, a welfare economy forms the base of the above state. According to Amarasekera, the civilizational state on the island is essentially Sinhala Buddhist. It is an inclusive state, argues Amarasekera, as long as "outsiders" accept the Sinhala Buddhist hegemony and integrate with this civilization (Amarasekera 2016:22, 24,25,35,46,47,58). In other words, what he proposes is the establishment of a chauvinist dictatorship, a Sinhala Buddhist hegemonic state.

I have discussed in-depth in the previous chapter how extra-discursive constructions such as, the Sinhala Buddhist, form part of the hegemonic ideology that the JC school is instrumental in articulating. Moreover, I also stated that the meaning of the term Sinhalese as it is used today only took shape in the 19ᵗʰ century, mainly due to the Orientalist scholarship (Gunawardana 1990). Before the 19ᵗʰ century, it had different connotations. Somathilaka contests the notion of a continuous Buddhist state that had suzerainty over the entire island until the British colonization. Moreover, he underscores the plural character of the Sri Lankan polity in which diverse ethnic and religious communities peacefully co-existed (Somathilaka 2015:146).

As discussed above, Amarasekera is very dismissive of democracy. He justifies the powerful office of the executive president in Sri Lanka introduced under the 1978 constitution

as a continuation of the Sinhala kingship in the country. According to Amarasekera, the island's civilizational consciousness is oriented towards such an absolutist political authority (2016:44-46). Moreover, he dismisses the thesis on the necessary relationship between democracy and economic development and explicitly justifies political dictatorships. According to the author, it is dictatorship and not democracy that ensure political stability and economic development (Amarasekera 2016:65,66). Further, democracy (i.e., International Criminal Court, R2P, and the Geneva Human Rights Commission) is a weapon of the Westerners to subjugate other countries in the world as well as to dismember Sri Lanka. Hence, it is high time to get out of this trap which is democracy (Amarasekera 2016:69). Amarasekera's text (2016) is nothing but an ideological justification of a chauvinist dictatorship, a Sinhala Buddhist hegemonic state.

Amarasekera's thesis that democratic ideals and practices are alien to the Buddhist tradition is contested. The spirit of intellectual tolerance of diverse views, public debate and discussion of the Buddhist tradition was the greatest contribution to democratic foundations in India. The Buddhist *sangayana* or councils provide the oldest and best examples of resolving doctrinal and disciplinary disputes through public debate and discussions (Sen 2008:6-15). Moreover, according to Uyangoda, the idea of democratic governance embodied in the concept of *janasammathavadee samuhaandukramaya* (democratic confederation) in the Buddhist tradition did not take root in the Sri Lankan soil. Instead, in the feudal social milieu in which the state and the s*anga* cohabited, Buddhism became part of the ideological state apparatus of an authoritarian and absolutist state (Uyangoda 2021c:135 - 137).

5.2. The Sinhala Nationalist Forces Recapture Power

Sinhala nationalism in the Sri Lankan context needs to be understood as a complex blend of ideology, class interests and political power. The competition among Sinhala ruling classes for the acquisition of state resources and political capital has resulted in Sinhala nationalism becoming the ruling ideology and the state ideology of Sri Lanka (Jayasundara-Smits 2011: 74,83). Sinhala nationalism is an ideological and political resource of the Sinhala ruling elites for the mobilization of the society along their sectional interests. Sinhala nationalism is an ideology and practice of the Sinhala ruling elite which ensures their hegemonic leadership in society.

The government which was formed in 2015 after ousting Mahinda Rajapaksa regime pursued a reformist agenda. One of the main promises of the new government was ethnic reconciliation. It enjoyed overwhelming support from minority communities and liberal sections in the Sinhala society for this mandate. The new government took notable measures in this regard. For example, the release of lands to civilians in the north, de-proscribing organizations and individuals in the Tamil diaspora, selective release of political prisoners, implementing the United Nations supported transitional justice measures, and initiating a constitutional reforms process to address the ethnic conflict are noteworthy.

The Sinhala nationalist forces, organized as the *Joint Opposition* under the political leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa, framed the reformist agenda of the government as a great betrayal of the Sinhala nation and the security forces. This discourse was disseminated in the Sinhala society, notably through print media outlets such as, the *Divaina,* and electronic media outlets such as, the *Derana* and the *Hiru*. It had great resonance in the Sinhala south due to the hegemonic character of Sinhala nationalism. The JC school and its offshoots such

as, the *Yuthukama Sanvada Kavaya,* played a key role in this ideological mobilization along ultra-nationalist lines. The infighting between the President who represented the left-of-the-center *Sri Lanka Freedom Party* (SLFP) and the Prime Minister who represented the right-wing *United National Party* (UNP) in the so-called "unity government" made governance ineffective and chaotic while no tangible economic benefits reached the poor and middle-income Sri Lankans. Moreover, the Islamic State-inspired bombings on Christian churches and luxury hotels on Easter Sunday 2019 that killed more than 250 and wounded at least 500 provided the opportunity structure for the Sinhala nationalist forces to swing back into power at the November 2019 presidential elections (Keenan 2019a). Further, the new political party, *Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna* (SLPP), which was formed in 2016 under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa, that possessed wide-spread grassroots-level political network in the Sinhala south, was a key mobilizing structure that ensured the nationalist victory in 2019.

The above discussed interplay between opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996:1-20) resulted in decisive nationalist victories in 2019 and 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections respectively. The presidential candidate of the SLPP, the former military man, the IT professional and the younger brother of Mahinda Rajapaksa secured 52.25 per cent of the vote, which was overwhelmingly a Sinhala vote while his main rival was able to secure 42 per cent of the vote for which contributed the majority of the minority communities and a minority of the Sinhala community (Keenan 2019b). This ethnically polarising voting trend was reinforced at the August 2020 general election where the SLPP led alliance secured what most political analysts predicted impossible, a two-thirds majority in the 225-member parliament for the first time in the history of Sri Lanka under the proportional representation system.

The Sinhala Buddhist character of the regime was underscored in no uncertain terms at the swearing-in ceremonies of the President and the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, which were held at the *Ruwanwalisaya* and the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, respectively, the iconic symbols of Sinhala nationalist imagination. Moreover, the President categorically reminded to the polity at his swearing-in-ceremony as well as during the first-year anniversary in office speech that he was elected to power mainly on the votes of the majority Sinhalese (Ada Derana, 2019 November 18).

5.2.1. The *Viyathmaga*

The *Viyathmaga* (*The Path of the Erudite*) is a remarkable movement that emerged in the above discussed context of Sinhala nationalist mobilization to re-capture political power. Unlike the agrarian Buddhist socialism of the JC, *Viyathmaga* imagination is capitalist, post-industrial, and high-tech. The movement advocated a vision of a technocratic cum military style governance by professionals. The *Viyathmaga* states as its vision, "to mobilize the nascent potential of the professionals, academics and entrepreneurs to effectively influence the moral and material development of Sri Lanka…." (Viyathmaga n.d.). The leadership of the movement is made up of retired high-ranking officials of the security forces, the business elite, and professionals such as, academics, physicians, and software engineers. Even though some of *Viyathmaga's* key financiers and members are non-Sinhalese, it is mostly a Sinhala nationalist political formation. The organization is remarkable because within a very short time span after its formation, it was able to nominate its Chairman, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, a non-politician and a professional, as the candidate of the SLPP and significantly contributed to the outcome of the presidential election in November 2019 which resulted in Gotabaya

Rajapaksa becoming the president of Sri Lanka. According to Godahewa, a key figure of the movement, the *Viyathmaga* was able to tap a social base that no political party has been able to do so thus far. The people who joined the movement were never involved in politics and ones who despised politicians (Business Today, 2020 January).

According to perceptive observers, a new middle-class has been in the making in Sri Lanka since the 1990s (N. R. Dewasiri, personal communication, February 5, 2021). This new middle-class is the fruit of the open economic policy introduced in the late 1970s in Sri Lanka. The members of this class are relatively young, in their late 30s and early 40s, and located in the expanding private sector, working as high-ranking executives in the corporate world or as professionals in sectors such as, IT.

The upper rungs of this new middle-class are English-speaking and relatively wealthy. Their wants are numerous, and their consumption patters are heavily dependent on imports (i.e., latest automobiles). The members of this class own luxury homes with modern amenities on the outskirts of Colombo such as, Kaduwela, Thalawathugoda, Maharagama, Kesbawa, Kadawatha, Homagama, Malambe, and Kottawa. Their children are educated in high fee-levying international schools. Special private schools (i.e., dancing and music schools) cater to the extracurricular needs of their children. An ensemble of salons, spas, shopping malls and department stores, restaurants and bakeries, bars and night clubs, gyms, private hospitals, and mega supermarket chains has sprung up to cater to the needs and wants of this new middle-class.

The members of this class are very interested in the beautification of the urban landscape and modern infrastructure. They greatly appreciate the redevelopment projects Gotabaya Rajapaksa undertook as the head of the urban development authority. Private

universities are preferred for the higher education of their children. The imaginary of this new middle-class is global and metropolitan. For many of them, Singapore serves as the ideal model.

The approach of the new middle-class to politics is highly technocratic. Politics is conceived in terms of corporate planning or as running an IT program (N. R. Dewasiri, personal communication, February 5, 2021). Democracy is viewed as an inefficient form of governance. Their notion of governance is based on a corporate model, like a CEO running a company. The chairman of the *Viyathmaga* embodies their perceptions of governance. He is viewed by them as a "task-master, one who gets the job done no matter what, like winning the war that most thought was unwinnable."

The members of this class are highly nationalistic. These are the children of rural land-owning middle-classes, the backbone of Sinhala nationalist politics. Most of the members of this class migrated to Colombo in their early adulthood in search of jobs in the expanding private sector. While living middle-class urban cosmopolitan lives which are tied to a global neo-liberal capitalist economy, they nevertheless still subscribe to rural Sinhala-Buddhist values of their fathers. According to N. R. Dewasiri, this is a highly schizophrenic class, living in two different worlds at the same time (personal communication, February 5, 2021).

Udaya, who was a coordinator of the *Viyathmaga*, is a typical member of the new middle-class. He is from the land-owning rural elite. Udaya's father is a strong supporter of the Sinhala nationalist SLFP and his more elderly relatives were politically associated with the remarkable electoral victory of Sinhala nationalism in 1956. Udaya who is now in his early 50s migrated to Colombo in the early 1990s to work as a junior executive in a leading

company. Today he is a top-level manager of a leading telecommunications company in Sri Lanka. His daughter attends a leading girl's school, and his son is enrolled in a prestigious international school. He has built a two-story house with modern amenities in Malambe, an outskirt of Colombo. His ideas and practices have a strong global and metropolitan flavour. But he is also a strong Sinhala nationalist.

The *Viyathmaga* formed in February 2016 was the intellectual and political manifestation of the above discussed new urban middle-class. Nalaka Godahewa, who is the chief ideologue and the architect of the *Viyathmaga* project, started his career as a management trainee at a leading private firm, Unilever, and progressed to become one of the highest paid senior managers in the corporate world in Si Lanka (Business Today, 2020 January). Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekara, Manori Unambuwa (a top-level sales manger in the corporate world), Admiral Mohan Wijewickrama, Indika Liyanahewage (a CEO in the corporate world), Major General G. A. Chandrasiri, Dr. Prasanna Gunasena (consultant neurosurgeon), Dr. Seetha Arambepola (ENT surgeon), and Major General Kamal Gunaratne are some of the founding members of the organization. The *Viyathmaga* presented itself as a nationalist intellectual movement that sought solutions to fundamental problems of the country. However, in practice, it turned out to be a highly choregraphed marketing campaign to secure the nomination of Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the presidential candidate of the SLPP and thereafter to ensure his victory at the elections. Godahewa explains the success of their campaign in the following manner (Business Today, 2020 January):

> We were very clever in our branding strategy from day one. The logo, the colours and everything we did, we did in style and there was glamour around it…We know the value of marketing and so there was a wow effect. The ability to market the brand also helped make it a powerful brand. I used to tell at Viyathmaga that quite often when a TV crew was recording a rally the background was a blank wall

or an unattractive scenery, which even the political party that has been in existence for 70 years did not take seriously, but, we at Viyathmaga ensured that when someone spoke on stage the background was attractive. In marketing such minute things make a big difference.

The *Viyathmaga* project is located within the universe of neo-liberal capitalism. The program is basically a combination of political authoritarianism and market economics. According to the organization's chief ideologue Godahewa, Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, General Park of South Korea, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, and Deng Xiaoping of China inspire the thinking of *Viyathmaga* (Viyathmaga 2018). Even though *Viyathmaga* is essentially a Sinhala nationalist formation, its vision and program are packaged in inclusive terms. The *Viyathmaga* forms of address are always Sri Lankan, acknowledging the plural character of the country, and never Sinhalese as with the traditional Sinhala national movement.

The *Viyathmaga* vision is a productive citizen, a happy family, a disciplined society, and a prosperous nation. It hopes to achieve these objectives through the so-called people-centric economy. A people-centric economy is based on four principles. First principle is based on the idea that every citizen must have some economic standing in the society. Therefore, there is no room for poverty in the society and poverty alleviation is a major priority of a people-centric economic policy. Second principle is based on equal opportunities for all citizens to progress. Third principle is based on clean and efficient administration. Fourth principle is based on grooming a local class of entrepreneurs who will drive the economy by competing globally (Piripun Deshayak Venuven 2017:2-16).

The *Viyathmaga* gaze is directed towards Asia and not towards the West. According to the view of the organization, the centre of gravity of economics is fast moving towards Asia with a population of five billion and a growing middle class. Moreover, a fourth

industrial revolution is taking place that is characterised by the internet of things, robotics, and nanotechnology. Sri Lanka needs to become a part of this phenomenon. Hence, the *Viyathmaga* program has a big focus on technology education for youth and reaping the benefits from the fourth industrial revolution that is centered in Asia (Business Today, 2020 January). The above ideas have significantly influenced the SLPP program, *Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour* (2019).

Like their chairman who won the presidential election with a handsome majority, most of the candidates of *Viyathmaga* who contested on the SLPP list at the August 2020 parliamentary elections scored decisive victories. In populous and politically significant districts such as, Colombo and Gampaha, the relatively unknown *Viyathmaga* candidates achieved the highest number of preferential votes on the SLPP lists of candidates. In other districts, *Viyathmaga* nominees received substantial numbers of preferential votes. Further, key members of the organization who did not contest the parliamentary election were appointed as members of parliament through the national list. Most of the *Viyathmaga* leaders received influential ministerial portfolios and high posts in the state. For example, the chief ideologue of the organization, Nalaka Godahewa, is the State Minister of Urban Development. Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekara is the Minister of Public Security. Major General Kamal Gunaratne, another founding member of the organization and a key orator at the *Viyathmaga* series of rallies preceding the November 2019 presidential elections, is the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and the State Ministry of National Security and Disaster Management.

The *Viyathmaga* never really crystalized into a movement after the victory of Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the President in November 2019 when it had the potential to become

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as such and re-articulate the Sinhala nationalist imagination in new ways. Some political analysts do not think the *Viyathmaga* as an authentic part of the Sinhala nationalist movement. K. Perera thinks that the organization was a charade that pickpocketed the popular Sinhala nationalist sentiment which prevailed in the country at the time to capture political power (personal communication, October 31, 2020). After becoming the President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa visited the *Viyathmaga* headquarters to meet the activists after a lapse of almost a year. This shows the interest the leadership had in turning the organization into a social movement. A frustrated *Viyathmaga* activist and a gastroenterological surgeon said:

> We took great risks to our professional lives when we joined the *Viyathmaga*. But now we are totally disillusioned with the way the country is governed. There is no sense of direction. We don't have the dialogues anymore with the president to give him our ideas and opinions. The *Viyathmaga* leaders got plump positions and vanished from our sight.

Another frustrated *Viyathmaga* activist and an engineer by profession said:

> Today the *Viyathmaga* activists are forgotten. Their skills and knowledge not utilized. The biggest betrayal was dashing the vision of professionals getting involved in governance.

The organizational structures that emerged as *Viyathmaga* chapters in Sri Lanka and globally have been either absorbed by the more traditional political organizational structures such as, the SLPP or they have simply disintegrated. The *Viyathmaga* turned out to be a meticulously choreographed marketing campaign by a cabal of retired high-ranking security forces personnel, business elite and professional who revolved around the political axis of Gotabaya Rajapaksa to capture state power. This cabal remains an influential centre of power, especially located in the executive arm of the government, propped up by the powerful Sinhala Buddhist army. According to M. Rathnayaka, a journalist and a political analyst, as any political force that operates in free-market economies, the purpose of existence of

Viyathmaga is to make money (personal communication, March 12, 2021). The *Viyathmaga* clashed with the traditional Sinhala nationalist movement in relation to the former's neo-liberal capitalist agenda. One of the most notable instances was the Sinhala nationalist resistance to the President's privatization attempt of 49 per cent of shares of the eastern terminal of the Colombo harbour to foreign interests in January 2021.

5.2.2. The Sinhala Transnational Community

New developments in transportation and communications have had major effects on transcontinental migration. Unequal and underdevelopment of capitalism has reversed the early migratory roots. The misery and privilege that exist side by side in the world has resulted in an avalanche of migration from the global South to the North, reversing the nineteenth century movement from the metropolis to the peripheries in Americas, South Africa, and the Antipodes. Nevertheless, the marginal existence of the migrants in the metropoles have resulted in nostalgic attachment to homelands, which thanks to capitalism and modern technologies, retains a powerful grip over their daily lives (Anderson 1992:7-9).

The identities of migrants in metropoles have a peculiar character. Their faraway homelands tend to serve as a phantom bedrock for their embattled metropolitan ethnic identities. Anderson elaborates this point in relation to an anecdotal middle-aged Canadian businessman of Punjabi origin and a long-term resident of Toronto (1992:11,12):

> (He) provides, sub rosa, substantial sums to the Khalistan movement in India, sums which, he is quite aware, are used to purchase guns, grenades, and bombs on the international arms market. He is enormously enthusiastic about the sacrifices of young Sikh activists as well as about their terroristic campaigns against non-Sikhs in the Punjab. But he also informed my friend that one reason for living in quite Toronto is to ensure that his own teenage sons remain safe, and assured of successful

commercial futures. He does not participate substantially in Canadian political life: instead he lives, through E-mail, by long-distance nationalism… His political participation is directed towards an imagined heimat in which he does not intend to live, where he pays no taxes, where he cannot be arrested, where he will not be brought before the courts – and where he does not vote: in effect, a politics without responsibility or accountability. Yet it is just this kind of politics, with its ersatz aura of drama, sacrifice, violence, speed, secrecy, heroism and conspiracy, that contributes so substantially to making 'being Sikh' in Toronto a serious affair.

Large numbers of Sinhalese are concentrated in Middle-East and south of Italy (Zunzer 2004:15). Italy is fast evolving into an epicentre of Sinhala transnationalism (Cheran 2004:9, Henayaka-Lochbihler and Lambusta 2004). Moreover, high concentrations of Sinhalese are also found in the UK, Canada, Australia, and Japan. The Sinhala transnational community in general and its political and ideological elements in particular have a Sinhala nationalist orientation. They are practitioners of long-distance nationalism. They lobby host country governments, influence the public opinion, and raise funds for political and other activities in the home country. The Sinhala transnational community played a significant role in bringing back the Sinhala nationalist forces to power in their homeland.

Out of the large number of organizations in the Sinhala transnational community, the Global Sri Lankan Forum (GSLF) is noteworthy. The organization was founded in the United Arab Emirates in June 2015. According to them, the Sri Lankan identity which is based on the Sinhala language and Buddhist values is the common heritage of the Sinhalese, the Tamils, the Muslims, and all other ethnic groups that inhabit the island (GSLF n.d.). The GSLF is a Sinhala nationalist formation largely inspired by the JC ideology. The GSLF functioned as a pan-Sinhala transnational political organization, forming its chapters in different host countries, or working in partnership with like-minded Sinhala transnational organizations. It also worked very closely with the more established Collective of National

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Organizations in Sri Lanka, led by JC ideologues such as, Gunadasa Amarasekera, Ven. Bengamuwe Nalaka, and Dr. Wasantha Bandara.

The GSLF played a key role in mobilizing the Sinhala transnational community participation in the annual sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. Moreover, it hosted leading figures of the *Viyathmaga* such as, Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekara, Nalaka Godahewa and Channa Jayasumana for these UNHRC sessions in Geneva as civil society representatives and channeled the Sinhala nationalist discourse into this forum. As a result of these "Geneva battles," these politicians became very popular in the Sinhala transnational community and in Sri Lanka. For example, militaristic Weerasekara was a strong choice among many members of the Toronto based Sinhala transnational community for the presidential candidature of the SLPP.

The GSLF also took the initiative to submit a "Testimony of War Heroes," compiled by legal experts attached to the Collective of National Organizations, to the UNHRC to repudiate the war crimes allegations against the security forces and the government of Sri Lanka in relation to the final phase of the war with the Tamil insurgents (Divaina Irida Sangrahaya, 2020 December 6). The GSLF was also instrumental in mobilizing the Sinhala transnational community to arrive in Sri Lanka in large numbers to vote for Gotabaya Rajapaksa at the November 2019 presidential elections. Like the *Viyathmaga*, this once dynamic organization has waned after the elections and the older and more established organizations in host countries continue to carryout the work of long-distance Sinhala nationalism.

5.2.2.1. The SLUNA and the New Splinter Groups

The Sri Lanka United National Association of Canada (SLUNA) is a hard-line Sinhala nationalist outfit and the pioneering political organization in the Sinhala transnational community in Canada. It was formed in August of 1983, soon after the anti-Tamil pogrom in Sri Lanka, by a group of middle-class Sinhalese under the leadership of a senior member of the Trotskyite *Lanka Sama Samaja Party* (LSSP) to counter Tamil separatist propaganda in Canada.

The SLUNA subscribes to the JC line of thinking. The organization views the Tamils of Sri Lanka in the following manner (SLUNA 2008):

> The Tamils whose homeland is in Tamilnadu, South India, where 61 million Tamils live, have invaded Sri Lanka from the earliest times to plunder and pillage, and on occasions captured parts of the northern territories for short periods before they were defeated by the indigenous Sinhalese people and driven back. They first came in as settlers only around the 11th century, with the bulk of the Tamils coming much later in the 18th and 19th centuries as indentured labour brought in by the Dutch and British colonialists for work on tobacco, coffee, and tea plantations.

Following the line of argument of Nalin de Silva (2000), the SLUNA asserts that when the dominant position which the Tamils in the country held prior to independence, due to British favouritism, was threatened with universal suffrage and eventual independence, the Tamil politicians wanted a separate Tamil state, incorporating Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka, fraudulently claimed as the traditional Tamil homeland (SLUNA 2008). The SLUNA was an enthusiastic ally of the Sri Lankan government's war against the Tamil insurgents. The organization does not believe in political solutions, based on devolution of power, to the protracted ethnic conflict in the homeland. They argue that such "ethnic enclaves" would lead to future destabilization of the country (SLUNA 2008).

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In 1985, the SLUNA organized an international conference in Toronto and formed the world Federation of Sri Lankan Associations. It was an attempt to link like-minded expatriate Sinhala groups. Moreover, the SLUNA played an active role to de-legitimise the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, which recognised Tamil political rights in Sri Lanka, by hosting conferences of Sinhala nationalist activists in Canada to mobilise Sinhala transnational opinion against it. Further, the organisation initiated legal action that challenged the Provincial Councils Bill, a provision of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord on sharing political power with Tamils, in the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka.

SLUNA operates on three fronts: anti-LTTE propaganda, lobbying, and development work in the home country. In the past, the SLUNA was more actively involved in development work in Sri Lanka. It worked with Sri Lanka based Sinhala nationalist NGOs such as, the Denzil Kobbekaduwa Trust Fund, the *Thawalama* Development Foundation, the *Dharma Vijaya* Foundation and the SUCCESS. Most of the development work of these organizations was carried out in the Sinhala areas. For example, the *Thawalama* Foundation was formed in 1994 to materially assist Sinhala villages in the *Yan Oya* basin with the aim of stemming the exodus of Sinhalese from this strategically important area due to threats and attacks by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (Thawalama Development Foundation Sri Lanka n.d.). Some of the development activities that are financed by the SLUNA include, medical camps held in remote villages, provision of equipment and facilities to rural hospitals and schools and scholarships for needy children.

The majority in the Sinhala transnational community in Canada including the members of the SLUNA were enthusiastic supporters of Gotabaya Rajapaksa's presidential elections campaign. The Sinhala transnational community was able to identify itself with

Gotabaya Rajapaksa who was a U.S. citizen. Many members in the Sinhala transnational community had great faith in Gotabaya Rajapaksa as a man who would put Sri Lanka on the right track due to his experience of living and working in the Global North. Some members of the community even went to Sri Lanka to vote for him at the presidential elections.

Due to internal conflicts, mostly personal in nature, new and more dynamic Sinhala nationalist organizations have appeared in Canada. Currently, the SLUNA is a part of an alliance of Sinhala organizations led by the Sri Lankan Canadian Action Coalition (SLCAC) that has initiated legal action in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice against the Tamil Genocide Education Week Act 2021. The entire Sinhala transnational community in Canada, led by the Buddhist ecclesiastical leadership in North America and Europe and the SLCAC have come together to fight to repeal this act. There is very enthusiastic response from the community to the appeal for funds to support the above litigation. The funds are generated through potlucks, *paduru sajja* (community musical parties) and personal donations. The Sinhala transnational community in Canada deny in one voice that any Tamil genocide took place in Sri Lanka. Appiah speaks of politicisation of identities: how politicians or political activists mobilise feelings or associations of belonging to certain identities for political gain (2006:16). The SLUNA and its spin-offs politicise ethnic identities. They mobilise transnational Sinhala political imagination in a way that undermines Sinhala-Tamil ethnic solidarity and coexistence and reproduce exclusivist and hegemonic notions of ethno-cultural identity.

5.3. The Dynamics of the Regime

5.3.1. Asian Values

The Bangkok declaration, which was compiled by several Asian countries in preparation to the 1993 world conference on human rights in Vienna, heralded the arrival of the "Asian values" discourse on world stage. The paragraph 8 of the declaration stated that the participating countries "recognize that while human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds" (Stokke 2000:134,135). The crux of the argument is that the Asian countries are fundamentally different from Western countries and therefore considerations of human rights are irrelevant in the Asian context. The highly authoritarian regimes of Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia became the leading advocates of the "Asian values" discourse (Stokke 2000:146, Kraft 2001). Nevertheless, the "Asian values" discourse is not without its critiques. One of its formidable critiques, Amartya Sen, questions the monolithic construct of a highly diverse and complex Asia as well as Asia's alleged predilection for authoritarianism (Sen 1997).

Many of the themes found in the "Asian values" discourse such as, the assault on democracy and the idealization of authoritarianism, communitarianism, and anti-colonialism (Sen 1997, Kraft 2001, Stokke 2000, Barr 2000) are found in the earlier discussed text, *Sabyathva Rajya Kara* (*Towards the Civilizational Sate*) (2016) authored by Amarasekera. The state policies favouring Islam over other religions and Malays over other ethnic groups in Malaysia, a leader in the "Asian values" argument (Stokke 2000), is Amarasekera's vision of chauvinist authoritarianism in action. Moreover, the Confucian cultural source of "Asian

values" (Barr 2000:311) and Amarasekera's Chinese inspiration also seem to match well.

The fundamental divergence between the JC and the "Asian values" seems to be the unapologetic advocacy of market economics in the latter. In the present context of Sri Lanka, the ruling elite is in the process of co-opting the JC and the Sinhala national movement into a variation of the "Asian values" characterised by a cocktail of authoritarian nationalism and market economics. According to Helleiner, even though economic nationalism (i.e., protectionism) and economic liberalism (i.e., open trade) are theoretically opposing concepts, in reality they are more ambiguous. Economic liberalism and economic nationalism are opposing positions only when the formulation of economic policies is freed from the nationalist impulse of a state (Abraham 2014:21,22).

At the *Viyathmaga* annual convention in 2018, the chief ideologue of the organization, Nalaka Godahewa, rejected the neo-liberal economic advice of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. He said that not a single country has developed following their advice. Instead, Godahewa emphasized the need to conceptualize an indigenous model of economic development for Sri Lanka. For him, Mahathir Mohamad's Malaysia, General Park's Korea, Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore, and Deng Xiaoping's China provide the inspiration in this endeavor (Viyathmaga 2018). What is common to all these inspiring models of Godahewa are political authoritarianism and market economics.

5.3.2. The Program: *Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor*

The program of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Chairman of the *Viyathmaga* and the SLPP candidate for the 2019 presidential election, titled *Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor,* is aligned with the above line of thinking. The program is based on a nationalist vision of state-

centered capitalism and political authoritarianism. It is orientated towards Asia, the new center of power where strong bonds and reciprocal commercial and trade relations would be forged (Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor 2019:15).

In 1977, under the rubric of "Open Economic Policy," market-oriented policies were introduced in Sri Lanka. All governments that came to power since 1977 have continued this economic policy. What is noteworthy in the current program is the combination of Sinhala nationalism and capitalist development. This orientation is manifested in the form of protecting the interests of the national capital in a global capitalist economy. Like the so-called developmental states in East Asia (Wade 1990), the strong state will protect the interests of national capital in the process of capitalist development.

The coming together of Sinhala nationalism and the economic interests of the elite is however nothing new. In the colonial period, Sinhala nationalism was employed by the burgeoning bourgeoisie to advance their economic interests against colonial economic interests of the British. In the post-colonial period, Sinhala nationalism was used against the trading interests of minority groups. Moreover, during the closed economy period (1970 – 1977), the state promoted the interests of the national capital (Bastian 2013:13). At present, this aspect of economic nationalism – state promoting the interests of national capital – has come to characterize the economic orientation of the regime. However, unlike the earlier period, this form of economic nationalism takes place now in a context of global neo-liberal capitalism.

The economic policy of the regime, the people-centric economy, is very explicit about the policy of protecting and strengthening local entrepreneurs (Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor 2019:36–47). Hence, a major emphasis is on local production and import

substitution. For example, according to the policy regime, import tariff on goods competing with domestically produced substitutes will be raised (Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor 2019:37). A major target of the program is the development of a local class of entrepreneurs who can become an integral part of the global capitalist economy (Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor 2019:36–47). The government policy is to infuse the spirit of capitalism in all sectors of the economy. It intends to launch a program to develop entrepreneurial spirit in citizens from school days (Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor 2019:44). Furthermore, the program unequivocally states that "there will be no transfer of key resources and strategic economic centers of the country to foreign ownership" (Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor 2019:36).

The integration with the global capitalist economy has been the policy direction since the Mahinda Rajapaksa presidency, especially from 2010 with the conclusion of the war with the Tamil insurgents. The 2010 manifesto of Mahinda Rajapaksa promised to make the country a naval, aviation, commercial, energy, and knowledge hub (Bastian 2013:11). Large scale infrastructure projects such as, ports, airports, highways were commenced based on this vision. This policy is continued under the current regime. The most visible manifestation of this policy is the Colombo port city project, an artificially constructed island adjacent to the Colombo harbor built by the Chinese with the aim of turning it into an international commercial and financial hub. The estimated cost of the Colombo port city project is US$1.4 billion, and it will include an integrated resort and casino and conference center zone, a marina, residential developments, a financial zone, and green spaces. (Sharma 2021). This project was started in 2014 when Mahinda Rajapaksa was the President and the Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived for the inaugural ceremony. But the project faced obstacles when

the Mahinda Rajapaksa government fell in 2015. But after Gotabaya Rajapaksa came to power, it picked up steam again.

Subscribing to its capitalist developmentalist orientation, the government is engaged in an aggressive campaign to promote foreign direct investments in the port city and in the economy in general. According to Ajith Nivard Cabraal, a leading figure in the *Viyathmaga* and the former State Minister of Money, Capital Markets and State Enterprise Reform and the current Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the government is expecting US$ 15 billion investment in the port city within the next five years (Irida Lankadeepa, 2021 April 25). The President himself participated in several international conferences to promote foreign direct investments in Sri Lanka. At the Sri Lanka Economic Summit held on 1 December 2020 to promote foreign direct investments in Sri Lanka, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said (Official Website of the President 2020):

> …our overreliance on loans must come to an end. That is why the focus of the Government is on fostering investments. We must attract more Foreign Direct Investment and encourage more local investment to drive our economic growth. With this in view, the Government is bringing in new laws to fully protect investments. We are also committed to enhancing the ease of doing business in Sri Lanka so the returns on investment can be generated faster.

State assets, some of which are strategic in nature such as, container terminals in the Colombo harbor and power plants, are opened-up to foreign investment and ownership, contrary to the policy stated in the *Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor* (2019). Basically, what Sri Lanka is witnessing at the current juncture is the deepening of the capitalist transformation of society, albeit with a nationalist rhetoric.

The rampant consumerism the above capitalist transformation encourages, and the JC vision of a minimalist Buddhist society do not agree with each other. This frustration is

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expressed by Amarasekera in several works of fiction, most notably in the short story titled *Mahagedera Soya A Gamana (The Journey in Search of the Ancestral Home)* (2013). The protagonist, Gunasoma, is a Sinhala nationalist who left Sri Lanka many decades ago to settle down in Australia. Yet, his heart never left the shores of Sri Lanka, and he endured an alienated life in the host country. After the war victory over the Tamil insurgents in 2009, Gunasoma is optimistic about the future in Sri Lanka. He sincerely believes that a new society would blossom along the lines of Buddhist socialism under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa. He decides to resettle in his ancestral home in the south of Sri Lanka. But the capitalist development and the accompanying vulgar consumerism, selfishness, and greed he witnessed is Sri Lanka made Gunasoma nauseous and quashed all his hopes for a new beginning in Sri Lanka. Broken in spirit and ideals dashed, Gunasoma returns to Australia and decides to sell his ancestral home in Sri Lanka.

However, in real life, Amarasekera and the JC school as well as the Sinhala nationalists in general, are reluctant fellow travelers of the Rajapaksa caravan that is trucking along the path of capitalist development. In India, as discussed earlier, the BJP was able to prevail over its ally, the *Sangh Parivar*, especially the *Swadeshi Jagaran Manch* (SJM) which advocated the economic philosophy of *Hindutva* and especially founded in 1991 to respond to the economic liberalization policies of the then Congress government (Abraham 2014:132 - 148).

The economic philosophy of Hindutva was articulated by Deendayal Upadhyaya (1916-1968). His economic thinking consisted of the twin concepts of *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) and *vikendrikaran* (decentralization): a Gandhian model without the total rejection of modernity (Abraham 2014:53-102). What this translated into in concrete terms

was an economic system characterized by decentralized production and self-sufficiency. In consonance with its Gandhian roots, *swadeshi* or self-sufficiency was envisioned as the domestic production of quality goods and a public practicing "simple living." It was assumed that such an economic system would allow individuals to flourish in their multiple dimensions (Abraham 2014:83,99).

The BJP criticized the economic liberalization reforms with the SJM before it came to power. However, one of the first things that the BJP government did in 1998 was to open up the hitherto nationalized insurance sector to foreign investments (Narain n.d:23). The BJP period in power, beginning in 1998, was characterized by deregulation of the economy, openness to international goods and services, the shrinking of the government and privatization over job security and full employment. The BJP led coalition government implemented this neo-liberal policy framework despite the strong protests from its ally, the *Sangh Parivar*, mainly the SJM (Abraham 2014:115,132-148).

However, in Sri Lanka, the regime in power has not been able to totally subdue the Sinhala national movement into accepting the capitalist development paradigm. The nationalist elements have been wavering on their position vis-à-vis capitalist development model. When the government attempted privatize 49 per cent of shares of the eastern container terminal of the Colombo harbor to foreign interests in January 2021, all the nationalist elements in the government were in the forefront of the campaign against the privatization move, launched by the trade unions of the Colombo harbor, which resulted in government backing off. With respect to the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill, which provides the legal framework for setting up the special economic zone within the port city, nationalists were divided. For example, Amarasekera was in favor and justified the port

city as a valuable project that will advance the economy of the country while Ven. Elle Gunawansa, an iconic nationalist monk and a key figure that brought the current regime to power, expressed serious reservations about the project (Irida Lankadeepa, 25 April 2021). Moreover, the two leading nationalist politicians in the cabinet, Wimal Weerawansa and Udaya Gammanpila, who earlier opposed the move to privatize 49 per cent shares of the eastern container terminal of the Colombo harbor, justified foreign investment and privatization of 85 per cent of shares in the western container terminal of the same harbor (Hiru, 2021 February 2).

The other key emphasis of the program, *Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor* (2019), is on a strong national security state. National security is considered as the prerequisite for economic development and all other things. One of the key tasks of the state, according to the program, is capacity building of the security-intelligence apparatus and putting in place a legal framework that will guarantee impunity for security forces personnel who are tasked with ensuring the continued existence of the Sinhala nationalist political fantasy, the unitary state (Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor, 2019:12-14). Moreover, this unitary state is a juridical space where the state will ensure and support the Buddhist hegemony. For example, in recognition of the service Buddhist monks have rendered society, the program proposes to financially assist parents who have given over their children to the Buddhist order (Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor, 2019:69).

One of the major grievances of the newly elected President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the political–ideological leadership of the SLPP was that they are unable to translate into policy the vision for which they received a massive mandate, mainly from the Sinhala constituency, due to the 19th Amendment to the Constitution introduced by the previous

government, which clipped the excessive powers of the Executive President and ensured checks and balances in the system of governance. Hence, one of the first major tasks of the newly formed SLPP government was the passage of the 20th Amendment to the Constitution. The 20th Amendment to the Constitution basically did away with many existing checks and balances in the political system and greatly enhanced the powers of the office of President to the point of a constitutional dictator. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the new amendment to the Constitution has fundamentally undermined the independence of key commissions and institutions such as, the Human Rights Commission, the Election Commission, the National Police Commission, and the judiciary (Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021:7). According to K. Perera, the purpose of the 20th Amendment was to consolidate the power of the President and the military-business elements that support him independently of the larger Sinhala national movement (personal communication, October 31, 2020). According to others, the purpose of the 20th Amendment to the Constitution is to perpetuate Rajapaksa dynastic politics and to ensure the takeover of the state by a cabal of business-professional-political interests with insatiable hunger for political power and wealth who have aligned themselves with the Rajapaksa political dynasty (T. Gunasekara 2020, Uyangoda 2021a). The Covid-19 outbreak and the chaos it unleased in the society and the economy has created conducive conditions for the emergence of a highly authoritarian state.

The militarization of civil administration is an outcome of the above discussed tendencies in the regime. In December 2019, the government brought 31 entities under the oversight of the Ministry of Defense, such as, the Police Department, the Secretariat for Non-governmental Organizations, the National Media Centre, the Disaster Management Centre,

and the Department of Emigration and Immigration (Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021:6). However, in November 2020, the Police Department was transferred to the newly formed Ministry of Public Security headed by the highly militaristic and nationalistic *Viyathmaga* leading member Retired Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekara.

Since 2020, the President has appointed at least 28 serving or former military and intelligence personnel to leading administrative posts and established several presidential task forces with overlapping mandates with the existing civil administrative structures. These task forces are partially or entirely composed of military, intelligence, and police personnel. For example, the Army Commander heads the National Operations Centre for the Prevention of the Covid-19 Outbreak (NOCPCO) and all quarantine centers are administered by the Sri Lanka Army. Moreover, 25 senior military officers have been appointed as Chief Coordinating Officers in the 25 districts in the island to combat the Covid-19 outbreak. Some of these military personnel such as, the Army Commander Shavendra Silva and the Secretary to the Ministry of Defense, Major General (Retired) Kamal Gunaratne, are implicated in United Nations reports on war crimes and crimes against humanity (Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021:7).

The government's practice of surveillance, intimidation and judicial harassment has intensified and broadened over the years to all individuals who are critical of the government policies (Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021:9,10; Bachelet 2021). The quarantine regulations are used to repress the rights to freedom of expression and association. For example, the peaceful protest of the Lanka Teachers Union and left-wing political activists against a bill alleged to privatize and militarize higher

education held in Colombo in July 2021 was dispersed and their leaders arrested by the security forces. Immediately after the trade union leaders and activists were released on bail by the court of law, they were manhandled by the police and shoved into buses and taken to quarantine centers to harass and intimidate (Ada Derana, 2021 July 13). Such practices have had a chilling effect on the civic and democratic space on the island. Moreover, Sri Lanka security forces continue to engage in abduction, torture and violence including sexual violence (Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021:11).

This increasingly authoritarian state is couched in Sinhala nationalist symbolism and rhetoric thus alienating and marginalizing further other ethno-religious communities in the society from the state. As discussed earlier, the President and key figures in the government contribute to this exclusion of the Other from the state. For example, in his anniversary address on 18 November 2020, the President reiterated that he was elected to power by the Sinhala Buddhists majority and alluded to various local and foreign forces and ideologies that conspire to destroy Sinhala race, Buddhism, national resources and the heritage. Moreover, the Tamil version of the national anthem is removed from all significant national events such as, the Independence Day celebrations (Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021:8,9).

The Sinhala nationalist symbolism and rhetoric of the state is translated into policy by granting impunity to security forces personnel who have been subjected to prosecution for grave human rights violations by the previous government. Fabián Salvioli, the special rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, states that the change of government in Sri Lanka led to a setback in the investigation and prosecution of violations committed during the conflict (2021:4). It is in this context that the

Attorney General's Department decided not to proceed with charges against the former Navy Commander in the case of the enforced disappearance of 11 men in 2008 and 2009. Moreover, in March 2020, the President pardoned the Staff Sergeant Sunil Ratnayake who was convicted in 2015 for the murder of eight Tamil civilians, including four children in Mirusuvil in April 2000 (Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021:13).

The President declared a state of emergency in Sri Lanka on 30 August 2021 with the stated aim to ensure food security and price controls of essential commodities. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the emergency regulations declared are very broad and may further expand the role of the military in civilian functions (Bachelet 2021). Hence, under these emergency regulations, the President appointed two Major Generals of the Sri Lanka Army as the Commissioner General of Essential Services and the Chairman of the Consumer Affairs Authority.

Since the end of the war in 2009, the power of the military has been growing under the leadership of Gotabaya Rajapaksa who was then the Secretary to the Ministry of Defense until the regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa fell in 2015. Initially, the military became a part of the economy by owning and operating hotels and cultivating large tracts of land in the former war zones. The figures of assets and wealth of the military are unknown. According to K. Perera, a Tamil journalist in the north who filed a right to information request to ascertain information on economic assets of the military went missing (personnel communication, February 12, 2021). As discussed earlier, high ranking military elements played a key role in the *Viyathmaga* project and bringing Gotabaya Rajapaksa to power, and they continue to play an increasingly significant role in the current regime. According to K. Perera, the President,

who is a former military man, is distancing himself from the Sinhala national movement that brought him to power and increasingly relying on the Sinhala Buddhist military to consolidate his power (personal communication, February 12, 2021). T. Gunasekara opines that the ruling elite is relying on the military to consolidate its power and manage the future waves of protest due to increasingly deteriorating conditions in the economy (2021a). In a context of unfolding economic and social turmoil which the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated, many analysts believe that the "Myanmar path" is a possible option for the ruling elite in Sri Lanka.

5.3.3. The Ruling Elite

According to M. Jayathilaka, the present government is like a *kanappuwa,* a three-legged table (personal communication, March 5, 2021). In other words, the regime is not a monolithic entity, and it seems to have three centers of power. The Sinhala national movement that played a decisive role in bringing the current government to power is a significant hegemonic force constituting the regime. It revolves around the hitherto undisputed political leader of Sinhala nationalism, the Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. The next power center revolves around the powerful Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa, the youngest sibling of the Rajapaksa brothers. His political orientation is liberal democratic and big business interests and the SLPP party functionaries revolve around him. Basil Rajapaksa is a U.S. citizen and is the main conduit of Western business and political interests in the regime. Finally, the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, another sibling of the Rajapaksa family, and the *Viyathmaga* elements dominate the executive arm of the government (M. Jayathilaka, personal communication, March 5, 2021). The above discussed power centers

are at times in tension and conflict with each other. As discussed earlier, the Sinhala nationalist forces in the government, which ensure the hegemonic leadership of the ruling elite in the Sinhala society, have been on a collision path with the neo-liberal capitalist policies of the government. The latest tension and conflict is in relation to the decision of the Finance Ministry headed by Basil Rajapaksa to allow a U.S. company to buy forty per cent of shares of the *Yugadanavi* thermal power plant and to award the monopoly rights to supply liquified natural gas to the country for five years to the same company bypassing the established tender procedure. Amarasekera considers this deal as a great betrayal of the nation (Divaina Irida Sangrahaya, 2021 September 26). According to Ven. Elle Gunawansa, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic when the entire nation is locked down, the current government is stealthily auctioning the wealth of the nation to foreign interests (Irida Lankadeepa, 2021 June 27).

At a fundamental level, there are no conflicts among the members of the Rajapaksa family. For example, as assumed by some analysts, there is no conflict between the Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa who represents the Sinhala nationalist forces and his younger sibling and Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa who is close to big business and Western political interests. The family members stick together when the going gets tough to perpetuate Rajapaksa dynastic politics which has been in the making since the end of the war with the Tamil insurgents in 2009. In the current government, the Rajapaksa brothers and their children play a decisive role.

The President of the country is Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Under him are Cabinet Ministries of Defense and Technology. The Prime Minister is his elder brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa. The Cabinet Ministries of Economic Policy and Plan Implementation; *Buddha*

Sasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs; and Urban Development and Housing come under him. The youngest sibling of the Rajapaksa brothers, Basil Rajapaksa, is the powerful Cabinet Minister of Finance. The eldest of the Rajapaksa brothers, Chamal Rajapaksa, is the Cabinet Minister of Irrigation. Also, the State Ministries of Defense and Disaster Management come under him. The young Namal Rajapaksa, the son of Mahinda Rajapaksa, is the Cabinet Minister of Youth and Sports and the State Minister of Digital Technology and Enterprise Development. Shashindra Rajapaksa, the son of Chamal Rajapaksa, functions as the State Minister of Paddy and Grains, Organic Food, Vegetables, Fruits, Chilies, Onions and Potato Cultivation Promotion, Seed Production and Advanced Technology Agriculture. Nipuna Ranawaka, the son of a sister of the Rajapaksa brothers, who was elected to the parliament for the first time in August 2020, is the Head of the District Development Committee of Matara, an administrative district in the south of Sri Lanka. Moreover, during the cabinet reshuffle in August 2021, Namal Rajapaksa was given an additional Cabinet Ministry, the Ministry of Development Coordination and Monitoring (Hiru, 2021 August 16). Hence, all major development projects of the government will come under the purview of 35-year-old Namal Rajapaksa. Without considering the new Cabinet Ministry and the institutions that come under it, 08 Cabinet Ministries and 03 State Ministries and close to 150 state institutions are under the purview of the Rajapaksa family. This figure is more than one third of all state institutions in the country and they are the most powerful ones (Ruhunage 2021).

The current Rajapaksa regime is bogged down in a major foreign debt crisis and a balance of payment crisis. This situation is gradually giving rise to an unprecedented economic crisis in the country. The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to exacerbate the situation. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic has severely affected the tourism industry in

the country as well as the remittances from migrant workers due to job losses. Consequently, the state treasury has lost much needed foreign exchange and the country's foreign reserves are at a historic low. Leading up to 2021, several leading credit rating agencies such as, the Standard and Poor's, Moody's, and Fitch Ratings have downgraded Sri Lanka's credit worthiness (Moramudali 2021). According to the Department of External Resources, at the end of April 2021, the total outstanding external debt of the government was US$ 35.1billion (Department of External Resources 2021). The government must pay interest on borrowings and the principle. Moreover, it must address the balance of payments deficit. With downgraded credit worthiness, it becomes increasingly difficult for Sri Lanka to access international financial markets for the much-needed hard currency to address these issues.

One major factor which contributed to the current debt crisis was the reliance of the previous Rajapaksa regime (2005-2015) on short-term high-interest commercial loans to initiate mega development projects, which yielded no financial or economic returns, in their electoral strongholds to prop-up the regime (Ranawaka 2014). A good example in this regard is the port that was constructed in Hambantota, the hometown of the Rajapaksa clan. As this port did not generate financial and economic returns, unable to service the debt of $1.4 billion from Beijing used to build it, Sri Lanka was forced to handover this strategic port to Chinese on a 99-year lease in 2017 (AFP News, 2021 May 10). As with the Hambantota port, the money for these mega projects mostly came from China as high-interest short-term commercial loans.

Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, beginning in late 1970s, China reoriented its economy and society in a new direction. This new direction was characterized by a shift from a centrally planned command economy to acceptance of market principles. These reforms

propelled China from being an underdeveloped agrarian country into a global superpower.

The Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI), reminiscent of the Silk Road, is a major infrastructure project that stretches from East Asia to Europe. The idea was conceptualized by Deng Xiaoping and launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013. The BRI includes the creation of a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, highways and streamlined border crossings, both westward- through the mountainous former Soviet republics-and southward, to Pakistan, India, and the rest of Southeast Asia. In addition to physical infrastructure, China plans to build 50 special economic zones, modeled on the Shenzhen special economic zone, which China launched during the economic reform in the 1980s. Through this project, China is motivated to boost global economic links to its western regions, which have been historically neglected. Promoting economic development in the western province of Xinjiang, where separatist violence has been on the rise, is also a major objective. Further, through the BRI, China hopes to secure long-term energy supplies from Central Asia and the Middle East via routes that the U.S. military cannot disrupt (V. Gunasekara 2020).

However, the U.S. and the G7/8 camp who struggle to maintain world hegemony in the face of rising Chinese power have a competing vision to BRI. This is known as Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), introduced by George W. Bush (2001-2009) administration. Harnessing Asia's growth and dynamism has been central to U.S. economic and military interests and has been a key priority for all U.S. administrations since President Bush. Open markets in Asia provide the U.S. with opportunities for investment, trade, and access to cutting-edge technology. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), initiated in 2007, is a forum comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. with a focus on countering the growing influence of China (V. Gunasekara 2020).

The Indian Ocean region consists of 28 countries, spans across three continents and covers 17.5% of global land area. In 2017, it was home to 35% of the world's total population (2.6 billion people). The Indian Ocean region has a rich resource base. For example, it holds 16.8% of the world's proven oil reserves and 27.9% of proven natural gas reserves. Most importantly, it is home to major sea routes connecting the Middle East, Africa and East Asia with Europe and the Americas. These sea routes facilitate maritime trade in the Indian Ocean region, carry more than half of the world's sea-borne oil and hosts 23 of the world's top 100 container ports (V. Gunasekara 2020).

Sri Lanka's strategic importance to China is conceptualized in the context of a conflict with India, the regional ally of U.S. India could disrupt the energy flows to China by blocking Malacca straits as 77% of China's oil is transported via the Indian Ocean. The objective of the "string of pearls" strategy of China is to gain access to key ports in the region such as, Gwadar in Pakistan, Kyaukphyu and Sitwe in Myanmar, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and Hambantota in Sri Lanka to counter such an eventuality. This is known as the "*Hexiao Gongda*" strategy in South Asia where the regional hegemon and the ally of the U.S., India, is counter-balanced by partnering with smaller states in South Asia (V. Gunasekara 2020). It is through the financing of massive infrastructure projects that China brings the smaller states in the region under her sphere of influence.

In the current context of Sri Lanka, Rajapaksas need a powerful foreign backer who can finance the regime to perpetuate dynastic politics, a friend who is not bothered about human rights and democracy in the country, and who would intervene on behalf of their client state in international forums. In return for this financial and political support, Rajapaksas are willing to serve the strategic interests of their foreign backer. China was in search of "pearls"

or satellite states in the Indian Ocean region and the Rajapaksa clan was in search of a powerful foreign backer to perpetuate their political dynasty. Hence, China's imperial ambitions and the needs of the Rajapaksa dynastic politics coincided well (T. Gunasekara, 2021b). It is in this context, as report in the New York Times on 2018 June 25, that the Chinese construction companies operating in Sri Lanka made substantial financial contributions to the campaign of Mahinda Rajapaksa at the 2015 presidential elections (T. Gunasekara, 2021c).

The Chinese influence on the island, through loans and projects under the BRI, has been steadily growing since Mahinda Rajapaksa assumed power in 2005, raising concern in India and among Western powers. China is the largest foreign investor in Sri Lanka. According to Gateway House, a Mumbai-based think tank, China has invested more than US$15 billion in Sri Lanka since 2005 (Sharma 2021). China in April 2021 provided Sri Lanka US$500 million loan – the second trench of US$1 billion package to address its dwindling foreign reserves. Moreover, China has also approved a US$1.5 billion currency swap with Sri Lanka to finance imports from China in February 2021 (Sharma 2021; AFP News, 2021 May 10).

The Chinese Minister of Defense visited Sri Lanka in April 2021 and held discussions with the President and the Prime Minister and agreed to closely corporate on matters concerning defense and security (Anidda, 2021 May 2). At present there is a large number of high-ranking Sri Lankan security forces personnel who are graduates of the prestigious National Defense University (NDU) of China. This was revealed by Major General (Retired) Kamal Gunaratne, the Secretary to the Ministry of Defense, at a keynote speech delivered to commemorate the first anniversary of the Sri Lankan alumni of the NDU which coincided

with the 94th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China (Irida Lankadeepa, 2021 August 1). Moreover, in August 2021, the PLA donated 300,000 Sinopharm vaccines to the Sri Lanka security forces to contain the Covid-19 outbreak (Ada Derana, 2021 August 28). Amidst the Covid–19 pandemic, the island has been increasingly relying on Chinese vaccines to contain the outbreak. The Chinese vaccine Sinopharm is the most widely used Covid-19 vaccine in Sri Lanka (Jayasinghe 2021).

The international inquiries into grave human rights violations and the large numbers of Tamil civilian deaths and disappearances amounting to war crimes during the final stages of the war in Sri Lanka is hanging over the head of post-war Sri Lankan governments like the Damocles sword. This has been a major irritant to the Rajapaksa governments since the conclusion of the war in 2009. The above issue is a recurring theme in international human rights forums with respect to Sri Lanka. In these forums, most notably at the United Nations Human Rights Commission sessions in Geneva, China has taken a consistent stand in support of Sri Lanka against resolutions forcing Sri Lanka to address accountability issues in the war, sponsored mainly by Western powers. For example, following is the statement read by China's permanent representative in Geneva in response to the report on Sri Lanka by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the 46th Session of the Human Rights Council (Daily News, 2021 February 27):

> As a friendly neighbor of Sri Lanka, China sincerely hopes that Sri Lanka maintains political stability, ethnic solidarity and national unity and wishes Sri Lanka greater achievements in its national development. We commend the Government of Sri Lanka for its efforts to actively promote and protect human rights, advance sustainable economic and social development, improve people's living standard, protect the rights of the vulnerable groups, advance national reconciliation and combat terrorism.
>
> It's the consistent stand of China to oppose politicization and double standards on human

rights, as well as using human rights as an excuse in interfering in other countries' internal affairs. We are concerned about the clear lack of impartiality shown in the OHCHR's report to this session on Sri Lanka and express our regret over the failure of the OHCHR to use the authoritative information provided by the Sri Lankan Government.

The so-called "preventive intervention" and the proposed targeted sanctions contained in the OHCHR's report are clear interference in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka and exceed the mandate of the OHCHR. We hope that the HRC and the OHCHR will strictly follow impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity and non-politicisation principles, respect the sovereignty and political independence of all nations, respect the efforts of the nations for the protection and promotion of human rights, advocate constructive dialogue and cooperation, and abandon the practice of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and exerting political pressure.

The pressure on Sri Lanka with respect to human rights, exerted mainly by Western powers with influential Tamil diasporas, and the unequivocal support extended to Sri Lanka by China in this context, is having a significant impact on the country's foreign policy direction. On the one hundredth anniversary of the Communist Party of China, the Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa emphasized that the rise of Asia in this century is directly linked to the expanding power of China. Further, he reiterated Amarasekera's argument (2016) on the similarities between the civilizational states in China and Sri Lanka and characterized China as a *kalyana mitra,* a friend with noble qualities, who was with Sri Lanka in good times and bad times (Prime Minister's Office 2021). Moreover, at the recent 48th United Nations Human Rights Commission session, Sri Lanka defended China's human rights accusations, commenting that "external forces should not seek to interfere in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, which are integral parts of the People's Republic of China (PRC)" (Abeyagoonasekera 2021)

The Rajapaksa regime seems to be tilting towards the alternative axis of power comprising of such countries as, China, Russia, and Iran in opposition to the Western axis

composed of US, Europe, Japan, and India in the context of the new cold war. Moreover, the current regime in Sri Lanka seems to be modeling its fledgling chauvinist authoritarian state on the authoritarian Chinese state (Uyangoda 2021b). This situation has resulted in the opponents of the regime renaming the island as Chi Lanka.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a powerful force within the regime that is countering this thrust towards China. The powerful Finance Minister, the youngest sibling of the Rajapaksa brothers, Basil Rajapaksa who is also considered as the chief strategist of the regime, is the key spokesman of this counter force. He is a U.S. citizen and perceived as the main conduit of Western political and economic interests within the regime. Basil Rajapaksa, a brilliant political organizer, is credited with the founding of the new party SLPP in 2016 with branches in every nook and cranny in the Sinhala south that led to massive victories in 2018 local government election, 2019 presidential election and 2020 parliamentary election. According to a Cabinet Minister, Basil Rajapaksa was behind the aborted privatization attempt of the eastern container terminal of the Colombo harbor to Indian and Japanese interests in January 2021(personal communication, August 8, 2021). Moreover, the Finance Ministry, under Basil Rajapaksa, initiated the deal in September 2021 to sell 40 per cent of the shares of the *Yugadanavi* thermal power plant to an American company and to award the monopoly to this very same company to supply liquefied natural gas to the country by passing the established tender procedure (Waravita 2021). Moreover, financial circles consider Basil Rajapaksa as a powerful influence within the government that may redirect policy consensus away from an anti-IMF position towards "pragmatism" (Daily FT, 2021 August 27).

Sinhala nationalist forces never liked Basil Rajapaksa. He is considered as ideologically antithetical to Sinhala nationalism and a wheeler-dealer. Basil Rajapaksa

publicly expresses his liberal democratic views and does not hide his unenthusiasm towards Sinhala nationalism (Irida Lankadeepa, 2020 November 29). Moreover, according to political analysts, Basil Rajapaksa's strategy is to wean away the government from Sinhala nationalist forces and come to a broad electoral alliance with parties of minority communities, especially, the Muslims, who have stable vote banks with them. This is imperative, since according to Basil Rajapaksa's calculations, it will be extremely difficult to get an overwhelming majority of the Sinhala Buddhist vote at a future election to form a government (S. Ranasingha, personal communication, October 7, 2021).

One of the clauses of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution brought by the previous government was to deny dual citizens from entering the parliament and holding high political office. This was particularly aimed at the politically active Rajapaksa brothers as some of them were dual citizens. The current President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was an U.S. citizen. Due to this clause in the 19th Amendment, he renounced his U.S. citizenship to contest the presidential election in 2019. However, Basil Rajapaksa was not willing to do this to hold high political office.

Apart from greatly enhancing the powers of the President, the 20th Amendment to the Constitution introduced by the new Rajapaksa government in October 2020 removed the cluse in the 19th Amendment which barred dual citizens from entering parliament and holding high political office to clear the path for Basil Rajapaksa to enter parliament and thereby come to play a key role in the government. He is tipped to be the next presidential candidate endorsed by the Rajapaksa family. All the nationalist forces that backed the government vehemently opposed this move. However, Rajapaksa brothers, especially, Mahinda and Gotabaya, who command a lot of respect among Sinhala nationalist forces, were able to

cajole and co-opt them into giving their consent for the 20ᵗʰ Amendment.

There is a fundamental conflict in the government between the Sinhala nationalist forces and the more liberal democratic currents. At the moment, this tension and conflict is manifesting as resistance by the Sinhala nationalist forces aligned with the government against its neo-liberal capitalist program, pushed most notably by Basil Rajapaksa. The Collective of National Organizations, spearheaded by Gunadasa Amarasekera and Ven. Bengamuwe Nalaka, a main pillar of support of the government, submitted a petition to the Commission to Investigate Bribery and Corruption against the Secretary to the Finance Ministry and the Treasury, in relation to the sale of shares of *Yugadhanavi* thermal power plant to an U.S. company and the awarding of the contract to this same company to supply liquefied natural gas to the country alleging that the country has incurred substantial financial loses as a result of this deal. Further, the nationalist monk, Elle Gunawansa, who played a key role to bring the current regime to power, reprimands the ruling elite against the sale of national assets to foreign interests and is assuming the leadership of the trade-union led mobilization against the government's privatization and foreign direct investment programs (Ada Derana, 2021 October 7). According to a senior Cabinet Minister, the nationalist forces in the government, led by Minister Wimal Weerawansa, are seriously considering withdrawing their support to the government over the controversial *Yugadanavi* privatization and liquified natural gas supply deal with the U.S. based New Fortress company (personal communication, October 27, 2021). In India, the BJP has co-opted and contained the *Hindutva* forces within a neo-liberal capitalist developmental paradigm (Abraham 2014). Whether the ruling elite, spearheaded by the Rajapaksa family, be able to co-opt and contain this hegemonic force, the Sinhala national movement, that gives legitimacy to their rule,

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within a neo-liberal capitalist agenda is yet to be witnessed.

5.4. Sinhala Nationalism as an Ideology and Practice of the Sinhala Ruling Elite Which Ensures Their Hegemonic Leadership in Society: *Sanda Hiru Saya*

The historical political ideology of traditional Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia is consisted of several strands. The king is identified as a *cakravartin*, a universal monarch; the ruler is believed to be a *bodhisattva*, a Buddha-to-be; he is the promotor and the protector of Buddhism; and the Buddhist ruler is a divine being. In the Sri Lankan context, the idea of Sinhalese people as the protectors of *Dhamma*, Buddha's doctrine, and the country as the *Dhammadipa*, the island of *Dhamma*, where the Buddha's doctrine will be preserved in a pristine state, was added to this line of political thinking (Bechert 1978:201).

The Sinhala chronicle *Mahavamsa* indexes the hegemonic status of Buddhism on the island. In the verses of the chronicle are found the vision of the Buddha that his doctrine would flourish in Sri Lanka, which is considered a *Dhammadipa;* the footprint of the Buddha on the majestic peak that is visible from all corners of the island; the dedication of the island to the Buddhist religion during King Devanampiya Tissa reign (250-210 B.C.); the implantation of a branch of the *Bodhi* tree in the island under which Siddhartha attained enlightenment; and more (Seneviratne 1978:177,182). Moreover, according to *Jetavana* slab inscription of Mahinda IV (956-972), kingship is a status bestowed upon the ruler to defend the Bowl and Robe[29]. Further, wars have been fought in defense and propagation of Buddhism. For example, the *Mahavamsa* describes King Dutugamunu who carried a spear

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[29] The Buddha's Dispensation.

with the Buddha's relic on it and who was accompanied by 500 Buddhist monks to battlefield in defense of Buddhism against the Tamil King Elara (Seneviratne 1978:177, Greenwald 1978:13-35).

Sinhala nationalism in the Sri Lankan context needs to be understood as a complex blend of ideology, class interests and political power. The competition among Sinhala ruling classes for the acquisition of state resources and political capital has resulted in Sinhala nationalism becoming the ruling ideology and the state ideology of Sri Lanka (Jayasundara-Smits 2011:74,83). Sinhala nationalism is an ideological and political resource of the Sinhala ruling elites for the mobilization of the society along their sectional interests. In other words, Sinhala nationalism is an ideology and practice of the Sinhala ruling elite which ensures their hegemonic leadership in society.

Hegemony is not a finished and monolithic ideological formation (Nilsen and Cox 2013:71). Even though hegemony permeates the whole of society, it is vulnerable to challenges and needs to be continually renewed, recreated, defended, and modified (Nilsen 2009:120). The ruling Sinhala elite needs to continually stimulate the Sinhala nationalist imagination of the society to reproduce their hegemony in it. Hence, they engage in numerous projects to achieve this objective. One such project is the *Sanda Hiru Saya*, a gigantic Buddhist stupa cum war-memorial.

Violence and piety stand side by side in the Sinhala nationalist imagination. This spirit is well captured in the character of Dutugamunu, the warrior-king, and in his troops. King Dutugamunu went to war with the Tamil King Elara to protect and promote the Buddha's Dispensation on the island with a spear that had a relic of the Buddha on it. On this mission, he was accompanied by 500 Buddhist monks (Greenwald 1978:13-35). Moreover,

Theraputthabhaya, one of Dutugamunu's ten giant worriers, exemplifies the warrior-monk tradition of the Sinhala nationalist imagination. According to the legend, Theraputthabhaya was a monk who disrobed to join the campaign of Dutugamunu and who soon reverted to monkhood after accomplishing the mission.

After the war with Elara, Dutugamunu became a master builder of Buddhist *viharas* and *stupas.* His monuments represent an institutionalization and a visible testimony to the existence of Buddhism in the country (Greenwald 1978:27). The *Sanda Hiru Saya* (Moon and Sun stupa) of the Rajapaksa regime is a continuation of this tradition.

After defeating the Tamil Tigers in 2009, the then President Mahinda Rajapaksa commissioned the construction of the *Sanda Hiru Saya* in 2010 in Anuradhapura, the most significant religious city in the country that reflects the peak of achievement of Sinhala kings and Buddhism. This colossal Buddhist stupa, more than 200 feet in height, purposely built a few feet lower than King Dutugamunu's *Ruwanwelisaya*, as a mark of deference, is the second largest stupa in the country. The purported objective of building this colossal structure was to transfer merit[30] on the security forces personal who lost their lives and who became disabled in the war against the Tamil Tigers. According to the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, Major General (Retired) Kamal Gunaratne, the security forces personnel did not fight the Tamil Tigers for a salary. They did it out of patriotism. The Sinhala nation is a nation that knows gratitude. The purpose of building the *Sanda Hiru Saya* was to preserve the memory of the sacrifices of "war heroes" in the nation until the moon and the sun last in this universe (Divaina Irida Sangrahaya, 2021 May 23).

The *Sanda Hiru Saya* was mainly built with the labour of the Army and the Civil

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[30] A form of invoking blessings in the Buddhist religious tradition.

Defence Force. However, the project took a hegemonic character with the popular participation of Sinhala Buddhist masses. For example, the faithful contributed their labour to the construction efforts of the stupa. They also donated *nidan vasthu*[31] to be deposited in the stupa. Moreover, the *kot vahanse*[32], which included a large *chuda manikya*[33], was paraded throughout the country under the escort of the Army and the Police, in pomp and grandeur, amidst the chanting of *pirith*[34] by Buddhist monks before reaching the final destination, the *Sanda Hiru Saya*, where it is installed. In towns and cities, the faithful gathered on either side of the road to venerate the *kot vahanse* and made donations for the construction of the structure. They also donated *nidan vasthu* to be deposited in the stupa. Each evening, the caravan stopped at a leading temple in a town to break the journey and rest. The elite, including the security forces high command, and the general populace in the town patronised the temple in the evening to venerate the *kot vahanse*. On this occasion, sermons were delivered by the leading monks in the town. Apart from the hegemonic character, the religious caravan had the flavour of an integrative and centripetal ceremony as well.

The *Sanda Hiru Saya* was bestowed upon the community of *sangha* and opened to the faithful on November 18, 2021, which was the birthday of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. The event celebrated a hegemonic notion of a Sinhala nation where it was conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship despite the actual inequality and exploitation that prevail and identified the regime in power with the symbolism of Sinhala nationalism. The pomp and grandeur of the event exhibited the power of the Sinhala Buddhist state and

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[31] Spiritual artifacts.
[32] The pinnacle of the stupa.
[33] Gemstone.
[34] Texts from the canonical Buddhist scriptures.

the ruling elite, especially the Rajapaksa family. The *sangha* hierarchy, a foundation of the Sinhala national movement, glorified Mahinda Rajapaksa as the great liberator of the motherland, Sinhala nation, and the Buddha's Dispensation from the scourge of terrorism and thus legitimized the power of the ruling Sinhala elite in general and the Rajapaksa family in particular.

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