

Journal of Buddhist Ethics

ISSN 1076-9005

<http://www.buddhistethics.org/>

Volume 10, 2003

Buddhism, Ethnicity and Identity: A Problem of Buddhist History

Professor Gananath Obeyesekere

Copyright Notice: Digital copies of this work may be made and distributed provided no change is made and no alteration is made to the content. Reproduction in any other format, with the exception of a single copy for private study, requires the written permission of the author. All enquiries to: editor@buddhistethics.org

Buddhism, Ethnicity and Identity: A Problem of Buddhist History

Professor Gananath Obeyesekere

Introduction: an Unscholarly Pre-statement

In this paper I want to tentatively examine the pre-colonial formations of nationhood and identity in Buddhist Sri Lanka, prior to the radical changes associated with modernity and the reforms of both Colonel Olcott and Anagarika Dharmapala in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a reaction to both colonialism and imperial conquest. This is a difficult task and because it spans over two thousand years it is an awesome one and I cannot claim to make any authoritative statement. Yet, I believe that one must be able to sketch even in a tentative manner pre-modern ideas of nationhood and identity in order to understand the rapid changes in both Buddhism and identity formation since colonial rule. I do not know how far such an account helps us to understand the current ethnic crisis. Nor do I have answers or solutions to that pressing issue. However, before presenting my main argument I want to briefly indicate the complexity of the current situation in an admittedly impressionistic manner and pose the difficulties Buddhists face in the wake of the current peace initiative.

One of the questions often asked of us scholars from educated Westerners is why Buddhism, a religion that is given to an ethic of radical non-violence, has produced a nation like Sri Lanka that has, over

the last two decades, produced a culture of extreme violence. In my view this is a wrong question to ask even though it is an obvious question. Buddhism can no more than any other world religion remain immune to the larger social and economic woes that beset a nation. However, one can ask a related question: what can concerned Buddhist lay-folk and monks do to bring about a critique of contemporary life that might in turn have some effect in creating a new vision of society, one better geared to Buddhist doctrinal values, rather than one oriented towards a destructive Sinhala nationalism. The latter is too complicated an issue for me to deal with here but I do not think that one can overcome the crisis facing Buddhists in Sri Lanka unless there is an ethical reform of the scale that occurred in the end of the late 19th and early twentieth centuries with the work of Colonel Olcott and Anagarika Dharmapala (even though I do not approve of the content of that reform). Instead I shall briefly comment on the current scene of violence and despair in Buddhist Sri Lanka and only then try to understand in more scholarly fashion the issues of ethnicity and identity in pre-colonial sociopolitical formations.

Let me briefly present a thumbnail sketch of the current situation in Sri Lanka in respect of both violence and social discontent. Though a so-called Buddhist nation Sri Lanka has over the last twenty years produced an extremely high murder rate and perhaps one of the largest rates of suicide for the whole world. Sri Lankan Buddhists are all familiar with the five precepts; yet Buddhists in Sri Lanka, over the same period of time, have become massive consumers of alcohol and my guess is that per capita Sri Lankan Buddhists are one of the largest consumers of alcohol in the world. This has been fostered by politicians who have issued liquor licenses for party donors who can give Rs. 1,000,000 for election funds. This means that even in small towns there are more liquor stores than rural banks. Youth and unemployed men are often incited to join party parades on the promise of huge quantities of booze.

In one small town I am familiar with an incumbent monk joins his youthful lay supporters in consuming alcohol, though this fortunately is more the exception than the rule. Sri Lankan Buddhists have become huge consumers of meat; vegetarianism is touted but it is the rare exception than the rule. In a famous temple in Kandy one of the monks in charge of coordinating almsgiving for monks, insists that the lay devotee supply chicken. The laity in turn can no longer supply vegetarian food to monks (fish maybe if meat is considered not kosher by lay-folk). While the laity is often critical of monk behavior, especially political behavior, they pile monks with luxuries, especially foods during almsgiving rituals which then reinforce monk worldliness. And excess robes, towels and other items donated by them to wealthy temples are re-channeled (quite sensibly) back to the market.

Given this context it shouldn't surprise us if forests and grasslands in the hill country are burned periodically to suffocate animals who are then eaten. In some forested areas there are no four legged wild animals to be seen. In my youth it was unthinkable for Buddhists to plunder temples and archeological reserves for artifacts; but now, spurred by the international antique market, such activities have become a minor industry and periodic newspaper accounts suggest monk complicity in plundering their own temples. Monks proudly affirm they are the ones who kept the Buddhist tradition intact yet ancient palm leaf manuscripts in the temple libraries I have visited are either rotting away or sold as artifacts and sometimes torn and sold to foreign tourists as examples of the Buddha writing. Very few monks can read Pali. In one major pilgrimage center hallowed by tradition, the chief monk who has consistently switched political allegiances, according to village gossip, carries a handgun. Buddhism is a religion of silence no longer. Loudspeakers pollute the environment around them every morning as monks conduct noise warfare with the mullas in their midst. In one instance in Kandy so much loudspeaker noise was created on a

full moon day in a powerful Buddhist temple frequented by a minister that someone phoned the monk to protest. Soon a party of about fifty laymen lead by the chief incumbent monk, drunk and armed with clubs, entered the house of a University professor threatening him with death and challenging him to report him (the monk) to the police, if he dare. And my friend dared not. Monks can with impunity encroach on government land and build temples; they can take over archeological sites for the same purpose and though there are laws against such actions I have not heard of one instance where a monk had been taken to court for them.

Newspapers constantly report of extraordinary violence towards women; and underworld gangsters are committing acts of highway robbery virtually everyday and now, not surprisingly, these acts are imitated by high school kids who have been taught Buddhism as a subject for public exams and have come to be bored with it. Underworld drug barons and thugs are part of the teams of all political parties; they are recruited sometimes as security personnel for senior politicians. Underlying all of this are the problems of a stagnant economy, rendered nearly bankrupt by years of ethnic warfare, huge population increases with poor prospects of employment or underemployment for vast masses of people. These conditions in turn led to the devastating brutalization of the society in the late 1980s with the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist JVP youth insurrection; appropriately it has been designated as the *bhisana kalaya* or period of dread. Not only were the most fearsome and degrading crimes committed by the JVP but the Government counter action in suppressing the movement was as brutal. I believe it is the JVP era and government counter-terror that resulted in the degradation of life in Sri Lanka and a major cause of the current culture of violence.

Let me get back to the disorder in the Order. Monks are almost overwhelmingly recruited as children from rural areas, initially as little child novices. It is not surprising therefore that monks share some of the psychic characteristics of the lay-folk around them, though I think that the majority of monks, like the majority of ordinary folk, are decent persons, even though not very learned in the scriptures. Village monks continue to perform an indispensable role in Buddhist society but they simply lack self criticism and the leadership potential to lead a new Buddhist reform movement. On the contrary many of the articulate monks and lay-folk carry on the self-delusion that everything seems fine with Buddhism and expect the government alone to solve the grievances of Buddhists. Scapegoatism is rampant in the population: not only is the LTTE blamed for the ills of the nation but Christians also bear that burden and sometimes expatriate scholars. Such widespread self-delusion is not surprising in times of social malaise and anomie.

Given the fact that there is no real character differences between monk and laity and the fact that increasingly the gap in styles of life are also being blurred, one would expect monks also to engage in radical, even violent politics. And because monks belong to all major political parties (and this includes the JVP) one would expect them to respond to the political message of secular parties which is hardly the message of the Buddha. But in comparative perspective Buddhism does not do too badly: though nationalist monks and layfolk remain politically vociferous, they are not as violent as those warrior ascetics in India today and murderous Hindu mobs in Gujarat; and the ones who have been influenced by Muslim ideas of jihad are very few in number, the exception being Elle Gunavamsa, a monk, who believes that those soldiers who die for the motherland will achieve nirvana.⁽¹⁾ Though the chauvinist sentiments of monks have been partially responsible for radicalization of the Tamils and also to the continuity of the present ethnic war, one must see their current responses not in isolation, but in

relation to the violence and atrocities committed by the LTTE, especially their (the LTTE) killing of Buddhist monks and novices going on pilgrimage, the attacks on civilian populations, and the more recent attack on the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy to name a few of the provocations. However, one would think that if monks and laity were sensitive to human suffering (as they ought to as Buddhists) they would not be opposed to the current peace moves. Fortunately, many leading monks have approved of the peace process and are willing to give it a chance though not the youthful monks from the JVP and the fledgling Sinhala Urumaya (Sinhala birthright) party and those representing all sorts of Buddhist organizations. Having vented my spleen I can now get to my main theme of nationhood and identity in the pre-colonial Sri Lanka!

Imagining a Buddhist "Whatever"

I will deliberately refrain from employing terms like "nation", "nation state" or even "state" to describe the situation in pre-colonial Sri Lanka. For the moment I want to bracket these words from the Western lexicon and tentatively substitute "whatever" instead, till I have presented the empirical material. Let me begin by saying that whatever "whatever" meant the idea of sovereignty was clearly recognized in Sri Lankan kingship. It was an ideological construct, a fiction, though a very significant one. Even minor kings who had effective control over only a miniscule area (such as the Tamil kings of Jaffna after the 15th century) claimed sovereignty for all of Sri Lanka. In reality the provinces could often asserted their autonomy though they paid ideological homage to the "seat" of sovereignty wherever it was located. For most of ancient and medieval history the province of Ruhuna in the south was a virtually independent kingdom, an ideological replica of Anuradhapura (and later Polonnaruva) of the *rajarata*, "the royal province," so named because the seat of sovereignty was located there. In the Kandyan period -- after the

15th century -- Buddhist kingdoms approximated what Tambiah has called "galactic polities," but, as far as the Kandyan kingdom was concerned, kings had considerable control over the provinces, especially through land grants combined with the frequent transfers or dismissals of provincial governors.⁽²⁾ Hence the characteristic of all these Buddhist polities: structurally disparate, yet ideologically imagined as a unified Buddhist "whatever."

For the most part the center was politically unstable: yet the ideology of a Buddhist "whatever" was fairly constant, and implied that the legitimate goal of sovereignty entailed the union of the whole island under the aegis of a single ruler. Hence the three texts of the Mahavamsa give prominent place to the sovereigns who effected the ideal in the practical polity -- Dutthagamani (161-137 BCE), Vijayabahu 1 (1070-1110 CE), Parakramabahu 1 (1153-1186 CE) and the last king to unify the island, Parakramabahu VI (1411-1461).

Let me now give some content to the "whatever" that I started with and that is some notion of ideological unity that transcends the fragmented and multiple notion of the "state." How then is this ideological unity conceived and expressed in the popular Buddhist imagination?

1. According to the first book of the Mahavamsa written in the sixth century, the Buddha, flying through the air by virtue of his supernormal powers, landed in Sri Lanka three times, chasing demons to a distant isle known as giri dipa ("rocky isle" or "island city") and settling a dispute among contending naga ("snake beings") kings living in the north and converting them. He visited places that later became sacred sites: Kelaniya near Colombo and Mahiyangana in the northeast where his collarbone relic was later enshrined.⁽³⁾ In his third visit he placed his foot on the top of the spectacular peak known as Samantakuta (Sumanakuta), named after the guardian of the peak, Sumana or Saman,

later to become one of the guardian deities of Buddhist Sri Lanka. The myth of the Buddha's visits is rarely contested. Its significance is also clear: the island has been cleared of malevolent demons while the benevolent nagas are converted to the true religion. Major religious centers have been sanctified by his presence and his foot is indelibly inscribed on Samantakuta, later to become the most important pilgrimage site and exemplary center for Buddhists. It is as if the land is consecrated as a place where Buddhism will flourish, as virtually all historical texts recognize.⁽⁴⁾ The land is made ready for the coming of the founding ancestor of the Sinhala, Vijaya.

2. Vijaya ("victory") was the son of Sinhabahu, a parricidal king who killed his father, a lion, and then married his own sister, and lived in Sinhapura ("lion city") in northern India. Owing to his violent and unlawful behavior, Sinhabahu banished his son by putting him in a boat with seven hundred of his followers. Vijaya landed in Sri Lanka on the very day the Buddha passed into final nirvana; thus Vijaya, the "victor", is the secular counterpart of the other victor or jina, the Buddha himself. What the Buddha is to the spiritual realm (sasana), Vijaya is to the "secular" realm. This is one reason why the name Vijaya is given to the founder of the first Buddhist kingdom (in the Mahavamsa and the earlier Dipavamsa history), and not the name "Sinhala" by which he is known in virtually all non-Sri Lankan texts. The Buddha entrusted Sakra (Indra) to protect Vijaya, and Sakra delegated this task to Visnu, who blessed Vijaya when he landed by tying a Buddhist protective charm on his person. Visnu (Upulvan), like Saman before him, became one of the guardian deities of the land and a future Bodhisattva. Vijaya married a demoness named Kuveni whom he subsequently betrayed; from this union sprang the Vaddas the "aboriginal" hunters of Sri Lanka (many of whom to this day claim Vijaya as their ancestor). Subsequently, in a formal ceremonial, he married a princess from South Madurapura (in the Tamil country, distinguished from North Madurapura, the land of

Krsna). There were no heirs from this marriage, and Vijaya's brother's son was brought from Sinhapura to take over the kingship.(5)

This is the foundational myth for Sri Lankan history and it is an inescapable part of the historical consciousness of the Sinhala. Modern scholars have scarcely noted the fact that it is a myth of ethnic separation and integration. The land is consecrated and cleansed of evil spirits by the Buddha for Vijaya to land; the hunters are descended from Vijaya but by an illegitimate union, and hence outside the pale of legitimate kingship and Buddhist history and civilization. The Tamils are affines; they do not inherit the dynasty; it goes back to Pandu Vasudeva, whose name resonates with that of the protagonists of the Mahabharata. Yet, unlike the Vaddas, the Tamils are not only kinfolk but also co-founders of the nation. This aspect of the myth has been almost completely forgotten or ignored in recent times. The rest of the Vijaya myth appears everywhere and is so powerful that virtually everyone treats it as an empirically "true" beginning of Sri Lankan history.

These foundational myths provide political legitimation for the dominant group, justifying the essentially Buddhist nature of the place, Sri Lanka. These founding myths proliferated Sinhala culture from the sixth century onwards, in popular myth, ritual dramas on the village level, in ballad literature and right into modern theatre. Few are ignorant of these and modern empiricist historians treat them as at least a symbolically correct account of the migration and colonization of the country by those funny people, the Aryans, introduced into our local histories by 19th century European historians, archaeologists and other mythmakers. These kinds of charter myths are found all over the world, in almost every culture, but here they are given Buddhist validation.

3. Village rituals, whether for gods or demons, virtually everywhere, often start with a standard phrase:

Sasiri bara, me siri laka

Heavy with prosperity, this blessed Sri Lanka.

Take the implication of this phrase: it does not express a geographic conception at all, but an imagination of a place. While people had little knowledge of anything like modern physical geography, there is little doubt that for many this place was surrounded by an ocean. This fixity of the land mass had important implications that I shall deal with later. Within this imagined space there is an internal geography recorded in kadaimpot or boundary books that parallels the cosmic geography of Buddhist texts.⁽⁶⁾ In addition there were even more fluid territorial domains of the various gods of the pantheon.

4. Following the preliminary incantation quoted above, the Buddhist hierarchy in this place of Sri Lanka is recounted in ritual texts, as in the following stanza:

The noble refuge of the Buddha

The refuge of the Dhamma the taught

And the jewel of the Sangha

With piety we worship these Three Refuges.⁽⁷⁾

Then the great guardian gods are named, followed by a list of minor local deities who exhibit considerable regional variation. Thus, though the rituals might vary in content and form from region to region there is a recognized a pan-island hierarchy of named deities, specifically the Buddha and the guardian gods who act as protectors of Buddhism, the state and the place, Sri Lanka. These stanzas occur in village bali and tovil (planetary and exorcistic) rituals all over the Buddhist and Sinhala speaking parts of the nation. They cannot be historically dated with any accuracy but from the Neville catalogue of

ritual texts in the British Museum it seems that they emerged in their present forms around the 16th century and were written in what one might call "modern Sinhala". But it is likely that similar ritual formulas existed much earlier. The imagined place has a cosmography, if not a geography, in which an overlapping hierarchy of Buddhist deities were allocated territories and propitiated at their ritual centers.

When one moves from these village rituals for gods and demons into Buddhist temples there is a strong standardization of rituals and prayers for the Buddha, in spite of different types of monk orders and fraternities. The Buddha figure is also internalized in the conscience of believers as a benevolent figure, an almost maternal one, though he is formally recognized as a male. This standardization is made possible because Buddhist temples and monks (and other kinds of Buddhist religious virtuosos) are everywhere present and accessible to all. Buddhist temple frescoes also indicate a strong tendency towards the standardization of popular Buddhist stories. This is not surprising given the fact that Buddhism has been for a long time, a kind of fetishized "book religion". Even when people did not go on distant pilgrimages they often did move outside their villages into other areas when visiting kinfolk, or during military service or for trade purposes. Once out there one might visit a temple or shrine for the gods (the two often located in the same place). At the Buddhist temple there are few boundary problems, except sometimes for few of the lowest castes. Most people perform standardized prayers and ritual acts because there is a sense in which they share a common "salvation idiom" derived from Buddhism. In my view a common "salvation idiom" takes the place of Western print capitalism in the formation of a trans-local communal consciousness.

5. One of the fascinating problems to emerge from the imagination of place is the two fundamental ways of designating it -- as Lanka or Sri Lanka and as *Sinhaladipa*, "the island of the Sinhala". In my

reading of literally hundreds of ritual texts I have not come across one instance of the country being called other than Lanka or Sri Lanka (Siri Laka), except when foreign gods or traders come to these shores and hail it as the country of the Sinhala (sinhaladesa). With few exceptions Sri Lanka also seems to be the almost exclusive form of self designation in Sri Lankan historical texts like the Mahavamsa, except for Tambapanni, which coexists with Sri Lanka in the earlier portions of these narratives.⁽⁸⁾ In the foundational myth, when Vijaya lands in Sri Lanka and asks Visnu for the name of the island Visnu tells him: "The island of Sri Lanka."⁽⁹⁾ By contrast outsiders often, if not always, designated the island as Sinhaladipa from which is derived European term Ceylon or Ceilao (or any one of its variations), in turn derived from the Chinese rendering of Sinhaladipa. So is it with Serendib, the Arabic rendering; and Ilam, which the Tamil guerillas nowadays identify as their homeland ironically means "Sinkalam", "the country of the Sinhalas," according to the Madras Lexicon. ⁽¹⁰⁾

A tenth century Nepalese painting refers to a hospital known as the Sinhaldvipa Arogyacala Lokesvara.⁽¹¹⁾ A very important outsider reference comes from the Mahayana text, the Saddharmapundarika. In this text the Buddha Gautama himself was born as Sinhala, a merchant of Sinhakalpa and the son of Sinha (the lion). Sinha and his five hundred followers go in search of precious stones when they were shipwrecked off the coast of the island of Tamradvipa (Tambapanni). They were rescued by celestial nymphs who were in fact demonesses, planning to devour the crew. Sinhala married one of them but he was warned by a magic light about his imminent danger; and then informed him that a white winged horse named Balaha will take him and his comrades to safety but no one should open his eyes until they have landed on the further shore. They did as they were bid but all the merchants except Sinhala, smitten by desire and longing, opened their eyes only to drop into the ocean and consumed by the demonesses. Sinhala's demoness-

wife appeared in Sinhakalpa and complained to the father about Sinhala's betrayal of her. The father would not listen to the son's admonishing and instead married her. The demoness brought her companions from Tamradvipa and soon devoured the king and other members of this family. The people then proclaimed Sinhala as their king. Sinhala succeeded in banishing the demonesses into the forest; in commemoration of this event Tamradvipa was named Sinhaladvipa.(12)

The major sections of the *Saddharmapundarika* was composed before the third century CE, according to Har Dayal;(13) but the section in which the Sinhala episode is mentioned -- the *Karandavyuha* -- was probably composed around the fourth century CE, that is, before the *Mahavamsa*. In any case one can be confident that the naming of the island as Sinhaladipa was an old naming convention by outsiders. Yet, how does one interpret this differential naming procedure? In my interpretation, the divergent terminology indicated that the people living in this place were sensitive to internal ethnic differentiations whereas outsiders adopted a more simplistic naming procedure after the dominant ethnic group. Take the foundational myth of Vijaya: in it the primary outsider ethnic group is the Vaddas even though later the Tamils seem to consume the Sinhala historical imagination. It therefore seems to me impossible for the Sinhalas in ancient times (perhaps at any point in the precolonial period) to maintain that their nation was Sinhaladipa or the land of the Sinhalas, when it was obvious to them from their own ongoing origin myth that the land also belonged to the Vaddas. And if we ignore the foundation myth which only has self-referential significance and go into prehistoric archaeology, it is clear that various groups, including hunters and gatherers ("Vaddas"), existed here long before the Sinhalas.(14)

The propensity for a group to see itself as internally differentiated is nothing unusual. It is also the case with traditional kin

groups like clans (and modern corporations like universities); outsiders see it as a single entity whereas the insiders are sensitive to the complexities of internal differentiation and, as far as clans and lineages are concerned, the differences between the perceptions of insiders and outsiders are given terminological recognition.(15)

6. All these cultural expressions permit the plurality of Sinhalas to imagine themselves as "Buddhists." Yet is imagining a community all that is necessary to create a sense of belonging to a community that transcends local boundaries and allegiances? Contrary to Benedict Anderson I think there are no "concrete communities": all communities are imagined but imagined in different ways.(16) The ethnographic or historical task is to describe the manner in which communities are imagined. But this is not sufficient: the imagined community even that of a modern nation must be "concretized" in a variety of ways -- in parades, national events, collective gatherings ranging from football to political meetings and so forth. Unlike Durkheim's Australian aboriginal corrobori,(17) these concretized gatherings of modern nations permit mass vicarious participation through their refractions in the media; and these media presentations in turn bring into question the very distinction between imagined and concrete. These diverse representations are intrinsic to the imagining of modern nationhood and they nourish it. The question I pose in respect of Buddhism is this: how is this sense of belonging concretized in the Buddhist case in pre-colonial times prior to the development of mass communications? I suggest that, in addition to the participation in common rituals (a "salvation idiom") in village temples, there is the crucial mechanism of the "obligatory pilgrimage" which I will now describe with an example from Rambadeniya, an isolated village in the northeastern hills of Sri Lanka where Stanley Tambiah and I did fieldwork in 1958-60. (18)

In Rambadeniya, after each harvest, villagers will gather together in a collective thanksgiving ritual for the gods known as the adukku ("food offering"). During this festival the priest of the deva or deity cults (never the Buddhist monk) pays formal homage to the Buddha and the great guardian deities and then actively propitiates the local gods, especially their main deity known as Bandara Deviyo (Bandara means "chief" rather than "king", the term reserved for the guardian gods). These rituals help define the village as a "moral community" under the benevolent care of Bandara Deviyo. Once every year, however, some of the villagers go to the great pilgrimage center of Mahiyangana, about thirty-five miles away, which the Buddha himself consecrated by his presence. As we proceed through the forest we hang branches or twigs on trees sacred to local deities, implicitly acknowledging that we are no longer under the care of our local deity but under the aegis of another whose *sima* or boundary we are now crossing. In a matter of a few hours other villagers taking different pilgrim routes join us and there is a literal and dramatic expansion of the moral community which ultimately becomes a vast sea of heads as we reach Mahiyangana. Right along we sing religious songs mostly in praise of the Buddha, since this is the shared idiom that makes sense in the context of an expanded community. At the pilgrimage site we bathe in the river and purify ourselves and pray to the two guardian gods represented there -- Saman and Skanda -- and then worship the Buddha and perform exclusively Buddhist rituals. An important shift in allegiances has occurred: villagers have temporarily renounced their parochial local deities and are united under the common worship of the Buddha and the guardian gods. The once separate and discrete moral communities now lose their identities in the larger moral community of Sinhala Buddhists.

A powerful act of concretization has occurred fostering the imagination in a special way, reinforcing and nourishing ideas of being Sinhala and Buddhist that a person has learned by simply living in his

village community and participating in its round of activities. Concretization is a physical, psychical and imaginative experience, as Durkheim rightly noted.(19)

The trip to Mahiyangana is but one station in an ideal pilgrimage round of sixteen, a number that comes to us from at least the 18th century.(20) Rambadeniya folk rarely made it beyond Mahiyangana in 1968, but all did make it to Mahiyangana some of the time.(21) The obligatory pilgrimage makes it possible for us to identify the "whatever" that eluded thus far: it is *sasana*, a term that could be loosely translated as the Buddhist "church". By contrast "nation" is an alien word that has no parallel in the Sinhala lexicon. It is *sasana* that takes its place. In the doctrinal tradition *sasana* refers to the universal Buddhist community or church that transcends ethnic and other boundaries. This meaning coexists with another meaning that is found in post-canonical historical texts: *sasana* is the Buddhist "church" that is particularized in the physical bounds of the land consecrated by the Buddha -- in the present instance, Sri Lanka. Here then is the word we were looking for: it is the *sasana* of Sri Lanka or, for most purposes, simply, the *sasana*. *Sasana* in a particularistic sense is locked into what one might call Buddhist history; *sasana* in a universalistic sense is locked into the Buddhist doctrinal tradition. This tension between the two meanings of *sasana* is intrinsic to Buddhism. Thus King Dutugamunu, the hero-king who has been resurrected in contemporary Buddhist religious nationalism, fights the Tamil unbelievers not for the glory of sovereignty but for the glory of the *sasana* -- in its entirely particularistic sense. Sinhala had no term that could be translated as "nation;" they had a term that belonged to the same polythetic class as nation, namely *sasana*.

Taming Otherness: the Collective Representations at Mahiyangana

The Buddhist *sasana* in Sri Lanka is not what we imagine it today. I have shown its transformations in colonial times particularly in the 19th century in what I have labelled Protestant Buddhism (or Buddhist modernism, if you prefer that term). In contemporary discourse in Sri Lanka the main dialectical opposition is between Sinhala and Tamil; most Sinhalas are Buddhist and most Tamils are Hindu. Sinhala Buddhists self-consciously feel that the nation has been historically a Buddhist one and that the main oppositional conflict was between Tamil-Hindus and Sinhala-Buddhists. I have myself made a case for such a dialectical opposition but now I want to introduce what I believe is the more fundamental structural opposition in Sri Lanka that has had a long historical run, namely, between the Vadda hunters and Sinhala Buddhist agriculturalists, in effect a distinction between Buddhists and non-Buddhists that has profound implications for our understanding of Buddhist history up to at least the 18th century.

Vaddas are today a remnant of a few thousand "aborigines" scattered in the area around Maha Oya near Mahiyangana. My current research shows however that Vaddas were a ubiquitous presence and that groups labeled "hunters" were everywhere in the island. While I cannot detail that research here let me present some accounts that suggest their pervasive presence before the 18th century. The first is an invocation known as *vaddan andagahima* or "the roll-call of the Vaddas," the idea being to ask them to participate in that part of the *kohomba kankariya* (a Sinhala post-harvest ritual) known as the *vadi dane*, "the alms giving of the Vaddas." The text starts with asking the god of Santana to bring blessings on the audience; *santana* is of course the mountain of *hantana* in Kandy and the god is known to the Sinhalas as *Hantane Deviyo* and to the Vaddas as *Hantane Maha Vadi Unnaha*, "the

venerable great Vadda of Hantana". However, contemporary Vaddas no longer associate him with the mountain of Hantana; his domain at the beginning of this century is Mavaragala in what is now known as the Vadda country or Bintanne. The Vadda god of Hantana has retreated from Kandy and his shrunken abode is now in what is considered Vadda territory proper. Yet, the text of vaddan andagahima suggests that the Vadda country proper was practically coterminous with the Sinhala country of the Kandyan kingdom. In two texts of vaddan andagahima, one edited by Charles Godakumbura and the other by Mudiyanse Dissanayake, over ninety Vadda villages are mentioned; no reference is made to Vaddas living in the province of Sabaragamuva (lit. the villages of hunters) either. Some of the areas where Vaddas lived are familiar to those living in and around Kandy: the text mentions Vaddas from Asgiriya, Bogambara, Hantana, Batalagala, Gomiriya, Maturata, Hunnasgiriya, Lower Dumbara, Kotmale, Nuvara Eliya, Kehelgamuva, Urugala. Needless to say, these are all Sinhala (and estate Tamil) areas today. These lists are by no means exclusive: but they are almost always from the area around Kandy, the North Central Province, the Dumbara and Kotmale valleys and Uva. For us Matale would be unthinkable as a habitat for Vaddas because its present inhabitants are mostly Sinhala, followed by later immigrants into the region, Muslims and estate Tamils. Yet the *Matale Kadaimpota*, or the book of boundaries of the Matale district" written around the mid-17th century presents an entirely different picture. In this account the king of Matale, Vijayapala, the older brother of Rajasinha II, summoned a leading chief and asked him to name the denizens (lit. men and animals) of Matale and the reply was: "Lord, there are only three [noble] houses in the district of Matale" and when the king asked what these houses were, "Lord, there is Kulatunga Mudiyanse of Udupihilla, Vanigasekere Mudiyanse of Aluvihara, Candrasekere Mudiyanse of Dumbukola [Dambulla], [and then also] Gamage Vadda and Hampat Vadda of Hulangamuva. And when the king asked who are there in the lands beyond (*epita rata*): Lord on the other

side of the steep waters (hela kandura) of Biridevela, there is Kannila Vadda guarding (hira kara hitiya) at Kanangamuva, and Herat Banda guarding at Nikakotuva, and Maha Tampala Vadda guarding at Palapatvala, Domba Vadda guarding at Dombavela gama, Valli Vadda guarding at Vallivela, Mahakavudalla Vadda guarding at Kavudupalalla, Naiyiran Vadda [some texts Nayida] guarding at Narangamuva, Imiya Vadda guarding at Nalanda, Dippitiya Mahage [a female] guarding an area of nine gavuvus in length and breath in the district known as Nagapattalama, and Makara Vadda and Konduruva employed in the watch of the boundary (kadaima), Mahakanda Vadda guarding the Kandapalla [today's Kandapalla korale], Hempiti Mahage guarding Galevela, Baju Mahage guarding the Udasiya Pattuva of Udugoda Korale, Minimutu Mahage guarding the [same] Pallesiya Pattuva, Devakirti Mahage guarding Melpitiya"(22) A.C. Lawrie's Gazetteer of the Central Province compiled at the end of the 19th century has references to over thirty Sinhala villages that were once Vadda according to local histories.

Consider the implications of this information. The Vaddas mentioned above have names which suggest a variety of social backgrounds: you have Vaddas that have lineage names like Gamage associated with members of the ordinary farmer (goyigama) caste. There are names that might well be unique to Vaddas of this region because they are not recognizably Sinhala ones, for example, Imiya Vadda, Makara, Hampat, Konduruva. One Vadda, Herat Banda, has a straightforward Sinhala name; and in Lawrie's list there are two Vaddas named Herat Bandara which normally one would think were simply Sinhala of "good families." Three Vaddas have the word "Maha" or chief or a similar term attached to their names suggesting persons of great importance, such as Huwan Kumaraya, "Noble Prince". Then there is Kadukara ("sword-weilding Vadda") of Bibile whose name suggests expertise in swordsmanship. Most fascinating are the five Vadda

"Mahage" of the Matale boundary book, that is, women who are heads of presumably Vadda villages and also engaged like their male counterparts as guards at watch posts, contradicting all of the latter day information of Vadda women as shy creatures kept under strict protection by their men-folk. The tradition of female Vadda chiefs is indirectly confirmed by Lawrie who mentions a Vadda woman Ambi as the founder of Ambitiyava village. Now for the final thrust: Lawrie refers to a Vadda King of Opalgala who married the daughter of a Sinhala king, Vira Parakrama Bahu, a strategic alliance between two kings. His son was significantly named Herat Bandara in Sinhala aristocratic style and he founded the village of Udugama and was perhaps the ancestor of distinguished Kandyan aristocrats, the Udugamas and Ellepolas. It therefore seems, that as far as the Vaddas of Matale are concerned, they were as internally differentiated as the Sinhalas though they probably did not have anything approximating the latter's caste system; and some were clearly already adopting high status Sinhala names.(23) I have recently been collecting unpublished popular palm leaf manuscripts from the 17th to the 19th and some of these texts indicate that Vaddas were everywhere in the nation though no estimate of numbers is possible.

In the minds of the Sinhalas contemporary Vaddas are associated with the desolate region of Bitanne, north and east of Matale. Yet historical sources indicate that Bintanne-Alutnuvara (the "new city of Bintanne") was a crucial stopping point for the king and for foreign visitors and local officials on their way to the east coast and back. Alutnuvara, as the term implies, was one of the alternative capitals of the king when he moved out of Kandy, known then and now, as Mahanuvara, "the great city".(24) A Dutch account of 1602 gives a fascinating description of the great temple of Alutnuvara (Mahiyangana) and the ceremonies and bustle associated with it.(25) \

Vaddas were fiercely loyal to the King and not only had easy access to the Palace (addressing him in familiar terms as "cross-cousin") but also were part of the Palace guard (and the guard of important royal officials). During the revolt against the British in 1818 the Vaddas were steadfastly loyal to Dorai Swamy, the Tamil claimant to throne (while Sinhala aristocrats were betraying their country). It was a Vadda aristocrat, Kivulegedera Mohottala, later deified, who was the major resistance fighter against the British. After the two rebellions of 1818 and 1848 were brutally squashed by the British the once impressive Alutnuvara simply became another "ruined city" and the larger region of Bintanne was designated as the region of "primitive" hunters and gatherers.

Let me now get back to the foundation myth according to which Vijaya married Kuveni and later banished her and his two children by that marriage. We noted that out of this union of brother and sister sprang the Pulindas ("hunters", that is, Vaddas). The myth implies that the Vaddas are kin of the Sinhala through Vijaya, yet are separate from them, having been banished into the forest and living by hunting, a very un-Buddhist profession. The charter myth for the opposition between hunting and Buddhism is known to most Buddhists and is first presented in the Mahavamsa, which describes the Buddhist saint (arahant) Mahinda flying through the air and landing in the mountain of Mihintale where the king (Devanampiyatissa, 250-210 BCE) was out hunting. Not only was the king converted but the place of this archetypal wrong act became a meditation site for the first monks and a center of Buddhist worship and pilgrimage. These myths have no literal truth value but they illustrate the manner in which Vaddas were perceived by the dominant group as an alien community in their midst, even though linked to them by historic and economic ties. This notion of likeness and difference is beautifully expressed in the dramatic ritual known as the vadi perahara ("procession of the Vaddas") performed during the annual

festival at Mahiyangana, the Bintanne-Alutnuvara already mentioned. Like the footprint of the Buddha in Sumanakuta Peak in the wilderness of hunters or Sabaragamuva, the Buddhist shrine indicated the hegemony of the Buddhists over the Vadda hunting population. Today, alongside this Buddhist stupa (relic chamber) and temple, there are also shrines for Saman and Skanda, major gods common to both Sinhala and Vaddas. My description of the Vadda procession is based on the rituals I witnessed in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In one of these rituals I counted seventy-one Vaddas carrying poles representing spears who line up near the shrines of the god Saman and Skanda, led by a "chief" carrying a bow and arrow. After circumambulating the shrine three times in a graceful dance, the Vaddas suddenly increase the tempo and, at a signal from the chief, start hooting, yelling and brandishing their spears and terrifying the assembled Sinhala spectators. They stage several battles in front of the shrine by "assaulting" it, striking their spears on its steps. They then run toward the Buddhist temple and try to enter the premises of the stupa, where the Buddha relics are enshrined. Here their path is blocked by two gate keepers (*murakarayo*) who shout, "You can't approach this place. Go back to the royal altar" (*rajavidiya*, the altar of the guardian deity). These mock battles are repeated several times and end with the Vaddas placing their "spears" gently against the stupa and worshipping it. They then run towards the monks' residence (*pansala*), stage a battle there and as at the stupa end up by worshipping the assembled monks. Then, from the monks' residence back to the shrine where they again perform a "battle" beating their spears against its stone steps until the spears break into small pieces; and finally they fall prostrate on the ground to worship the gods housed in their shrine (*devale*). After this they run toward the nearby river ("the ferry crossing of the gods") and bathe and purify themselves. Returning to the shrine, calm and self-possessed, they are now permitted to enter the inner sanctum where the Sinhala priest (

kapurala) chants an incantation for the gods Saman and Skanda and other major deities, and blesses the Vaddas by lustrating them with "sandal water". The ritual ends with the Vaddas all shouting haro-hara which in Sri Lanka is the paean of praise for the god Skanda, the great guardian deity of Sri Lanka and formal overlord of both the Vadda and the Sinhala pantheon.

The difference in the social functions of the rituals performed by the Sinhala and the Vaddas at Mahiyangana are impressive. In the case of the Sinhala there are no rituals that separate one group from the other: all the assembled Sinhala form one moral community participating in common worship at Mahiyangana. In the case of the Vaddas, the rituals define their status in relation to the dominant religion in that they are prevented from entering the temple and stupa . Though they are made to formally acknowledge the Buddha, they are clearly outside the community of Sinhala-Buddhists. Yet they are not total strangers either; after initially resisting the gods Skanda and Saman, they finally acknowledge the fact that these deities also head their own pantheon. Further, it must be recognized that the guardian deities, are not only protectors of the Buddhist religion: they are also protectors of the secular realm. The Vaddas are incorporated into the "state" structure; not into the Buddhist "nation" or sasana symbolically represented in the stupa . Their incorporation into the political order of the Kandyan state is recognized in another part of the vadi perahara ; the Vaddas rub their bodies with honey and then cover themselves with cotton wool. Honey is the substance they used to collect as the king's due or rajakariya ; it is likely that some Vaddas were also the suppliers of cotton cultivated in forest clearings or small garden plots. We know both from Knox and from early Dutch accounts that cotton was a crucial local industry, later destroyed by British colonialism. Supplying cotton must have been an important historical role for some Vaddas and this is

recognized in the foundation myth itself which says that when Kuveni first met Vijaya she was spinning cotton.(26)

The level in which the Vaddas are incorporated into the larger symbolic order shared by both communities is not on the level of Buddha worship but that of the guardian deities. In the present time the great guardian god that unites Vadda and Sinhala (and both with Tamils) is Skanda who is the overlord of the Vadda pantheon (the Mahavamsa evidence suggests that in ancient times it was the god Saman). This integration is given further symbolic validation in the mythology of Valli Amma, who was adopted by the Vaddas as a child and became Skanda's illegitimate spouse or second wife. Rituals and practices at Kataragama recognize the Vadda connection in many ways. For example, prior to the present enbourgeoisment of Kataragama it was permitted to sell venison (the pure meat for the Vaddas) near the shrine premises and venison was also offered as part of the adukku or meal given to the god. Similar techniques of articulating Vadda with Sinhala was practiced in village rituals. Thus, in Sinhala communal post-harvest thanksgiving rituals, including the kohomba kankariya mentioned earlier, there is a sequence called the vadi dane (Vadda alsgiving) or vadi pujava (the Vadda offering); it is likely that this too was an attempt to bring in Vaddas into the Sinhala-Buddhist ritual scheme of things on the village level. In some rituals there are actors who represent Vaddas and they are permitted to eat meat substances, not in reality but in mimesis. Whereas no meat, cooked or otherwise, was ever brought into the ritual arena by Buddhists. As I interpret it, the vadi pujava, like the previous rituals, is a mechanism for incorporating Vaddas into the religious and social structure of adjacent agricultural communities while at the same time recognizing their separateness. For Buddhists these rituals like the procession of the Vaddas at Mahiyangana was a way of recognizing their own separate identity as members of the *sasana* in opposition to those who are not.

The Creation of Axiomatic Identities

In our previous discussion I made the point that Buddhists had a conception of a trans-local cultural consciousness that was conceptualized in the notion of *sasana*. Our conception of *sasana* is a "form of nationhood" constructed by the ethnographer on the basis of a phenomenological reality existing in Sri Lankan culture and consciousness. Not so with "identity" which is a conceptual invention of the analyst. There is no word that resembles "identity" in the Sinhala lexicon. So with the concept "axiomatic identity" which in my usage refers to those statuses and social positions that one takes for granted and which carry an important though varying emotional investment, the root of which is "birth." Thus "son" is a "status" or "position" in the conventional sociological sense of a bundle of rights and duties; as an *identity* however it is associated with "birth" together with emotional investments of various kinds, such as feelings of filial piety as well as all sorts of ambivalences. As a status it is taken for granted; but this taken-for-granted-ness can get a jolt if, for example, I begin to question whether my father deserves my love or whether fatherhood is not a bourgeois institution that ought to be abolished, and so forth. The questioning of axiomatic identities, precisely because of their taken-for-granted quality, can be profoundly troubling and agonizing. Axiomatic identities are woven into one's sense of worth, wholeness (Erikson's "ego identity") and well-being. When one talks of an axiomatic identity one can also examine the processes whereby an identity is created, reproduced, broken, changed and reconstituted. Thus the Freudian Oedipal crisis is, among other things, a process whereby an identity crisis pertaining to the axiomatic identity of son-ship takes place. The processes or mechanisms that help create identity formation can also be depicted, such as the "introjections" of paternal values and "identification" with the father.

I do not want to make a sharp distinction between individual and group identities for the individual does not stand alone but is related as brother, sister, father, spouse and so forth to a larger entity, the family, and, I might add, to even larger structures like lineages and clans.⁽²⁷⁾ While recognizing the fuzziness of these boundaries let me nevertheless, for heuristic purposes, refer to group identities that also have an axiomatic quality, as, for example, caste identities; or lineage identities; or that of ranks such as aristocracies; or, in the largest sense, that of modern nations; or even the emerging forms of transnational identities like that of an universalizing Islamic cultural consciousness; or that recent formation struggling to emerge, namely, European-ness. In all of these cases axiomatic identity is an end-product or consciously or unconsciously sought as one. Yet this end-product did not emerge out of the blue; there had to be a lot of work to create it. Even when the axiomatic identity is one that is already in place it must be reproduced or recreated or refashioned according to changing socio-historical circumstances. Axiomatic identities need not necessarily produce intolerance, though that possibility always exists for some identities. To say one is French is certainly to say one is not Dutch or English; it need not be a statement about enmity. However in times of crises such as wars or football games, the axiomatic identity gets an infusion of passion and commitment; and it gets sharpened in opposition to an equally simplistically defined and opposed Other. Thus strengthening-weakening is a dialectical process inextricably associated with axiomatic identities. Naturally these processes depend on historical circumstances that must be contextualized for each case.

I noted that the critical feature of axiomatic identity is birth : it is the one incontestable feature of any kin relation or membership of a lineage, caste or nation and so forth. Thus the popular word for caste in many South Asian languages is *jati* which means "birth". The modern word for "race" is *jati* ; when Sinhalese think of themselves as a nation

they also use the term *jati*. The etymology of the European word "nation" is also birth. What modern nationhood has effected, as Eugen Weber shows for France, is to refigure the idea of "birth" associated with axiomatic identities by transfusing it into a larger domain, namely, nation -- an enormously difficult and complicated work of culture.(28) Being born into a group identity is in fact the critical mechanism that renders an identity axiomatic. In European thought an identity associated with birth is "natural", a cultural idea that has resonances in other traditions. In Europe the outsider who adopts an axiomatic identity of a citizen of a nation state has therefore to be "naturalized."

Parallel with this is another notion in modern nationhood: birth is not in any place but in a particular "land." Yet such metaphors are also found in the pre-colonial Sri Lankan case: this blessed isle, this Sri Lanka -- blessed by the Buddha himself as a place where the *sasana* will flourish. In modern times even more powerful familial metaphors are invoked in both nationalistic and ethnic discourses everywhere: *patria*, fatherland, and motherland. In the latter instance the violation of the land is associated with sexual violation and rape of the mother. *Patria* is associated with juridical rights that have to be defended in the name of the father, often associated with duty. Both can lead to an extraordinary level of violence, as we can see in modern ethnic and nationalist conflicts.

The precursor to violence is the passion that one associates with nationalist cultural identity. This is why I find Anderson's attempt to divorce nationalism from racism, and patriotism misleading; you can have racism without nationalism but as a special kind of axiomatic identity sharing family resemblances to nationalism, it can easily spill over to the latter. Let me phrase the issue in another way. Some scholars, following Edward Shils, have dealt with the resurgence of "primordial loyalties" in the non-Western discourses on nationalism and

fundamentalism, replacing or coexisting with, the earlier equally pejorative term "tribalism." In the West, we are told, these primordial loyalties have been replaced by the more rational discourses of nationalism. The position I take is very different: "primordiality" is a sine qua non of nationalism, and, as the work of scholars like Linda Colley and Eugen Weber have demonstrated, it was an essential condition in French and English nationalism, both based on opposing identities, rooted in two religions, Protestantism and Catholicism. By contrast, primordiality in the sociological imagination is the idea that a particular identity comes from a long past, evoking passionate (xenophobic) responses which are almost innate (primordial). But in my view, this is not something confined to "the rest" by the West: whether it be tribes threatened by other tribes, or religious sects warring with each other, or nations in a similar situation, make not the slightest difference because primordiality has to be culturally constructed and fostered through wars and other mechanisms and hooked into the historical consciousness of a group through the myths and literary products of an age ranging from serious literature to jingoistic national anthems such as "La Marseillaise." Primordiality is the spirit or "geist" of a nation that German romanticists like Fichte have fetishized.⁽²⁹⁾ It might be submerged under certain conditions, let us say in times of peace or prosperity, but it is to be reawakened when an axiomatic identity is threatened -- be it an oedipal, tribal or national or even a transnational one. And often enough a negative view of primordiality is projected on to the Other as we can witness once again today, for example in the notion of an evil empire or axis of evil, or the demonization of ethnic groups by the majority community and vice-versa.

As far as Buddhists are concerned the tension between the two meanings of sasana resurface in the historically constructed and then essentialized and primordialized axiomatic identity. Buddhist soteriology denies any enduring reality to the body or the self: the

doctrine emphasizes the fluctuating and senseless nature of all structures of existence. Therefore an axiomatic identity in Buddhist soteriological terms is a kind of "false consciousness." Nevertheless such an identity (or rather what it substantively stands for) is the self-perceived "true consciousness" of Buddhist history and lived existence in different periods of its history, particularly when the *sasana* cum nation is under threat. It is therefore to be expected that in Buddhist history there will occur a continual Buddhicization (i.e., a *sasanization*) of South Indian groups, including their gods, magical practices, language and texts, which if translated into the European language game is a form of life that is akin to "naturalization." Viewed in long term historical perspective Sinhala have been for the most part South Indian migrants who have been *sasanized*. It is interesting to note that *sasanization* embraced most but not all the castes in the Sinhala system. *Sasanization* has been facilitated by the relative absence of contestation by immigrant groups in areas dominated by Sinhala speech communities. A parallel process perhaps took place in the northern peninsula which, after the 15th century at least, was controlled by Kerala and Tamil peoples who in their own way assimilated previous Sinhala speakers.(30)

Because an axiomatic identity is often given at birth it may seem to us ready made, as it were. Yet, this initial birth assigned nature of an axiomatic identity, while intrinsic to its character, is only a formal feature. Axiomatic identities have to be learned and this can be a complicated process. Take even a simple case. I am born as a son, but this is not sufficient to create an axiomatic identity because I have to learn the rights and duties and the affective ingredients that go to constitute son-ship in my culture. Again: the puberty rites that we know from many preliterate societies give content, meaning and affective valence to the idea of belonging to a particular kinship and social group, helping to create an axiomatic identity or identities through special kinds of learning experiences, some none too pleasant. Thus, an axiomatic

identity is an end-product and an ideal condition, whether we are talking about a kinship or "tribal" status or the cultural identity of being a member of a nation. If the cultural identity Sinhala-Buddhist is an ideal condition that can be realized as the end-product of a variety of socializing strategies and cultural practices, then one can legitimately speak of this identity as existing in a variety of imperfect conditions in situations where such strategies did not exist. Let me give an example. Rambadeniya from where I embarked on my pilgrimage is Sinhala; there is no question of it because that is the language they speak and it is their self-conscious identity. Yet there was no Buddhist temple there in the late fifties; neither was there any in Gangahenwela, a nearby hamlet; nor in some of the other villages in the area. On important occasions Rambadeniya folk invited the monk from the nearby village of Atanvala to perform religious ceremonies like pirit (paritta, special text recitals) and they had a sermon hall or bana maduva for this purpose. It struck us that Rambadeniya folk, though Sinhala, were not fully incorporated within the frame of Buddhist culture at that time. For example, all of them used to hunt and this was considered a noble activity. On one occasion, on Vesak day itself, the headman of the village used poisonous herbs to kill the fish in the local river, something unthinkable in most Buddhist villages. The memory was still strong of a time when, the night prior to the holding of a Buddhist ceremony or pinkama, they had to have a ritual to ask the "forgiveness" of the yakku (nowadays meaning "demon").⁽³¹⁾ I felt that this society was a one time culturally close to those of the Vaddas in whose proximity they now live. And it is Vaddas who use the term yakku without any pejorative connotation, as for example when they call their dead ancestors na yakku ("kinfolk deities"). Thus, it was likely that Rambadeniya was a Sinhala speaking non-Buddhist village, or a purely formal Buddhist village, which now has become, imperfectly even at the time of our field work, a Sinhala-Buddhist one.⁽³²⁾ Here then is a situation where sasanization had been going on for some time. I think this is no isolated example and one must

therefore see sasanization as an ongoing cultural process. I think it is necessary to now apply this insight to the texts that we considered previously and show them as cultural products that assisted this ongoing process, the topic of our next discussion.

Restoring History and Indeterminacy in Cultural Identity

Because axiomatic identities have a paradoxical character of being seen by people living in a society as essentialized or primordial and seen by the analyst or a detached outsider as something culturally constructed, it is time to put this notion back into the vortex of history from which it was abstracted earlier by considering Richard Helgerson's *Forms of Nationhood* which shows how the emerging sense of national consciousness in England was supported and given literary expression by several Elizabethan writers -- poets, historians, dramatists, philosophers, travel writers, and compilers of Apocalyptic texts. Helgerson says: "To men born in the 1550s and 1560s, things English came to matter with a special intensity both because England itself mattered more than it had and because other sources of identity and cultural authority mattered less."⁽³³⁾ To rephrase what I think Helgerson is saying: these Elizabethan texts might give you an account of the cultural identity of "Englishness;" but more importantly they are diverse and sometimes opposed ways of constructing such an identity. For example, in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (popularly known as the "Book of Martyrs" and running into 2314 pages), the church is both universal and particularistic, very much like the Sinhala concept of *sasana*. Foxe and other apocalyptic thinkers, argues Helgerson, created an imagined community of Protestant martyrs who in a sense existed outside the state. Yet, he also supplies the evidence and arguments for later thinkers for whom Protestantism and Englishness are inextricably linked.⁽³⁴⁾ If Foxe is the apocalyptic thinker, the legalistic

Richard Hooker is the "apologetic historicist" in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. But Hooker, like other Elizabethan writers, also tried in his own way to create the idea of an English nation which, in his case, should not conflict with the state. "We hold that ... there is not any man of the Church of England but the same man is also a member of the commonwealth; nor any man a member of the commonwealth which is also not of the Church of England."⁽³⁵⁾ Thus different visions of the English national and cultural identity were being created by a variety of writers. The end product of these activities is to foster or to begin to create an axiomatic identity of being English. After the union of the England, Scotland and Wales in 1707, it was additionally being British that were being created as Linda Colley shows in her book, *Britons: forging the nation*. The subtitle of the book has a double significance that Colley perhaps misses; it is creating nationhood as in a forge and also practicing a kind of forgery or a fabrication of the nation.

Now we can I think get a better insight into the historical "texts" written by monks. The *Mahavamsa* is not just a text that gives us information on Sinhala-Buddhist identity; much more importantly it is a text that helps to create such an identity in a way that the previous chronicle, the *Dipavamsa*, did not. And central to that process of identity creation is the hero, Dutthagamani Abhaya (161-137 BCE), the man who conjoins the land or the place, Sri Lanka, with the sasana, already blessed by the Buddha as a place where the Dhamma will flourish. And when the anguished king asks the monks what consequences will befall him for having killed millions of people, the monks reply, that no real sin has been committed by him because he has only killed Tamil unbelievers, no better than beasts. And more gratefully the *Mahavamsa* monks assign Dutthagamani a place in heaven in the proximity of the next Buddha, Maitreya.

The Mahavamsa then attempts to forge the nation in the double sense of that term. The historical period in which this forging took place is not the time of Dutthagamani but the time in which the Mahavamsa was composed, namely the sixth century CE. From that time on, it seems to me, the process of forging went on with its ups and downs, as in other nations. It seems futile to construct an omnipresent Sinhala-Buddhist identity on the basis of the Mahavamsa, as it is to deny its non-reality. We will never know how widespread this identity was during that period. However, the evidence from the graffiti scribbled on the mirror wall of the mountain fortress of Sigiriya suggests that Sinhala people from distant places were meeting each other in pilgrimage centers between the eighth and twelfth centuries and this communion was spurred by a common language and script.⁽³⁶⁾ By the time the popular literature of the thirteenth century was written, there seemed to have developed a language and script which is remarkably close to modern Sinhala. One of these texts is the Pujavaliya which has an extraordinary account of the Sinhala-Buddhist identity in its thirty-second chapter entitled *uddesika puja katha* which is a synoptic history of Sri Lanka from its very founding. Let me render this text into reasonable English.

Sri Lanka in non-Buddhist times (*abaudhakalaya*) was entirely the home of demons (*yaksas*) but during the dispensation of the Buddhas (*baudhopadakalaya* , lit., when Buddhas arise or are born) by humans. Several previous Buddhas at their very enlightenment controlled (or destroyed) the *yaksas* and the country became home to humans; other Buddhas actually visited this country, defeated the *yaksas* , and established the *sasana*. Since during the enlightenment of countless Buddhas, the right branch of the Bodhi tree and the *dhammadhatus* ("essence-teaching") will no doubt be preserved, this island of Lanka is like a treasury of the Triple Gem [that is, the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha]⁽³⁷⁾. Just as the demons could not find permanence here, neither can this land become a place of residence for non-believers (

mityadrusti gatavunge vasaya). If any non-believer becomes a king of Sri Lanka by force, at any time, that dynasty will not last owing to the special influence of the Buddha. Because this Lanka is rightfully those of kings who have right views [Buddhists], their rightful dynastic tenure (kula praveniya) will absolutely prevail. For these various reasons the kings of Sri Lanka are drawn by a natural love of mind to the Buddha, and will establish the sasana without delay or neglect and protect the wheel of the law and the wheel of the doctrine and reign so that the rightful dynastic tenure will be preserved.(38)

The text adds that in the time of the very first Buddha of our kalpa, Kakusanda, this land was called ojadvipa , that is, the land that contains the creative life force or ojas . At that time Anuradhapura was called Abhayapura and the king was Abhaya The Buddha Kakusanda, knowing the great meritoriousness of its citizens and spurred by great kindness (karuna), accompanied by a retinue of 40,000 noble monks flew through the air and landed at the mountain named devakuta , that is, Mihintale. The text describes the citizens who gathered there making offerings to the Buddha; the various sacred spots in Anuradhapura were consecrated by the Buddha Kakusanda during that visit. These visits were repeated by the other Buddhas of the age (kalpa), namely, Konagamana, Kasyapa and finally our own Buddha, Gautama.(39) I cannot analyze this extraordinary text here in any detail except to suggest that it outdoes the Mahavamsa in its myth of an eternal return, namely, that this land is a Buddhist one consecrated by the four Buddhas of our age (kalpa) and some Buddhas of previous ages. There is no question that non-believers can last here; only Buddhist kings have just tenure. In doctrinal Buddhism the sasana in the soteriological sense of that term can only be established by a Buddha; here the sasana defined as Buddhist history is established by Buddhist kings. In my view this statement is more important than the Mahavamsa one because it is written in Sinhala and accessible to ordinary laypersons either through

direct reading or through public recitals or monk sermons. Yet, it too has to be seen in historical context. The Pujavaliya was written soon after the devastating invasion in 1214 of Magha of Kalinga (in Orissa). These invasions combined with historical forces that made coastal trade lucrative resulted in the movement of Sinhala civilization to the southwest. There is a desperation in the tone of the text; hence its preoccupation with the eternal return of Buddhas to Sri Lanka. Anuradhapura has already been abandoned as the capital; hence the nostalgia for it and the idealization of that city.

Now let me deal with an interesting problem that arises from our reading of both the Pujavaliya and the Mahavamsa . It is indeed the case that to be Sinhala is ipso facto to be Buddhist: they are twin facets of the same identity. Yet, on the other hand, to be Buddhist is not necessarily to be Sinhala because some people knew, particularly the monks who wrote these texts, that there were Buddhists who were not Sinhala. The question is: which facet of the twin identity is the dominant one? The Mahavamsa , and most certainly the Pujavaliya , are clear that it is Buddhist side of the identity that is dominant. I think the reason is not too far to seek: the emphasis on the Buddhist aspect of the identity would make a lot of sense to monks because they had continual historical contact with South Indian Buddhists; the Tamil country itself contained urban centers of Buddhism during this period. It is hard to believe that there were no Tamil Buddhist communities in Sri Lanka among them those who invaded the island and were being assimilated into the social structure of their neighbors. And we know that as late as the middle 15th century there were Tamil monks studying in Sri Rahulas Buddhist College (*pirivena*) at Totagamuva and Tamil itself was part of curriculum there.

Let me now move from historic texts back into the folk traditions and focus on contemporary ritual dramas, versions of which I think must

have occurred right through the nation's history. The basic scenario common to all these ritual dramas is as follows. In the ritual arena two performers take the role of the Buddhist guardian deities of the island. They hold a stick that acts as a barrier and also as a kadavata, literally an entrance to a "city gate", but, at another level of symbolic remove the entrance to Sri Lanka itself. An alien deity or magician or merchant (or groups of them) try to break thorough the barrier and enter Sri Lanka but the gods prevent them. These aliens speak a funny kind of Sinhala with a strong Tamil accent and they constantly utter malapropisms, unintended puns and spoonerisms. In their ignorance they make insulting remarks about the gods at the barrier; they know not Sinhala and Buddhist customs and the audience has a lot of fun at their expense. Gradually the alien visitors recognize their errors of speech and custom; they learn to speak properly; they begin to properly worship the deities and acknowledge the superiority of the Buddha. Then the gods open the barrier and these aliens enter Sri Lanka.

I think these rituals give symbolic expression to a important historical process: the foreign visitors are "naturalized" as Sri Lankan Buddhists; and only then can they be "citizens" and permitted to perform *rajakariya* or "work for the king," the legitimate right of citizenship. These ritual performances parallel what I have previously described and dubbed as "colonization myths" -- myths that describe the arrival and incorporation of South Indian people into Sri Lanka and their subsequent Sinhalization and Buddhicization (or better still their sasanization).(40) In my work on the goddess Pattini I have shown how the ritual texts of these migrants were soon translated into Sinhala.(41)

The Pujavaliya then is in sharp contrast to these ritual dramas found in large areas of the Western, Sabaragamuva and Southern provinces. Here we see foreigners with Tamil accents and alien gods being converted into Sinhala Buddhists. The emphasis in these village

rituals is on both aspects of the identity; it is ordinary people in these areas who had to contend with immigrants of all sorts from South India; for them it would make sense that the identity Buddhist also implied Sinhala. The universalizing of the unconditional identity, Sinhala=Buddhist, with the primary emphasis on the first part of that duality, namely being Sinhala, is the product of the colonial period.

Unfreezing Tamil-Hindu Otherness

In today's ethnic conflict the Tamils, at least in the abstract, are the primary Other for many Sinhalas; the feeling is mutual as far as the Tamils are concerned except that for the latter there also exists the hated Muslims in their own midst. It is a mistake to think that this is a primordial conflict rooted in the nation's history. The fact that history imagines a Buddhist *sasana* in the island of Sri Lanka does not mean that the Tamils were exclusively depicted as enemies. So was it in other nations where national or ethnic identities surface in history. One must therefore avoid two kinds of "prejudices." First, one must avoid the European language game which often defines "Otherness" as a radically exclusive conception. One can be an "other" in respect of some specific defining feature or attribute but not in respect of another. Second, the contemporary Sri Lankan prejudice which, in recreating the past from the present, have read the *Mahavamsa* simply as a text that represented the Tamils as enemies who should be destroyed. One might disagree with Paul Ricoeur that written texts get frozen in time; but textual freezing can certainly happen during ethnic conflicts in the era of print capitalism.

Yet a critical reading of the *Mahavamsa* itself and, more generally, a broader look at the Sinhala-Buddhist imagination, suggest that Tamils (the generic Sinhala terms for South Indians) appear in history in a variety of ways that I have discussed in an earlier article and which I shall now briefly summarize.(42)

I assume that during periods of invasions from South India Tamils were viewed as hated Others by a plurality of Sinhala-Buddhists. The colonization myths and ritual dramas that I have mentioned bring both invaders and the many peaceful immigrants who do not appear in history into the frame of a larger Buddhist culture and social order. But Tamils were also historically allies of the Sinhalas; Sinhala kings sought the aid of Tamil kings in their local conflicts. Some kings fled to India to seek the aid of their Tamil allies while others cemented alliances by marrying Tamil queens. But there was no consistency in this latter project either. In some periods in history the popular imagination records that the offspring of Tamil queens were illegitimate or inferior to Sinhala ones; this is reversed at other times. These marriage alliances were not only a historical reality for both commoners and kings but they also refract back into the foundational myth giving legitimacy to intermarriages for, according to that myth's proclamation, the union of Vijaya and his followers with the Tamils from Madurapura produced the Sinhalas. Thus Sinhalas have Tamil blood, since "blood" is bilaterally inherited in Sinhala genetic theory.

Tamils can be kings, though subsequently Sinhalized and brought within the frame of the Buddhist sasana. Some of the greatest Sinhala kings had South Indian origins, though not necessarily from the Tamil country: for example, Nissanka Malla (1187-1196), Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1741-1780) and Bhuvaneka Bahu VI (1469-1477) who, as Sapumal Kumara, was one of the great heroes of the Sinhalas and, ironically, the conqueror of the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna!⁽⁴³⁾ One of the most persistent historical images of "Tamils" (from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Orissa) is as sorcerers and ritual specialists. Even today in spite of the enormous hostility to them some of the most popular shrines for Buddhists are the Kali temples at Munnesvaram, near Chilaw north of Colombo, and in the city of Colombo itself, both controlled by Tamil priests. In Colombo there are Tamil priests who have recently set up an

institution for reading nadi vakyams , astrological sheets written in Tamil, supposed to have been compiled by rishis thousands of years ago containing the horoscopes of most human beings of the past, present and future. These are enormously popular with Buddhist middle classes and even monks patronize these priests for horoscopic readings. It is also well known that past presidents and prime ministers have consulted astrologers from South India for the timing of most state events and the solution of personal crises and anxieties.

I am not suggesting that these images of Tamils were consistently operative, but some were operative all the time in the pre-colonial period. Some images, such as Tamils as enemies to be vanquished, must have surfaced during invasions from South India while at other times marriage and affinal connections must surely have been important. One also cannot assume that these diverse images did not imply that Tamils were not seen as "others", because their language and customs were in fact not Sinhala and also often not Buddhist. "Otherness" was not a total exclusion but rather a series of identity boundaries that tended to be fuzzier in some periods of history than in others. This can be illustrated during the period of European invasions beginning with the Portuguese in 1505 till the capitulation of the last Sinhala kingdom of Kandy to the British in 1815. During much of this long period the "Otherness" of the Tamils hardly surfaced (with one important exception to be discussed later); instead the new enemies of the sasana were the Europeans.

Let me illustrate this with one vignette from around 1558 when the Sinhala king Mayadunne of Sitavaka waged war against his nephew Dharmapala of Kotte (near Colombo). Dharmapala himself was sympathetic to Catholicism and was baptized in 1557 and ceded his kingdom to the Portuguese king in 1580. The Franciscans were busy proselytizing in the coastal areas and in 1556 about 70,000 persons of the karava (fisher) caste, along with their leaders, became Catholics in a

mass conversion organized by the Franciscans. "Even more disastrous was the donation of all the lands belonging to the hallowed temples of the Buddhist faith to the Franciscan order with all their revenue to be expended to the colleges and seminaries established by them in the Island. The temple complex at Kalaniya [one of the holiest places for Buddhists] on one side of the river and the Dalada Maligawa [the temple containing the tooth relic] on the other side of the river at Kotte were to be transferred to the Franciscans."⁽⁴⁴⁾ In this historical situation, da Silva Cosme points out, it was possible for Mayadunne to "pose as a champion of Buddhism." "An eminent Buddhist monk took up Mayadunne's cause and so did a renegade Portuguese Buddhist ... [and] it was argued and harangued in public that Dharmapala had forfeited his right to the throne the moment he embraced Christianity just as Christian princes of the Catholic faith did the moment they became heretics. ... Some of the monks stepped into Kotte and fomented trouble at bana [sermon] preaching at night. Dharmapala and Diogo de Mello and the bodyguards stepped out of the palace to investigate and met a surging crowd led by Buddhist monks. A hail of stones injured the royal face."⁽⁴⁵⁾

da Silva Cosme's information is derived from Father Queyroz's voluminous history and is rare in the published historical literature. ⁽⁴⁶⁾ But it surely must have been more general. It also meant that Tamil Otherness was replaced by the Portuguese (and later by the Dutch and the British). There was one exception though: from the reign of Rajasinha II (1635-87) Sinhala kings of the Kandyan kingdom obtained queens from Madurai and eventually these Telegu and Tamil speaking Nayakkars became such a powerful force in the court that they eventually took over the kingship with the accession of Sri Vijaya Rajasinha in 1739 and stayed on till the fall of Kandy to the British in 1815 during the reign of the last Nayakkar, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha. Yet, the Nayakkar kings not only learnt Sinhala but they also embraced

Buddhism. One of the greatest kings was Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747-82), a patron of Buddhism who was instrumental in sending a mission to Thailand to bring monks to revive the Buddhist ordination that had lapsed during the period of conflict with the European powers. In spite of his contribution to the Buddhist cause, Sarankara, the Buddhist patriarch (*sangaraja*), in conjunction with some members of the aristocracy, planned his assassination (which failed). There is much historical evidence to show that some monks and laity were opposed to the Nayakkar on the grounds of Tamil alien-ness symbolized by their daubing themselves with holy ash, an action that indicated a commitment to Saivism than Buddhism. I am certain that the Nayakkar period produced debates regarding the moral legitimacy of the Nayakkars, some emphasising their Tamilness and others their lack of genuine commitment to Buddhism. (47) But it is as likely that the vast majority of the Sinhala simply viewed them as Buddhist monarchs and was loyal to them. It is doubtful whether there was anything like popular discontent against them, except in the case of the last king, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha. Sri Vikrama was installed as king by the first minister Pilima Talava who had royal ambitions himself and tried to negotiate with the British (who had control over the maritime provinces they had seized from the Dutch) to usurp the kingdom. This did not work. The historian Paul E Pieris has a detailed account of the intrigues of the Kandyan chiefs with the British and the British manipulation of the weaknesses of these chiefs.(48) Further, the British had an astute spy in John D'Oyly who learned Sinhala and fomented the discontent in the kingdom, explicitly exploiting the foreign-ness of the Nayakkars and their lack of political and moral legitimacy. At the very most the historical evidence reveals that the last king of Kandy was unpopular with some segments of the population but this did not imply a resurrection of a primordial Sinhala-Tamil enmity.

Conclusion

In this paper I try to make a case for the idea of a Buddhist "nation" in pre-colonial political formations in Sri Lanka. For the most part Sinhals took for granted that they belonged to the *sasana* of the Buddha; such a stance implied an identity "Buddhist" even though there was no indigenous term designating such an identity. Being Buddhist constituted a "axiomatic" identity which takes its bearing from a fundamental structural opposition between "hunters" or Vaddas who were not Buddhist and Sinhala who were Buddhists for the most part. Nowadays the Vaddas exist as small dispossessed groups labeled as "aborigines" by scholars as well as ordinary people. Though I did not deal with it here, my general argument would be that Vaddas gradually became Sinhala-Buddhist when the vast area of the Western, Sabaragamuva, Uva and Kandyan regions were converted into rice cultivation after the fifteenth century consequent to the emergence of Buddhist states in those areas.

Additionally, I demonstrate the further structural opposition between Tamils and Sinhals that was exacerbated during periods of wars. This oppositional structure was frozen in written historical texts like the Mahavamsa and Pujavaliya and unfrozen in other ways that I mention in this work. On the popular level people had to contend with immigrants of all sorts from South India and I describe briefly the ways they were "sasanized" and incorporated into the larger cultural order. After the arrival of the European powers it was the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British who were the enemies of the *sasana* for most Sinhals. But while many Sinhals became Christians we have only glimpses of Europeans, especially Portuguese, who intermarried with Sinhals and eventually became Buddhist.

How the preceding argument is linked to the current ethnic conflict cannot be elucidated here but I hope that others would. My main

argument would be that after the British colonization of the Island, particularly after the late 19th century, the identity Sinhala began to take precedence over the Buddhist. This is not surprising because after the colonial periods there were many Sinhalas who were not Buddhists. But while the Sinhala identity was primordialized, even for some Buddhist monks, one must not assume that it was necessarily an instigator of violence. For example, the violence against the Tamils in 1983 that in turn led to the escalation of the ethnic conflict was the work of the Jayawardene government of the time and was entirely politically motivated. In spite of my preface one can see some hopeful signs: after the 1983 riots there has been a progressive decline of violence against Tamil civilian populations by the Sinhalas, even when the provocations by the LTTE have been acute. Yet on the minus side the intransigence of extremists on both sides of the divide will surely make the current peace moves a complicated and vulnerable process. And part of the problem lies with those who claim to be Buddhists and this includes monks who seem to have forgotten or ignored the teachings of the founder.

Endnotes

(1) For an excellent account of this monk and the whole issue of the new Buddhism of Sri Lanka, read H. L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Return to text.

(2) Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Renouncer and World Conqueror*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976. Return to text.

(3) The *Mahavamsa* states that during his first visit the Buddha, on the urging of the god Sumana (now known as Saman), gave some of his hair for enshrinement at this stupa; after the death of the Buddha the collar bone relic (according to Wilhelm Geiger) or the Adam's apple (according

to G.C. Mendis) was enshrined. See Geiger *Mahavamsa* , p. 5 and p. 303, note by G.C. Mendis. Return to text.

(4) *Mahavamsa* , pp. 1-13. Return to text.

(5) *Ibid* , pp. 51-61. Return to text.

(6) *Kadaim pot* literally means the "books that deal with the limits or borders of a *kadavata* ", the latter meaning an entrance to a city or a specified domain. Return to text.

(7) This incantation is as follows in Sinhala:

Utum budu ruvane

Lova desu daham sarane

Samaga sanga sarane

Sada vandimuva metun sarane . Return to text.

(8) *The Dipavamsa* , 9.1 has it thus: The island of Lanka was called Sihala, after the Lion (Siha), trans. Hermann Oldenberg, New Delhi, Asia Educational Services, reprint, 1982, 160 Return to text.

(9) *Mahavamsa*, ed., Wilhelm Geiger, p. 55. According to the foundation myth, the Buddha entrusted the king of the gods, Sakka to protect his sasana in Sri Lanka; and Sakka in turn entrusted this task to Visnu. Sakka is known in Sinhala as Sakra, a transformation of Indra of Hindu mythology. Return to text.

(10) It is one of the ironies of ethnicity that the Tamils want a separate state of Ilam, which means "Sinhala country;" while the Sinhala want to hang on to Lanka which is derived from "ilankai" the Tamil word for "island." Return to text.

(11) Cited in John Clifford Holt, *The Buddha in the Crown* . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 79. Return to text.

(12) A detailed account is available in John Holt, *The Buddha and the Crown* , 48-51. For another fascinating account of this myth and a related one, see mid-seventh century text, *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions* , fascile xi entitled, Simhala, trans., Li Ronxi, Berkeley: the Numata Center, 1996, 323-33. Return to text.

(13) Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* . Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978, reprint of 1932 edition, 382. Return to text.

(14) For information on the prehistory of Sri Lanka, see S. U. Deraniyagala, *The Prehistory of Sri Lanka* , parts 1 and 2. Colombo: Archaeological Survey Memoir, Vol., 8, 1992. Return to text.

(15) Apropos of Sinhaladvipa it must also be remembered that in the colonial period people in the maritime provinces referred to the remote parts of Uva and Sabaragamuva, as Sinhale. Thus: "I am going to Sinhale" was a familiar expression even in my childhood. I think this too is a variation of the old theme. By this time the resistance to the foreigner was by the people of these areas, and they were thus appropriately designated as Sinhale. In the twentieth century, the term Sinhale had connotations of "old fashioned," "remote," not unlike the European term "primitive." Return to text.

(16) Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* . London and New York: Verso, 1983, 74. Return to text.

(17) Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* , trans., Joseph Ward Swain. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954, 205-234. Return to text.

(18) I draw heavily upon my article, "The Buddhist Pantheon in Ceylon and its Extensions" in Manning Nash, ed., *Anthropological Studies of Theravada Buddhism*, Cultural Report Series, No. 13. Detroit, Michigan: The Cellar Bookshop, 1966, 1-26. In using the term "obligatory pilgrimage" I was influenced by Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Muhammedan Festivals*. New York: Schuman, 1951, 15-51. Return to text.

(19) Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 209-219. Return to text.

(20) Wilhelm Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in Mediaeval Times*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1960, 207. Return to text.

(21) The "obligatory pilgrimage" also has an important political function in fostering a sense of a larger consciousness in Buddhist societies as it did in Chaucer's England:

And specially from every shires ende

Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,

The hooly blisful martir for to seke,

That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke. It is very likely that these obligatory pilgrimages set the stage for the later development of a more powerful sense of nationhood in Elizabethan England. Return to text.

(22) H. A. P. Abeyawardana, *Kadaim-pot vimarsanaya*. Colombo: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1978, 223-31, my translation. Return to text.

(23) A neat example of this shift comes from the *Matale Kadaimpota* which refers to Kulatunga Mudiyanse of Udupihilla. Udupihilla, now practically a suburb of the town of Matale, was founded by Vaddas and the present farmer castes are their descendants, according to Lawrie, vol., 2, p. 858. It

seems likely that Kulatunga Mudiyanse of Udupihilla, a Sinhala aristocrat, is a descendant of Vaddas. Return to text.

(24) Others were Madamahanuvara, Hanguranketa (Jayatilaka pura) and Nilambe. In times of war Kandyan kings moved into these alternative capitals. Return to text.

(25) This account says that "the old Emperors used to hold court as it is a beautiful city where there are many large streets, beautiful buildings and wonderful pagodas or heathen temples and among others there is one whose base is 130 paces round, extraordinarily beautiful, very tall In it is also a beautiful and large palace of the Emperor full of beautiful buildings within. Here the best galleys and *sampans* of the Emperors are made. Here are also many shops but no market, stone monasteries and a great many bamboo [bark?] houses which stretch for a mile or two in distance along the river. *Francois Valentijn's Description of Ceylon* , translated and edited by Sinnappah Arasaratnam (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1978), pp. 152-53. Another account: "it is "one of the most beautiful cities of the entire island where everything that one thinks of can be obtained." Return to text.

(26) I am not sure how far one can go in interpreting the mytheme of Kuveni spinning cotton. It is obviously derived from an Indo-European one circulating in a vast region because the same mytheme is found in the *The Odyssey* in the episode of the goddess Calypso. However many women in this epic are presented at the looms whereas this representation of women is unusual in Sinhala history. Return to text.

(27) See Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* , in Standard Edition vol. XV111. London: The Hogarth Press 1981, 69. Return to text.

(28) Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* . Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976. Return to text.

(29) See Blandine Krieger, Return to text.

(30) Given our discussion of axiomatic identities and modes of representing the Tamils, it is difficult to accept the positions taken by several leading scholars regarding the attitude to Tamils in Sri Lankan texts. Thus Tambiah, following an important paper by Gunawardana, thinks that the relations between Sinhalas and Tamils were traditionally harmonious until the changes brought about by colonialism and the imperial conquest. By contrast K.N.O. Dharmadasa looks at another set of historical sources to prove the very contrary. Thus each protagonist brings forward historical evidence to advance the hypothesis he favors against the one he opposes. My position is that "evidence" of this sort is indicative of debates that were going on in the society at large and these debates could easily have co-existed at any particular time span. Stated in another way, people could have had *both* views of Tamils at any particular time; or in some periods of history one set of views may have dominated over the other. The debates between these scholars provide evidence of debates in the society at large; they cannot be used as "facts" to vindicate one scholarly hypothesis over another. Even today in spite of the virulence of the ethnic conflict, there are a variety of views about Tamils, though the predominant view is that of the hostile other. I do think, however, that Gunawardana is basically correct in arguing against fixing a specific date for the development of a Sinhala-Buddhist identity or giving it a historical fixity. Return to text.

(31) In many low-country exorcistic rituals, it is necessary to offer a chicken as a *billa* or offering to the demons. In reality this is only a token offering because the chicken is never killed; instead a little bit of blood is taken from it as a substitutive *billa* . In the neighboring village of

Gangahenwela, the exorcist consistently killed the chicken as a *billa* , by cutting its neck off and drinking its blood. These practices are not unusual in rituals known as *nica kula tinduva* , roughly translatable as "low caste sorcery". Return to text.

(32) Such situations can easily be multiplied. There are cultural zones where Tamils and Sinhals met and where intermarriage often took place. One such "intermediate zone" is Panama in the extreme end of the Eastern Province, today sandwiched in the North by Tamil speaking communities and further West by Sinhals. It is not unusual for a see a member of the same family called Hin Banda (Sinhala) and Subramaniam (Tamil), as a consequence of either Tamil-Sinhala intermarriage or a Sinhala woman marrying a Tamil man on the death of her Sinhala husband. Return to text.

(33) John Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 3. Return to text.

(34) *Ibid* , 263 Return to text.

(35) *Ibid* , 277 Return to text.

(36) The Sigiri Graffiti are scribbles on the "mirror wall" of the great mountain fortress, Sigiri, built by the parricide king, Kasyapa (c. 473-491 CE). For an account of these graffiti see Senerat Paranavitana, *Sigiri Graffiti* , vols. 1 and 2. London: Oxford University Press, 1956; for accounts and translations of Graffiti missed by Paranavitane, see Sita Padmini Gooneratne, H.T. Basnayake and Senake Bandaranayake, "The Sigiri graffiti" in *Sigiriya Project: First Archaeological Excavation and Research Report* . Colombo: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1984, 196-98; and an important paper "Sigiri Graffiti: New Readings" in *Further Studies in the Settlement Archaeology of the Sigiri-Dambulla Region* . Colombo: PGIAR Publication, 1994, 199-223. Return to text.

(37) I have translated *dhammadhatu* as "essence-teaching" which is not the conventional meaning of that term. In general *dhammadhatu* is an important technical term that has several meanings, the primary one being "element." See Venerable Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980, 56. Nyanatiloka translates *dhammadhatu* as "Mind-object-Element." I think the *Pujavaliya* does not use the term in its technical sense but in a more literal sense as "essence teaching." Return to text.

(38) Mayurapada Thera, *Pujavaliya*, edited, Pandit Kirialle Gnanavimala. Colombo: Gunasena and Sons, 1986, 746. Return to text.

(39) Ibid, 746-47 Though this part of the *Pujavaliya* is derived from the *Dipavamsa*, written at least a hundred years before the *Mahavamsa*. Unlike the *Mahavamsa* and *Pujavaliya*, the *Dipavamsa* has very little anti-Tamil feeling in it. The heroes of this text are those associated with the founding of Buddhism, the Buddha, the Buddhist king Asoka and his Sri Lankan contemporary Devanampiyatissa. Return to text.

(40) For details, see Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, 306-312 Return to text.

(41) Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, 521-528. Return to text.

(42) Gananath Obeyesekere, "Buddhism, Nationhood and Cultural Identity: A Question of Fundamentals" in *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, volume 5 of *The Fundamentalism Project*, edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 231-56. Return to text.

(43) The Kandyan rulers from the time of Sri Vijaya Rajasinha till the reign of the last king, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha (1798-1815), were South Indian Nayakkars. See, C.S. Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom 1707-1760*, Colombo: The Lake House Press, 1972. Return to text.

(44) da Silva Cosme, p. 78 Return to text.

(45) da Silva Cosme, pp. 79-80. Return to text.

(46) Father Fernao de Queyroz, *The Temporal and Spritual Conquest of Ceylon* , trans., S.G. Perera, Colombo: Government Printer, 1930, 327-37. For other references see, Father Fernao de Queyroz, *The Temporal and Spritual Conquest of Ceylon* , book 2, trans, Father S.G. Perera. Colombo: Government Printer. On page 262 he says of Mayadunne: "... seeing the King of Cota surrounded by a few Portuguese, Madune and Xaga Raja planned this war on the plea of defending the Law of Buddum, and he Candea especially to avenge the death which Tribule inflicted on his Father and Brothers." Return to text.

(47) For details of this debate see Stanley J. Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed* , Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography" in Jonathan Spencer, ed., *Sri Lanka: History and Roots of the Conflict* . London: Routledge, 1990, 45-85; and K.N.O. Dharmadasa, "'People of the Lion': Ethnic Identity, Ideology, and Historical Revisionism in Contemporary Sri Lanka," *Ethnic Studies Report* , 10, no. 1. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1992, 27-59. Return to text.

(48) See especially his two remarkable books, *Tri Sinhala: The Last Phase 1796-1815* . Colombo: The Colombo Apothecaries Co., 1939; and *Sinhale and the Patriots 1815-1818* . New Delhi: Navrang 1995 [1950]. Return to text.

Copyright 2003