War by other Means. Expansion of Simhala Buddhism into the Tamil Region in “Post-War” Īḷam

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Introduction

On May 18, 2009 the Lankan Government (GoSL) officially declared its military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who ran a de facto state in the North and East of Īḷam for nearly twenty years. This victory and the take-over of the North and East were called “second Independence”, with which the territorial control by the Lankan state over the whole of island became total. The Lankan President’s victory speech reflected the imagination of “re-conquest”: where he referred to ancient, medieval and modern invasions that were successfully overcome by great Siṃhala warrior-kings of the island.

We are a country with a long history where we have seen the reign of 182 kings who ruled with pride and honour that extends more than 2,500 years. This is a country where kings such as Dutugemunu, Valagamba, Dhatusena and Vijayabahu defeated enemy invasions and ensured our freedom. The President was awarded the highest honour by the chief saṃgha of the two main Malvatta and Asgiriya Buddhist chapters for his ideological, political and military achievement in defeating the LTTE and “uniting” the island under one rule. His title of the honour was viśva-kirti śrī trisimhalādhiśvara, which means “Universally Renowned Overlord of the Blessed Three Siṃhala Regions”; representing the President as one in the line of ancient epic kings who have united the island against “foreign” invasions. In this way the political and mili-

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1 Īḷam is a Tamil toponym for Lanka. Tamilīḷam is a part of Īḷam in the North-East. Ilaṅkai is a Tamilised form of Lanka.
3 The three Sinhala regions were called Rohaṇa, Pihiṭa and Māyāraṭa, and were
tary leadership of the country is honoured by the Buddhist sāṃgha for reclaiming the whole of the island for Śiṅhala Buddhists. The entire territory of the island is believed to be an essential part of Śiṅhala Buddhism: in this belief—what has been achieved is a return to a glorious past, rather than to a newly constructed present and a future. The ideological marker of this victory—Śiṅhala Buddhist nationalism—has two features, unitary state structure and cultural homogenisation. Thus, the military victory meant reinforcement of these two features over the entire island. In keeping with this ideology, the expansion of Śiṅhala variant of Buddhism into the Tamil region has become one of the highly contentious developments in the “post-war” era. The main focus of the present paper is to examine this expansion, and how the religiosity it propagates is implicated with cultural, socioeconomic, politico/military and geopolitical dimensions. Finally, it intends to highlight certain ethical, legal, religious and ideological/political issues arising from the expansion, and challenges these pose to justice and recovery in the island.

This paper has four parts. First, it will conduct a historical, contextual and conceptual analysis of terms such as expansion of Śiṅhala Buddhism, “post-war” era, Tamil region, etc.

The second part will examine how the 2002 Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) and peace process, between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE—which treated both parties with parity of esteem—was perceived by the Śiṅhala Buddhist nationalist groups as justification of “Tamil invasion” of the Śiṅhala Buddhist land and a gross violation of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country (the only Śiṅhala Buddhist state in the world). The recognition of LTTE on the same level as the GoSL in the peace process was seen as de-legitimising of the unitary state and its accompanying right to

ruled by three different kings at the time of Portuguese conquest in the 16th century. This does not include Yāḷpāṇām kingdom in the North. Out of 2500 years of recorded history – which has been written in vaṃśic literature through a Theravāda Buddhist sectarian perspective – the island has been a set of kingdoms throughout most part of this period. At different periods of 2500 years of history, for about 250 years, there have been kings who claimed authority over other smaller kingdoms in the island. Memory of this short period has become a justification for a perennial existence of a Śiṅhala Buddhist unitary state for 2500 years. The conflicts and wars have been dynastic conflicts some of which were associated with monastic politics. Imagination of the island as a single state structure in vaṃśic literature is part of this monastic politics which has been employed by the colonial and post-colonial practices in modern times to legitimate unitary state structure and Śiṅhala Buddhist cultural homogenization throughout the entire island. See H.L. Seneviratne, *Buddhism, Identity and Conflict* (Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2002).
Siṃhala Buddhist cultural homogenisation throughout the entire island. It is important to understand this opposition for us to analyse the “post-war” expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region which takes place with and after the collapse of the peace process, and the complete military takeover of the Tamil region by the GoSL in 2009. This part will examine the convergence of diverse Siṃhala nationalist groups against the 2002 CFA, and how the religiously defined political imagination of the military campaign against the LTTE gained preponderance amongst the Siṃhala nationalists. One of the notable developments during the peace process was the campaign led by Jātika Heḷa Urumaya (JHU) claiming a Siṃhala Buddhist heritage in the North and East of the county 60–70 % of which came under the de facto state of the LTTE.

The third, and, the major part of this work, will focus on the ways and means (hitherto worded as “types”) of expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region spearheaded by the President, the Prime Minister and the Government, the security forces and the Buddhist monks. This section will carry a considerable number of photographs as evidence of this expansion. The military as an apparatus of the state’s political and ideological power will be analysed.

The fourth part will investigate the ethical, religious and ideological/political issues arising from the close (inseparable?) relationship between, the state, the military, the middle classes and the Buddhist monks.

1 Conquest or “Re-conquest”?

What does expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism mean? The ideological justification for the expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region is based on a collective imagination of nationhood, informed by a belief in the perennial existence of a Siṃhala Buddhist state; where Siṃhala ethnicity, Buddhism, the entire land of the island and the state are seen as inseparable “givens”. In this sense, within the Siṃhala Buddhist nationalist discourse, the expansion is a “re-conquest” whereby the rightful Siṃhala Buddhist heritage is secured through a military victory in the North and East of the island; meanwhile, it figures as a conquest within the Tamil nationalist discourse. In theorising collective imaginations based on ethnic attachments, Clifford Geertz uses the term “givens” not to uphold a conception of primordial essence, but to analyse the collective belief in such an es-
sense by those who live in a particular community. For Max Weber, belief in an ethnic identity does not necessarily form a group with a collective identity. Such belief “facilitates” group formation and gains force within the political field as it “inspires the belief in a common ethnicity” no matter “how artificially” this political community is organised. The process of facilitation and inspiration engages with new interpretations in answer to “who we are and what we are?” determined by the power dynamics of the political community and leads to imagined horizontal communities called nations that are sometimes believed to possess a perennial past. The theoretical debate on the phenomenon of nationalism has mostly revolved around the antiquity or novelty of ethnic ties that inform nationalist sentiments. However, what is more important is to focus on the political dynamics of the essentialist representations (imaginings based on beliefs) of nationhood and its historical process, rather than arguing the novelty or antiquity of these imaginings. As Craig Calhoun points out, the persuasive force of nationalism is not its antiquity, but “its immediacy and givenness” within a particular historical context. What makes a belief believable, is the public acts of its interpretation determined by the power dynamics of the historical context; immediacy arises within these power dynamics.

It is within the immediacy of the socioeconomic and political transformations of the colonial period that the “givenness” of Sinhala Buddhist national identity, with the two aforementioned main features, was imagined. The pre-colonial texts Dipavamsa, Mahavamsa and Cūḷavamsa (“vamsic texts”), that had been written within sectarian and dynastic conflicts, were read as national texts—through positivist view of history initiated by the colonial officers: privileging the Sinhala Buddhists (Aryans) as “true heirs” of the entire land and others, mainly Tamils (Dravidians), as invaders. In this new reading the

6 Benedict Anderson points out how through “print capitalism” nations are imagined as horizontal communities among the people who are not known to one another. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London / New York: Verso, 1991), 42–43.
7 Calhoun Craig: Nationalism (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997), 34.
soteriological and ethical meanings of *dhammadīpa* which means “having the *dhamma* as guiding light” (Pali canonical meaning), and its pre-colonial sectarian and parochial meaning propagated by *Mahāvaṃsa* (post-canonical meaning) where the “island of Laṅkā” was seen as “having *dhamma*” (not only Sinhales, but also Tamils and others could be Buddhists): were transformed into a racialised and territorialised sense of *dhamma*.) With this, other forms of being Buddhist were subjugated. This imaginative ordering of the island’s collective identity and landscape was associated with the physical ordering of the island by the colonial Government. As part of the colonial conquest diverse regions were amalgamated into one centralised state through the building of roads and administrative structures. This centralised state (given constitutional legitimacy in the 1972 constitution which claimed to replace the prior, colonially designed, constitutions) was fundamentally a unitary state: which became necessary for the British Raj to maintain political/military control of the island in ruling the Indian subcontinent. All of the colonial powers considered the island of Laṅka a strategic location in the Indian Ocean; while the emerging Sinhala Buddhist nationalists perceived the unitary state-structure, covering the entire island, to mark its perennial existence - it belonged to them. During the clearing of jungle to build roads, ruins of Anurādhapura, the city-cum-battleground between the ‘sinhala” king Duṭṭhagāmini and “Tamil invader” Elāra of *Mahāvaṃsa* was “discovered” leading to an archaeological, aesthetic and historiographic interpretation of the landscape in a manner that “nationalised Anurādhapura”. Thus, the British Empire was conquering a land, within which another conquest by the Sinhala Buddhists was being set in motion against Tamils and Muslims. Within the immediacy of Christian proselytism, a rationalist interpretation of Buddhism came to the fore facilitated by its Western sympathisers as opposed to the *mythos* of Christianity, Hinduism, and even folk religions within popular Buddhism itself. Those who spearheaded the nationalist discourse belonged to a particular class defined by wealth acquired through colonial plantations, trade, liquor, renting and

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11 Seneviratne, *Buddhism…*, 3.
graphite mining, as well as English-education. They were joined by the Sinhala-educated sangha, village school teachers, ayurvedic physicians, minor civil servants and so forth.\textsuperscript{12}

All the above factors give evidence to the fact that Sinhala Buddhism which is racialised, territorialised and rationalised is interwoven with socioeconomic, political and geopolitical factors. Yet, such colonial construct is believed to be a “given” from time immemorial; given by the Buddha himself to the Sinhala race. This is the pure form of Buddhism that should be protected and propagated. The aim of the “re-conquest” by the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists that has been taking place since colonial times is to regain this imagined past, the ideal society which, in fact, reflects more a projected vision of conquest than a received past as stated earlier. Echoing Anagârika Dharmapâla (1864-1933) who was the pioneering articulator of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism—as a racialised, territorialised and rationalised discourse—on 20\textsuperscript{th} of April in 2012 Inâmaluveda Sumaâgalâ Thera led a mob of Buddhist monks and lay men and women towards a Muslim mosque and a Caiva temple in Dañbulla/ Tampuḷḷai (in the north-central province of Iḷam), demanding the demolition of these religious sites—calling them “illegal” constructions—stated that intellectuals throughout the world (muḷu lōkayēma buddimatun) recognise the greatness of Buddhist dhamma (bududahama), and Buddhists cannot allow their heritage to be destroyed. The Thera’s argument was that no other religious site should exist in the sacred region surrounding the ancient Dañbulla royal temple.\textsuperscript{13} Another monk who spoke at the demonstration said that this demand will be carried out throughout the island, as Buddhists hold the first and foremost position in the country. The demonstrators marched chanting the first stanza of a popular Sinhala song, mē sinhala apagē raṭayi, apa ipādunu mārēṇa raṭayi [‘This is our Sinhala country, the country we were born and where we will die’].\textsuperscript{14}

The process of spatial “re-conquest” that had already begun during the colonial period through the ordering of landscape, initially by


building roads, continued later through Sinhala colonial settlements and restoration of ancient hydraulic works for irrigation in the bordering areas of the North and East as far back as 1920s. Some of these settlements had to be abandoned due to malaria and harsh conditions in the region (called Rājarāṭa “the country of Kings”) that was the historical location of vanśic texts, and was covered with thick forest when the British arrived in the island. However, the process of Sinhala settlements was accelerated in 1930s and 1940s, especially after the granting of universal franchise that led to the formation of state councils in 1931 and 1936. These councils were dominated by majority Sinhala political elite, who pioneered the Sinhala settlements with the support of the colonial Government. They were planters whose acquisition of land in the predominantly Sinhala south had deprived many Sinhala peasants of their land as the population increased. The Sinhala ministers of the state council also carried out a campaign in the 1940s, to restore the city of Anurādhapura and build a new town. Within the existing town area 75 percent of inhabitants were Tamils and Muslims. Some politicians also made speeches glorifying the greatness of Rājarāṭa and its Sinhala Buddhist heritage. The first prime minister of independent Lanka—formerly one of the key ministers of state council under the colonial Government—claimed ancestral relations to the ancient families of Rājarāṭa. After independence in 1948 a new town was built separating it from the newly restored ‘sacred city’. All the residents who were mainly Tamils and Muslims were removed from the ‘sacred city’, and the area became exclusively Buddhist as every other place of worship was removed and their original locations obliterated.

The Anurādhapura that was created in the decades after Independence does not represent a return to any original condition. It was, rather, a new creation—a very concrete manifestation of current ideas about the ancient past and its relation to the present.


17 Wickramasinghe, Ethnic Politics..., 124.

Even though land of the Sinhala peasants was conquered for expansion of plantations, the ideology of “re-conquest” of the North and East supplied “solutions” to landlessness. The landless peasants too were materially absorbed into the imagined past of a pristine Sinhala Buddhist heritage through new Sinhala settlements.

It was the Indian labourers brought by the colonial government who cleared the thick jungles when ordering the landscape so to built roads to facilitate a centralised state, and restore the ruins of Anuradhapura. They were also plantation labourers who were settled in the central province in the island; and who had to be brought by the colonial governments in the initial stage of plantations, as Sinhala peasants already had some arable land and agricultural work in the villages. It is in the second stage, of expansion of plantations, that they lost some land.¹⁹ The wealth that the colonial government accumulated through exploitation of the Tamil plantation labourers was then used to build Sinhala settlements and for the restoration of irrigation works and Buddhist sites in line with the colonial policy of “preservation of the peasantry”. This policy must be analysed within the overall strategy of the British Raj, which necessitated political/military stability on the island for ruling the whole of Indian subcontinent. The belief in Sinhala Buddhist pristine past, as opposed to the others, aptly served the geo-strategic interests of the empire despite the fact that this “givenness” entered into conflict with the immediacy of Christian proselytism associated with the empire. In this sense, the form of Sinhala Buddhism that was propagated was associated with a particular economic (dependent capitalism based on plantations), and political (unitary state) structure which was colonial, and a strategic interest which was imperialistic. It was the British colonial state (unitary state-structure) and its economy that was dominant,—shared by the Sinhalas—while the Sinhala Buddhist “freedom struggle” was geared against the Tamil plantation labourers as early as the end of nineteenth century; the Muslims in the 1910s; and Indian-origin urban workers in the 1930s. Within the emerging nationalist metanarrative Tamil plantation labourers were invaders who defile pure Sinhala Buddhist culture with their Hindu practices, and grabbed land that had belonged to the Sinhalas. Therefore, “re-conquest” continued. After Independence in 1948, a process completing the “re-conquest” was enacted with the abolition of citizenship rights of the plantation sector Tamils in 1948 and 1949, declaration of Sinhala as the only official language in 1956, and thereby, dominance in public

and state sector employment, as well as standardised university entrance in 1971. Post-colonial nation-building—facilitated through Westminster parliamentary democracy of majority rule—meant completion of heretofore partial “re-conquest”. The public face of Sinhala Buddhism has to be understood in light of the discussed socio-economic, political/military, ideological and geopolitical layers of meaning.

What is the Tamil region? In the “immediacy” of the process of discrimination, Tamil nationalist sentiments were formed not on the basis of an attachment to a glorified past, but as a demand for equality and justice against discrimination; evolving from a phase of federalism into national independence. The “re-conquest” of Sinhala Buddhist nationalists was seen as a conquest by the Tamils; and Sinhala Buddhism as its ideological justification. Even though the material and ideological basis of Sinhala Buddhist state had already been built during the colonial period, and reinforced in the post-colonial, nation-building phase, both the unitary state and its exclusivist ideology gained a constitutional status in the 1972 constitution (called the Republican Constitution). It gave primacy to Buddhism, while the process towards such exclusivism was accompanied by violent suppression of Tamil dissent since 1950s. With the completion of “re-conquest” Tamil demand changed from federalism to national independence in 1976. Within the above historical process of oppression, the Tamil region came to be seen as a Tamil homeland that would guarantee the collective rights and aspirations of the Tamils as a people and a nation. Yet, demands made by the Tamil political parties have been seen as part of an invading agenda, one perceived by the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups as a perennial invasion that should be confronted. The core of the Tamil national movement (both unarmed and armed phases) was secular, based on modern principles of self-determination. Counter-violence in the armed phase which targeted several key Buddhist places of worship was tactical, not fundamentalist in the sense of Talibans’ destruction in March 2001 of the two Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan. Here the word tactical means part of an overall political and military strategy. LTTE’s counter-violence directed towards certain Buddhist sites was not based on an intolerant religious ideology, but as a reaction to the close association of these sites with the Sinhala political leadership and the military. These sites became symbolic locations for the unitary state structure which were frequented by the Sinhala political leaders and the military to acquire blessings for their military operations against
the Tamil region. In this way counter-violence directed towards these locations (there have been two main attacks) became part of an overall political and military strategy of the LTTE in facing the war waged by the Lankan state. However, within an imagined past of Tamil invasion these manoeuvres were seen as part of a continuous onslaught against the sole land of pure Buddhism. As the entire land was perceived to be dhammadīpa, the de facto state that the Tamil national movement (led by the LTTE) built in the Tamil region was experienced as conquest by none other than the “enemies of [Siṃhala] Buddhism”. Finally, opposition to the 2002 CFA and peace process, which accorded parity of esteem to both the GoSL and the LTTE, and, the subsequent “post-war” military expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region, may be understood within these power dynamics of imagined past and identity.

What does “post-war” era mean? This phase is often called either “post-conflict” or “post-war”. The term post-conflict is used mainly by governments and NGOs who analyse the conflict as an outcome of the armed resistance of Tamil nationalism. This perspective does not pay attention to the historical roots of Tamil resistance outlined above. While, post-conflict terminology is used in academic literature where there are formal peace agreements and processes, such as of South Africa, Northern Ireland etc. This term could have been used on the basis of 2002 CFA and peace process (to be discussed in detailed in the next section), as there was a recognition for political negotiations to address the root causes of the conflict, but not to refer to the phase after 2009 military victory of the GoSL that consolidated the unitary state-structure and its ideology, which are the root causes of the conflict. The term “post-war” is used to refer to the end of the armed phase of the conflict, but not to the end of the conflict itself. Even though this term captures the reality of the conflict to a certain extent, it also tends to conceal how a war could be pursued by many other means even after official announcement of its end. For example, expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism in the Tamil region is a war by other means. These means pre-existed the armed phase and led to the armed conflict. After the 2009 military victory, they have been intensified so that cultural homogenisation is achieved through a phase of accelerated militarisation and colonisation. Therefore, “post-war” must to be understood with a nuanced meaning. The expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region in this phase could be better analysed by focussing on the power dynamics in the period of the CFA and the peace process. After situating the subject matter within a historical, contextual and conceptual analysis I presently move on to the second
part of the discussion, where I will analyse the power dynamics of the peace process itself that gave a new life to the ideology of “re-conquest”.

2 2002 Peace Process: Overcoming “Re-conquest” and Conquest?

The Parliamentary electoral defeat of the People’s Alliance led by President Candrikā Kumāraṇatūṅa (Chandrika Kumaratunga) in December 2001 was a result of the failure of her military campaign to regain the North and East, and the economic collapse that her government had to face. Kumāraṇatūṅa’s proposed constitutional reforms while presenting a package of devolution of power to the Tamil region, attempted to constitutionalise the power of the saṃgha in state affairs. That is, by establishing a high saṃgha council to determine all Buddhist affairs of the island. Her military campaign begun in 1995 was called “war for peace”, and though initially apparently successful, particularly in getting hold of Yāḷppāṇam peninsula in the North, by 2001 had faced a considerable number of setbacks due to the military achievements of the LTTE in other regions of the North and East. Setbacks against the LTTE and the economic collapse that the GoSL faced altered for the time being the mindset of the Sinhala political elite and its constituency; demoralising the spirit of “re-conquest”, and leading to the defeat of the government. Then came to power Ranil Vikramasimha’s (Ranil Wickremasinghe’s) United People’s Front, which expressed a non-militaristic readiness to resolve the national question, and while Kumāraṇatūṅa remained President, Vikramasīhiha formed the government as Prime Minister with a majority in the Parliament.21

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20 This was only in the Draft Constitution that did not come into effect. See Peter Schalk, “Present Concepts of Secularism among Ijavar and Lankans”, Zwischen Säkularismus und Hierokratie. Studien zum Verhältnis von Religion und Staat in Süd- und Oastasien. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Historia Religionum 17 (Uppsala: AUU, 2001, 63–66). — Āḷvāppiḷḷai Vēḷuppiḷḷai points out how President Kumāraṇatūṅa calculated that the devolution package would not face opposition from the Buddhist clergy if their position in the state is constitutionally guaranteed through setting up of a Supreme Council. See Āḷvāppiḷḷai Vēḷuppiḷḷai, “Sinhala Fears of Tamil Demand”, Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka, edited by Mahinda Deegalle (London/New York: Routledge, 2006), 94–95.

21 Sri Lanka has both a Presidential and a parliamentary system where the President has been constitutionally vested with executive powers to the extent of overrul-
The ideology and the agenda of “re-conquest” were temporarily put aside by the Sinhala political elite, and space was created for political negotiations between the GoSL and the LTTE. The 2002 CFA and the peace process between the GoSL and the LTTE reflects the weakening of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, both as a political power and as an ideological movement due to LTTE’s de facto state in the North and East of the island. The peace process, in fact, was a result of a balance of power. The LTTE entered into the peace process from a position of power, but the GoSL was in the position of weakness. In the CFA, the LTTE-administered Tamil region was recognised as the line of control between the two parties. This problematised the constitutional privilege that Sinhala Buddhism enjoyed throughout the island, particularly in the Tamil region. LTTE upheld a secular ideology in its political imagination of the state of Tamil Ilam as opposed to the religiously defined ideology of the Lankan state. Therefore, the balance of power functioned as a counterforce to Sinhala Buddhist cultural homogenisation in the Tamil region. For the Tamil national movement this helped contain further conquest. However, within seven years from 2002 this power balance gradually changed. Sinhala Buddhist ideology both as a political power and as an ideological movement peaked dramatically after 2006; particularly during the election campaign and after the electoral victory of the United People’s Alliance (UPA) which was formed by SLFP with the support of JHU and JVP (Janata Vimukti Peramuna) which fundamentally opposed the peace process. Though JHU and JVP were marginal powers at the time of the signing of the CFA, by 2004 both parties entered into alliances with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which was then led by President Kumara Gunaratna (also posed against the CFA). The temporary political division within the Sinhala elite—between the United National Party’s (UNP) Vikramesh and Sri Lanka Freedom Party’s (SLFP) Kumara Gunaratna—was capitalised to the maximum by the JHU and the JVP, representative mainly of the middle classes, without whose support no traditional party (UNP and SLFP) led by the Sinhala elite political families could come to power. This

ing the parliament and the judiciary. President Kumara Gunaratna did not use her executive powers to overrule the CFA, but criticized the agreement while making alliances, as the leader of SLFP, with JHU and JVP to oust the UNP-led government and thereby facilitated the reinforcement of the ideology of “re-conquest”.

alliance between the SLFP, and JHU and JVP was strengthened in the Presidential election of Mahinda Rājakpāsa in 2005 meanwhile the chief aim was to oppose the CFA and to re-establish unitary state structure.

From the moment of its signing the JHU opposed the CFA on the basis of the belief in a glorious past of a Siṃhala Buddhist state which legitimises the unitary state structure and cultural homogenisation of the entire island. Referring to the period that followed after the 2002 peace process, Campika Raṇavaka (Champika Ranawake), the theorician and the national organiser of JHU, writes as follows:

The time was ripe for bikkhus to step forward. We set the stage in 2003 for the formation of the National Sangha Council—a powerful new bikkhu front led by Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Nayaka Thero. Many respected bikkhus... supported us. Defeating terrorism and the preservation of the unitary system of the island were the main conditions put forward by our bikkhus to the Presidential candidates seeking their response.23

He also states that he was motivated to fight against “terrorism” on 14 May, 1985 when the LTTE attacked the devotees of Śrī Mahā Bodhi in the city of Anurādhapura.24 This is the location of the Bo tree which is believed to be an offshoot of the very tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. The JHU claimed that it aims to build a dharmarājya ‘Buddhist state’, which has been termed in academic literature as dharmacracy.25 The JHU slogan was marabiya nāti, kusagini nāti, turulīya āti dāhāmi dāyak ‘a land of dhamma without fear of death, without hunger, full of flora and fauna’. The first characteristic of this land (without fear of death) refers to defeat against “LTTE terrorism” that has generated fear in the country. The first step towards that end was the abrogation of the CFA and the adoption of a military solution against the LTTE.

The LTTE’s principle of secularity was perceived either as a Western Christian conspiracy, or as a Hindu invasion; a barrier to the maintenance, consolidation and expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region. One of the key areas of the peace process was rehabilitation, reconstruction and demilitarisation of the Tamil region.

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Two main sub-committees were proposed to implement these aims. The military was expected to withdraw from the civilian properties and public places that they had occupied, and a process of reconstruction was intended. This included all places of worship reflecting the secular and pluralist character of the peace process. The JHU viewed this secular and pluralist character as a sign of the age of decline of the Sinhala Buddhist unitary state, its purity, territorial integrity and sovereignty. The “re-conquest” was envisaged not in the form of conversion to Buddhism, but as an ethno-religious homogenisation of the entire island through a military takeover of the North and East.

Comparably, the JVP’s opposition to the CFA was grounded on the need to protect the unitary state in view of reaching its socialist goals. However, as both parties not only shared the spirit of “re-conquest” but also competed for the same constituency of rural and urban middle classes, the JVP also utilised the names of warriors and kings (imagined as Sinhala Buddhist) of the past, as symbols in their campaign in an attempt to authenticate the party’s variety of patriotism. While JVP saw the legitimacy given to the de facto state of LTTE as a part of an imperialist strategy of “divide and rule”, the JHU perceived it as a conspiracy against the only Sinhala Buddhist state in the world where Sinhala Buddhism and land, state structure are inseparable “givens”. Buddhism is seen as an essential feature of Sinhala ethnicity and state structure. The JVP’s political position was that political power of the state should not be devolved on religious or ethnic basis, but any citizen should be able to settle down wherever s/he wishes whereas the JHU upheld that the Sinhala Buddhists have primacy of place in the island as they are the “true nationals” and the others are only “citizens”. Subtle differences between the two positions vaporised in the public domain because the unitary state structure cannot be justified without an imagined glorious Sinhala Buddhist past. Both parties called the Tamil national armed resistance siyalo praśnayangē mav praśnaya ‘the root (mother) problem of all problems’ (in Ilam). Therefore, both positions, while mutually enriching one another contributed to the ideology of “re-conquest” based on an ancient Sinhala Buddhist heritage which is the fundamental standpoint of JHU. It is important to note the power dynamics of this religiously supported campaign, as the religious support has implications for the later military campaign and the “post-war” expansion of Sinhala

26 For a justification of this position by JHU theoretician, see Pathali Campika Raṇavaka, Siṃhala Abhiyōgaya (Colombo: Dayawansa Jayakody and Company, 2001), 138.
Buddhism into the Tamil region. Meanwhile, the two parties competing with each other for the urban and rural middle class voter base among the Sinhala meant that public discourse was transformed into an anti-CFA, anti-LTTE and anti-Tamil rhetoric.

There were many concrete political actions that were taken by both the JHU and JVP in strengthening the public discourse of “re-conquest”. The JVP’s propaganda secretary, Vimal Viravanša (Wimal Weerawansa), visited the military camps to politicise the soldiers and was a key member of the National Patriotic Front (NPF) where Allē Günavanša Thera (who wrote a popular song depicting soldiers that fight for the country as those who acquire merits to reach nirvāṇa), and Günadāśa Amarasēkara (Gunadasa Amarasekara), one of the leading theoreticians of jātika cintanaya ‘national ideology’, which argues for the hypothesis of the clash of civilisations, were prominent members. The NPF launched a campaign called *manel mal viya-pārāya* [‘Water Lilies Movement’] to boost the morale of the soldiers and to cater to their welfare.\(^\text{27}\) Water lilies are popular offerings of Buddhists who frequent monasteries, and the Buddha’s enlightenment is associated with the water lily blossom.

The JHU adopted a different radical set of actions. The party leader, Ellāvala Mēdhānanda Thera, also known a historian, undertook travel to the predominantly Tamil speaking (Hindu and Muslim) Eastern Province to publicise (according to the party), how the Sinhala Buddhist ancient sites have been “vandalised”, “desecrated”, “destroyed” and “occupied” mainly by the LTTE, Muslims and by treasure hunters.\(^\text{28}\) In a political move to “discover” ancient Sinhala Buddhist heritage in the Tamil region, the Thera, with the support of the military, trespassed the line of control between the GoSL and LTTE that had been demarcated by the CFA as a step to ceasing hostilities. Campika Raṇavaka states, that attempts made by the Thera to conduct archaeological investigations in the LTTE-administered areas in the East were planned as a party decision in a move to oppose the CFA and to regain Sinhala Buddhist heritage.\(^\text{29}\) The pictures of Mēdhānanda Thera with the Lankan soldiers walking the jungles examining archaeological sites often accompany articles with sense-


\(^\text{28}\) These expressions could be found throughout many of the texts written by the Thera. See for example Ellawala Medhananda, *The Sinhala Buddhist Heritage in The East and The North of Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Dayawansa Jayakody and Company, 2005).

\(^\text{29}\) Raṇavaka: *Paṭisōtaṃmūva* ..., 103.
nationalist headings, such as *jāṭika urumaya sōyā koṭi kāṭṭa gīya ga-
manak*, ‘a journey to the mouth of the Tigers in search of our national
heritage’. In one article the Thera writes that it was the Śiṁhalas
who built the Buddhist heritage in the Eastern Province, and claims
that the Buddha visited the Eastern Province as it had already been
inhabited by a person, giving the impression of the Śiṁhalas being on
the island long before Buddhism arrived. According to the Thera the
Buddha visited Cēruvilai, Dīgvapīya, Mahiyaṅganaya, and also Tis-
samakārāma, the region that borders the Eastern and Southern Pro-
vinces of the island. Any ancient site, for him, becomes a Śiṁhala
Buddhist heritage; administrative structures, irrigation systems, and
Buddhist sites as all built by Śiṁhalas—the architects of Lankan civil-
ization.

The main text written by the Thera, which is also translated into
English (Medhananda, 2005), has many statements feeding the ima-
gination of the Śiṁhala people with an ancient heritage that has been
destroyed:

- The caves, that were used by mendicant monks one time, to give the holy
  message of peace, are now used by blood thirsty terrorists.
- Non-Śiṁhala settlements over Buddhist ruins, is a common site.
- Today it is an LTTE base, and no one can go there.
- Many valuable sculptural pieces of religious value have been taken for
  their secular use.
- Treasure seekers have done harm to the stūpa. A kōvil is built at the site
  using Buddhist architectural remains.
- The non-Śiṁhalas have occupied many lands and paddy-fields that were
  owned by Śiṁhalas a few years ago.

30 Ellāvala Mēdhānanda: *Kāḍunu Visiruṇu Sellipi: Ellāvala Himmiyāgē Viviḍa
Lipi Ekatuva –1* (Colombo, Published by the Author, 2009), 187.
32 Ibid., 235.
33 The Sinhala text, Ellāvala Mēdhānanda: *Pācīna passa – uttara passa, nāgena-
hira paḷāta hā uturu paḷātē śiṁhala Buddhist urumaya, 4th edition* (Colombo,
Medhananda, *The Sinhala Buddhist Heritage in The East and The North of Shri
34 Ellawala Medhanda: *The Sinhala Buddhist Heritage...*, 205.
35 Ibid., 41.
36 Loc.cit.
37 Ibid., 40.
38 Ibid., 34.
39 Ibid., 33.
A Muslim watcher appointed by the archaeological department has not succeeded in the upkeep of the place.40

Though many ruins are scattered all over the area, no authority had given any interest over the place.41

It is with great patriotism we invite the Sinhala people to colonise these areas once again.42

...these two stupas were also dug into by seekers of treasure.43

Except for a few families that live at the foot of the mountain, the whole area is covered with thick jungle.44

Treasure hunters digging into the relic chamber can be seen.45

Sea erosion over a period of 1000 years resulted in the decay.46

All means of access to the area have been forcefully jeopardized by the Muslims and continual damage is done to what is remaining.47

Despite the fact of recognition of the destruction of the ancient sites by treasure hunters (perhaps connected to the Sinhala politicians, police and security forces) and natural causes, the Tamils and Muslims, particularly the LTTE and the Muslim politicians in the Eastern Province are still being held as mainly responsible for the loss and destruction of ancient artefacts.

Often it was depicted that the Tamils and Muslims have a deliberate plan to invade and destroy not only the Sinhala Buddhist heritage in the North and East, but also in the entire country. LTTE’s attacks on the outer wall of the temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in the Central Province and in the area surrounding Sīrī Mahā Bodhi in Anurādhapura were given as examples of an all out invasion of the country. Meanwhile, the attack in the Central Province was an attempt to resist the 50th anniversary celebration of the Independence of GoSL, planned to be held in the vicinity of the temple (with Prince Charles as the guest of honour). It was promised to the Sinhala constituency that security forces would complete the military takeover of the main A9 road and annex the Northern Tamil region to the South before the celebration. The other attack was carried out with a range of one mile distance of Sīrī Mahā Bodhi belonging to the area of the ‘sacred city’ built obliterating other places of worship as mentioned in the previ-
ous section. Moreover, the attack took place in the aftermath of the 1983 Tamil pogrom; burning of Yālppāṇam library in 1981, and killing of Tamil political prisoners, as a form of counter violence. The civilian deaths in both attacks reinforced the Siṃhala Buddhist rhetoric of victimhood.

In the view of Mēdhānanda Thera what has been “discovered” in the North and East and in the rest of the country were not pura vastu ‘ancient artefacts/sites’, but pūjābhūmi ‘sacred sites/lands),\(^\text{48}\) instantiating a concrete manifestation of the territorialisation of dharmaddīpa evocative of a primordial essence. In this sense, it is not only Anurādhapura, but the entire island which is sacred. This belief gives absolutist value to the link between Siṃhala ethnicity, Buddhism and territory not only legitimising a “just war”, even justifying natural disasters like tsunami as the karmic effects of the desecration of dharmaddīpa. In an open letter to President Kumāṇatunga the Thera gives a list of sites that are allegedly destroyed by the Muslims and Tamilś in the Eastern Province. He writes that he wonders sometimes whether the Province was destroyed by the tsunami as a karmic effect of these acts.\(^\text{49}\) The title of this letter gives the name of Kāliṅga Māgha—a pre-colonial South Indian invader who destroyed Buddhist sites in dynastic warfare—to those who destroy Buddhist sites in the present, creating the impression that the present Tamil national movement now destroys such sites being the reincarnation of former invaders.\(^\text{50}\) No distinction has been made between pre-colonial dynastic wars, and post-colonial ethno-nationalist conflicts. He also has a separate article on how those who destroy sacred sites are punished by the karmic effects of their actions.\(^\text{51}\)

In his works, the Thera claims that contrary to the figures of ancient Buddhist sites in the North and East of Īlam issued by the country’s Commissioner for Archaeology tallying 276, there are at least 500 such places in the entire Tamil region. He writes: “…but I am not satisfied as I know that there are still more places undiscovered in the two areas…”,\(^\text{52}\) while supplying contradictory figures about the number of ancient sites in the Tamil region throughout his work (most of which are round).


\(^{49}\) Ellāvala Mēdhānanda, Jātika Urumayē Piya Saṭahan–2, 196.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 191.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 146–149.

\(^{52}\) Ellawala Medhananda, The Sinhala Buddhist Heritage..., 10.
Referring to the ancient Sinhala Buddhist sites in the Eastern Province in a recent paper articles re-published in the book Kāḍunu Vīṣiruṇu Sel Lipi ['Broken and scattered stone plates'] Mēdhānanda Thera writes:

We believe that there have been 8000 villages here. Therefore, according to characteristics of ancient settlements that we have recognised, we can conclude that there have been 8000 irrigation tanks and 8000 vihāras-tānas here [translated from Sinhala].

Elsewhere he writes that there are thousands of archaeological sites that have not been identified by the archaeological department. In an article from 2001, he identifies over 100 Hindu (Caiva, Vaiṇava) kōvils built over Buddhist malāsanāyas. When this article was written the LTTE administered around 60–70 percent of the North and East. Yet, it is not clear how the Thera came to this figure.

Citing another number he writes that there have been around 500 monks in Dīgavāpi in early Buddhist history in the Eastern Province and their monastery must have spread through 500 acres.

In the writings of Mēdhānanda Thera, there are also constant references to the resources of the region:

There are 103 rivers in the country that flow to the ocean. Out of these, 64 flow to the sea in the North and East and these locations where the rivers meet the sea have been ports.

It has to be mentioned here how Tirukōṇamalai has been one of the most strategic ports in the Indian Ocean since the time of Portuguese conquests in the 16th century. Additionally, “the economy of the land was based on agriculture and trade”. The Eastern Province was full of paddy fields; thus “an economic miracle”. Referring to the Yāḷppāṇam peninsula in Northern Province, the Thera writes that at one stage “the whole area of Yāpanaya [Yāḷppāṇam, Jaffna] was lighted with yellow robes” and the rulers of Anurādhapura considered this region as part of their kingdom and built many Buddhist sites that have been later destroyed. He gives a list of 45 places of Buddhist ruins in Yāḷppāṇam peninsula alone, considered to be Sinhala Bud-

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53 Ellāvala Medhanda, Kaḍunu..., 187.
54 Ibid., 180.
55 Ibid., 182.
56 Ibid., 238.
57 Ibid., 234.
58 Loc.cit.
59 Ellawala Medhanda: The Sinhala Buddhist Heritage..., 275.
dhist sites. Commenting on Vauniya [Vavuṇiyā, Vavuniya] district which is to the North of Anurādhapura the Thera writes as follows:

Numerous Buddhists lived in Vauniya. Therefore, many Buddhist monasteries and malāsanayas sprang up throughout. A number of inscriptions prove the Buddhist and Sinhala heritage, but it is sad to say that the LTTE has included it into their imaginary kingdom of Eelam. The region is also seen as the location of many ancient irrigation tanks, canals and banks.61

The imagined glorious past is not only religious, but also economic and geo-strategic (as ports). In fact, it is difficult to separate these factors from the Siṃhala Buddhist ideology.

When a careful survey is conducted, it can be observed that after the peace process the frequency of TV and radio programmes, newspaper articles, and books written on the Siṃhala Buddhist heritage in the North and East increased compared to other periods in the preceding 30 years of armed conflict. Most articles on the ancient Siṃhala Buddhist heritage in the North and East were written by Mēdhānanda Thera, which then appeared in a number of leading Siṃhala newspapers such as Divaina, Dinamina, Lakhima, Laṃkādīpa, Boduhaṇḍa (all widely read). These articles were also compiled into books and published by a leading publisher in Colombo, as well as by the Thera himself. He also participated in a weekly television programme called siṃhalē mahāvaṃśa katāva ‘story of the great chronicle of the Siṃhala land’. A similar pattern could be observed in the early 80s under the leadership of Cyril Mathew, a minister of the UNP government who was known for his anti-Tamil rhetoric and one of those allegedly responsible for the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983. He also wrote and appealed to UNESCO compiling a list of ancient sites that have been destroyed; generating an anti-Tamil ethos among the Siṃhala Buddhists.62 Both the works of Mēdhānanda Thera and Cyril Mathew have been quoted by a Siṃhala academic in his work Demaḷa Bauddhayā [‘Tamil Pauttar/Tamil Buddhist’], which recognises clearly the existence of Tamil Buddhism (tamilppaṭṭam) in the North and East of the island.63 However, for the above political leaders what may be found in the Tamil region is evidence for Siṃhala Buddhism. Ac-

60 Ibid., 277–278.
61 Ibid., 239.
62 Caluwadewage Cyril Mathew, An appeal to UNESCO to safeguard and preserve the cultural property in Sri Lanka endangered by racial prejudice, unlawful occupation or wilful destruction (Colombo: Ministry of Industries and Scientific Affairs, 1983).
63 Sunil Ariyaratna, Demaḷa Bauddhayā (Colombo, S. Godage and Brothers, 2006).
cording to another Buddhist monk, Daṁbara Amila Thera who is the senior lecturer in archaeology in Jayawardanapura University in Colombo, Mēdhānanda Thera could be a very good informant to the archaeological department but he does not have a scientific training or expertise to scrutinise ancient history and archaeology. However, Campika Raṇavaka hails the Thera as one of the few foremost historians and archaeologists that the country has ever produced. Often the JHU propaganda campaign published photos of the Thera with the military, examining ruins of a site. Some of the publications of Mēdhānanda Thera, for instance, were launched in the most prominent auditoriums in Colombo with the participation of key Siṁhala political elite.

The resulting immediacy of “givenness” is constructed through “print capitalism” thus feeding the imagined community of the Siṁhala Buddhist nation, which is perceived to be under threat due to a peace deal with the “Tamil invader brokered by the Western powers.” It is often stated that the destruction that this invasion has caused is not second even to that of Māgha. In fact, the Tamiḻ national movement is called Māgha(s) projecting a primordial, perennial antagonism between the Siṁhalas and Tamiḻs (and Muslims) despite the latter group not being related to the Māgha invasion. This process of construction takes place within the attempted negotiation of power among the Siṁhala social classes, namely between the elite and the middle classes led by the latter’s intelligentsia. Raṇavaka acknowledges that JHU is similar to BJP (Bharatiya Janatha Party) in India and is led by middle class intellectuals in Īḻam. In the process of construction of an essentialist identity, there is no need for the scientific deconstruction of historiography or for analysis of archaeological findings; and, what appears as truth is declared as reality.

As said, the Eastern Province was the main focus of the anti-CFA campaign of JHU. A group of US naval officers who conducted a security/military assessment of the area surrounding Tirukōṇamalai harbour, several months after the CFA was signed, had reiterated the importance of guaranteeing “security” in the region in any future war effort due to its strategic importance. As an initial experimental step

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65 Raṇavaka, Paṭisōṭagāmiṇīva..., 118.
66 Ellāvala Mēdhānanda, Jātika Urumayē Piya Saṭṭahan–2, 191.
67 Raṇavaka, Paṭisōṭagāmiṇīva..., 100.
in the “re-conquest”, in May 2005, a Sinhala organisation in the strategic city of Tirukōṇamalai unlawfully erected a Buddha statue in the town centre, supported by the police and military, though this was opposed with demonstrations, and shutting down of shops by Tamil and other civil society groups in the region. It was reported that 15 grenades explored in the area; one person was killed and several were injured. A court order was issued to remove the statue, but the JHU opposed it in the Parliament accusing the LTTE of attempting to deprive the Sinhala Buddhists of their right to religious freedom. The government, which even at this stage had to distance itself from such acts due to the internationally accepted peace process, stated that it will resolve the issue justly and fairly by all concerned and in conformity with the law.68

In addition to perceiving Muslim and Tamil leaders as invaders, Campika Raṇavaka also interprets the rise of Christian evangelical sects in the Tamil region as an outcome of the policy of LTTE “appeasing the Christian West.”69 The JHU also worked with Tiyākarāja Makēsvaraqa (T. Maheshwaran), a Caiva parliamentarian based in Colombo to propose an anti-conversion bill. The former President Kumārāṇatuṅga, in an address at a meeting at the South Asia Policy Research Institute in Colombo on 27 November 2011, revealed how JHU made attempts to persuade her to build Sinhala villages on the border of Tamil Yālppānam peninsula. According to her, the JHU had also built Buddhist sites in the fully Tamil or Muslim areas in the East. She claims to have arrested around 60 JHU activists accused of attacking Christian places of worship in the South.70 While Mēdhānanda Thera, in the aforementioned public letter to President Kumārāṇatuṅga admonished her about these steps reminding her of the ancient role of the saṃgha to advice the King, and the responsibility of the latter to protect the saṃgha and the land—the Aśokan model of polity. Campika Raṇavaka in his memoirs remarks how the former President did not keep to her promises and could not be trusted.71 The JHU also capitalised on the internal party-political rivalries within SLFP, between the President Kumārāṇatuṅga and the Prime Minister

69 Raṇavaka: Puṭisūṭagūṁīva..., 105.
71 Raṇavaka, Puṭisūṭagūṁīva ..., 135.
War by other Means

Mahinda Rājapakṣa, siding to promote the latter.

In a decisive intervention, the JHU carried out a fast-unto-death campaign in front of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic (Sri Daḷada Maligāva), against the Proposed Tsunami Operational Mechanism (PTOMS) between the GoSL and the LTTE in 2005, which was signed by the government under enormous international pressure. It also obtained a court order against the mechanism and finally made a pact with the SLFP’s Presidential candidate Mahinda Rājapakṣa. The pact was signed in the vicinity of the temple and was called Daḷadā Sammutiya [‘Sacred Tooth Relic Consensus’]. Campika Raṇavaka in his memoirs names the Presidential candidacy of Mahinda Rājapakṣa as Mahindaḍīgamaniyā ‘the advent of Mahinda’ evoking the memory of the Mahinda Thera, who is said to have first preached dhamma to the islanders in the 3rd century BCE.72 The Presidential election manifesto of Mahinda Rājapakṣa was named Mahinda Cintanaya [‘Ideology of Mahinda’] and in the election campaign he was called Deveṇi Maḥinda [‘the second Mahinda’]; thus posed to be a new Mahinda who will lead the nation, and attributed with the characteristics of Dutugāmunu (Duṭṭhagāmini), the epic warrior king of the Mahāvaṃsa, said to have united the country against non-Buddhist forces in the 2nd century BCE. As Dutugāmunu is said to have lived in the south of the country: so the new Mahinda. This leadership is mandated to reclaim the Sinhala Buddhist heritage of the entire island, and particularly of the Tamil region; taken from its worthy and rightful heirs, the Sinhala Buddhists, by the LTTE with the support of imperialist and anti-Buddhist powers in the form of a deadly trap that is the CFA.73

Even though consequent upon the re-enforcement of the ideology of “re-conquest” shared by SLFP; JHU and JVP could contribute to the victory of United People Alliance’s (UPA) Presidential candidate Mahinda Rājapakṣa in December of 2005, this alone could not alter the power dynamic between the GoSL and the LTTE as long as the latter had a material base of the de facto state with civil and military power. It was rather the US and UK governments’ non-equidistant approach to peace processes, and the EU ban imposed on the LTTE that provided the UPA-led government with the material conditions (through military, economic and diplomatic support) to implement the ideology of “re-conquest”. With this support the weakened Sinhala political elite were strengthened and the agendas of JHU and JVP became practicable. As the thick jungles were cleared in the ordering of

72 Ibid., 129.
73 Ibid., 95–128.
landscape by the colonial government in the 19th century, using the labour of Tamil plantation workers, so the *de facto* state of the LTTE where at least half a million people lived was “cleared” using a high intensity war with massive human costs, all for to implement the unitary state. It is such kind of state structure that was needed by the aforementioned international powers, also joined by India and China. By mid 2009 the power of the Lankan state had been rendered total again, with the imposition of the unitary state structure; and the LTTE’s secular *de facto* state that had operated as a counter-force to cultural homogenisation, dismantled. A religiously defined form of nationalism has superseded a secular form of nationalism.

In his address at the celebration of the military victory over the LTTE in May 2009, President Mahinda Rājapakṣa, referred to foreign invasions from ancient times to the contemporary period, and held in high esteem the security forces which fought the war against the LTTE. He not only stated that the nation is Buddhist, but also claimed a moral high ground by stating that the soldiers waged the war with compassion towards the Tamil civilians. While the former President Kumarāṇatuṅga called her war in the 1990s “a war for peace,” President Mahinda called his war a “compassionate humanitarian operation” led by an army that upholds Buddhist ideals. The two positions, despite bolstering the same dogma of the unitary state, and giving supreme position to Buddhism in the country, reflect two different political climates that brought the respective Presidents into power. President Kumarāṇatuṅga came to power in the mid 1990s after a long war with the promise of peace, yet what peace meant was never clearly outlined. When she started war it could not be waged without referring to peace. President Mahinda came to power during a period of peace with an explicit promise of protecting the unitary state and safeguarding Siṃhala Buddhist nationalist ideology. As Buddhism is involved, the war could not be waged without claiming to maintain the moral high ground denoting the benevolence of the regime. However, this latter is entangled with a fundamentalist belief that the land was given by the Buddha himself to the Siṃhalas to protect Buddhism, and the territory, ethnicity and *dhamma* are inseparable in constituting the state.

A state cannot maintain its fundamentalism without a heavy military might. Thus by May 2009, the Lankan state had reached the apex of its Siṃhala Buddhist fundamentalist stature not only ideologically but militarily. It is this ideology and its movement that underpin the “post-war” expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region, such that expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region and
militarisation of the region are inseparable. Ideologically, it goes without saying that the military takeover spreads the light of dhamma to the region dispelling the darkness of the “terrorists.” As the colonial officers brought light to Anurādhapura, the region has become an attraction and “jungle” has been cleared. A battle between “good” and “evil” is imagined here, as the Buddhist forces struggling to subdue the armed Tamil national movement, respectively. The re-conquest is also a duty and a service, not an invasion or domination; the regime is benevolent. It is Mahindagamanaya ‘the advent of Mahinda’! It is Second Independence! Amidst scores of deaths the “inevitable achievement” is appreciated by UN Security Council, the White House and the European Union on the same day, 13 May, 2009. After visiting the island during the final phase of the war a well-known scholar of ethno-nationalism in Īlam captures the local and international dimensions of “just war” as follows:

An almost life-size image of the President, flanked by a military commander, and led by a Buddhist monk, which was visible when entering the city of Colombo from the international airport, during the last months of the conflict in May 2009, was one of the symbols of the “just war”. Simultaneously, it is arguable that the JHU’s “just war” rhetoric which draws from the Mahavamsa story of the defeat of the Tamil King Elara by the valiant King Duttugemunu, has also been inspired by and articulated alongside the global “war on terror” resulting in the form of a public religion that mobilises and rearticulates the symbols, words and texts of the faith with a contemporary meta-narrative of globalisation—“the war on terror.” The JHU monks argued that the island has historically been the land of the Buddha and the country’s “territorial sovereignty” and “national security” (essentially Westphalian concepts that underwrite the modern nation-state system), must hence be ensured to protect and preserve the religion, particularly against the LTTE fighting for a separate state for the Tamil minority in the northeast of the country. Thus too unfolds the dialectic of the enlightenment and modernity in Sri Lāṃkā.\[74\]

In the aftermath of the military victory, a year later, the President Rājapakṣa seeking a re-election addressed Tamilṣ in Yālppāṇam in the North saying, We are Sinhalas, the country too is Sinhalese, you Tamilians just listen.\[75\] This is what Mahindāgamanya ‘the advent of


\[75\] Anon., “‘We are Sinhala. Country is also Sinhala. Those who are listening are Tamils’. President Rajapakṣe’s style of address to the Northern Tamils”, www.lankaenews.com (04 April, 2010), http://lankaenews.com/English/news.php?
Mahinda’ means for the Tamils at present; the Buddhism they know in their region is nothing else, but a religion of conquest and oppression.

The expansion was not a conquest, but a legitimate “re-conquest”; one to regain the pristine Siṃhala Buddhist heritage. But it is neither a doctrinal nor a soteriological heritage. It is not a moral heritage either, but a religious, cultural, socioeconomic and political heritage which had to appear moral and benevolent: in other words, a religious expansion interwoven with other factors, and a military expansion with a religious ideology. The ethno-religious ideology that demands this conquest also has a socioeconomic and political base. Likewise, there is a geo-political dimension involved. As the war unfolded with “re-conquest” of the Eastern Province and parts of the Northern Province on to the west, the government-owned English weekly published a short article commending the work of Mēdhānanda Thera (republished by the Thera in one of his books).

As the security forces march forward towards the North it seems to be that we are discovering more and more hidden stories of our lands, those we have “lost” in the sea of time.\(^\text{76}\) The title of the piece goes: In Search of the Magnificent Past of Mannar: An Attempt to Unearth the Undiscovered History.\(^\text{77}\) [Fig. 1–2]

Mannār here is the Tamil port city of the Northwest and the closest point to India. The article focuses on four categories of “discovery”; ancient Siṃhala Buddhist kingdoms and sites, irrigation tanks as sources of economic wealth, and ports as geo-strategic and commercial locations.\(^\text{78}\) These writings clearly reflect how expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism is not a mere religious expansion but a political economic and geo-strategic project. Therefore, in exploring the expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region what has to be examined is not simply the appearance of Buddha statues, vihārayas and stūpas but also the material basis of Siṃhala Buddhist nationalism and its two main features; for no religion exists as an abstract category, but as a concrete, socioeconomic and political structure embedded in a particular culture. Its ideology can be liberating or enslaving, and appear to be liberating. The socio-political structure that is being built in the aftermath of the military victory is based on the ideology that Siṃhala ethnicity, Buddhism and unitary state structure have

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\(^{76}\) Ellāvala Mēdhānanda, Jātika Urumayē Piya Saṭahan–2, 284.

\(^{77}\) Loc.cit.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 284.
been inseparable from time immemorial. Under this ideological scheme peace is assured only when the Tamil region is brought under the power of the unitary state where Sinhala Buddhism, which means Sinhala administration, business, trade, middle classes, education, cultural symbols and so forth, can flourish. Expansion of Buddhism into the Tamil region has to be understood in light of this historically constructed form of Buddhism within the attendant colonial and post-colonial practices. In the next, third and major section, I strive to demonstrate how this expansion unfolds in the “post-war” era.

3 Expansion of Sinhala Buddhism into the Tamil Region

Moving to the third part of our discussion let me now identify the manners (types) of expansion of Sinhala Buddhism into the Tamil region,—what may be termed “war by other means”—and explore how the power of the state and its ideology are consolidated. These types of expansion are interwoven with cultural, economic, political/military and geopolitical factors, and are as follows:

I. Establishment of Buddha statues and malāsanayas ‘flower seats’ in military camps, police stations and settlement of monks;
II. Establishment of Buddha statues and malāsanayas in new public places, and plans to settle monks;
III. Renovation of modern Buddhist sites and settlement of monks;
IV. Arrival of Sinhala Buddhism with Sinhala colonies;
V. Organisation of Buddhist rituals and festivals in the Tamil region;
VI. Building Buddhist sites on or close to other religious sites;
VII. Declaration of ancient Buddhist sites in the region as Sinhala Buddhist heritage;
VIII. Building of Sinhala Buddhist sites at geo-strategic locations;
IX. Destruction of LTTE cemeteries and monuments while building GoSL war memorials;
X. A Sinhala Buddhist site at Muḷḷivāykkāl;
XI. Consolidation of Sinhala Buddhism throughout the entire island.
Each type should not be treated as discretely separated from the others, as two or more may blend together at one location. For example a military camp, a public place and a commercial location can exist at the same site as a Buddhist malāsanaya. This is recognised in the analysis of military, economic and political factors involved in these locations. The categorisation of types, however, helps us to understand the diversity of means utilised in consolidating the unitary state structure and in the process of cultural homogenisation through the expansion of Sinhala Buddhism.

I. Establishment of Buddha statues and malāsanayas in military camps and police stations and settlement of monks

The word for shrine is malāsanaya ‘flower seat’ or pūjayanaya ‘shrine for veneration (of the Buddha). Building of Buddhist malāsanayas in military camps is not a “post-war” phenomenon. It has been a practice since the militarisation of the Tamil region by the Lankan security forces long before the Tamil armed resistance came into existence. Different sizes of Buddhist malāsanayas which house a Buddha statue have become an essential element in the structure of a military camp and a police station and it is difficult to find one without one such. This reflects the collective perception that Buddhism, Sinhala ethnicity, state structure, the military and the police are inseparable from one another. Though it is also important to note that not all military camps and police stations in the predominantly Sinhala areas in the South have such malāsanayas. Nor can one find any official statement, which says that the Lankan military is a Buddhist army. The same military was instrumental in suppressing the two Sinhala uprisings in 1971 and 1987–89 (led by the JVP) in the south of the country. In the latter period it has been estimated that at least 600 Buddhist monks were killed by the military with another 60,000 mostly Sinhala Buddhists. The government’s stated aim was to build a dharmiṣṭa samājayak ‘a righteous society’. In countering the religious connotations of this term the JVP used a secular word to state their aim; that is sādhāraṇa samājayak ‘a just society’. Ironically, the militarisation of the Tamil region took place with the full support of the JVP. In the Tamil region the military now becomes a Sinhala Buddhist army whose aim is to protect the state, and the state-backed supremacy given to Buddhism.

When interviewed by my informants, the soldiers do not explicitly state that they build Buddhist malāsanayas in the camps because
Buddhism is the state’s foremost religion. Instead, they usually say that these *malāsanayās* are built for them to perform their religious observances as they do not have such *malāsanayās* in the area. On the one hand, this response reveals that Buddhism is not the predominant tradition in the Tamil region, and on the other hand, it gives the impression of the right to religious freedom. However, there is also a sizable number of Sinhala Christians who work in the military, yet Christian *malāsanayās* with statues cannot be found in military camps. It could also be observed that as the military camps get established the Buddhist *malāsanayās* too get modified. The novelty in the “post-war” period is that there is a rapid growth in such *malāsanayās* as the military camps continue to increase. There is also a process of renovation and expansion of existing ones. Some have been extended into *vihārayās* ‘monasteries’ where Buddhist monks have come to reside. A good number of these *malāsanayās* are located in between the main road, and the barbed-wire fence of the camp. Some are located inside the camps and could be seen from the roads. There are also *malāsanayās* inside the camps that are not visible when looking from the main road. Within 129km, along the main A9m road from Omantai to Yāḷppāṇam there were 12 clearly visible Buddhist sites of worship. Within 33.8 km road from Yāḷppāṇam to Parutittūrai there are five such places. There were also at least 20 such locations from Māṭavāći to Māṇṭār visible from the road. The figures came from a random count done by a team of Tamiḷs and Sinhālās as part of a human rights training programme they underwent which was jointly organised by two human rights organisations in Yāḷppāṇam and Colombo in 2010. By 2012 number of Buddhist statues from Omantāy to Yāḷppāṇam increased to 29.79 There are also three main sites along the Pūnakari Road from Māṇṭār to Yāḷppāṇam, and it has been reported that 28 Buddhist statues have been brought to the Palāli High Security Zone in Yāḷppāṇam peninsula from the south of the island as reported by *Utayaṅ* newspaper.80[Fig. 3–6]

Some of these camps with Buddhist *malāsanayās* have been built near ancient religious sites such as Kīṟimalai, Kōṇēsvaram, Māṭakal, Tirukkēṭāisvaram which have been claimed as Sinhala Buddhist sites by the JHU. In these cases the claim to an ancient heritage and the

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building of Buddhist malāsanayas by the military and police bodies overlap.

The reason behind a rapid increase in building such sites by the military and police can be explained only through an analysis of the state ideology that conditions the military, not by reference to the rights to religious freedom discourse. The latter is interpreted through the state’s religious ideology. The military victory of the GoSL is a victory for Sinhala Buddhism as a state-centred, ethno-religious tradition. In other words, on the one hand, Sinhala Buddhism cannot be propagated in the Tamil region without the military, and, on the other hand, the state has no ideological justification to militarise the region without treating the entire island as a Sinhala Buddhist heritage. In the popular war songs the military is seen as the mura dēvatavō ‘guardian gods’ of the dhāmmapāpa ‘land of dhamma’—where the meaning is not moral, but territorial. It is through these guardian gods that the lost Sinhala Buddhist heritage is regained. Although guardian gods do not occupy the highest place in Buddhist soteriology in the present historical phase of the island it is believed that without them (the military), dhāmmapāpa could not be protected.

Even though the power of the Lankan state has been made total with the military victory over the LTTE, further increase in military camps with Buddhist malāsanayas is a clear reflection of a fear of future resistance by the Tamil people. What would the focal point of resistance be? What would the target of resistance be: the military or Sinhala Buddhism? Could the two be separated? This will be determined by how the Sinhalas distinguish between the state, the military, and Buddhism as an ethical/soteriological tradition in the future.

II. Establishment of Buddha statues and malāsanayas in new public places and plans to settle monks

Buddhist places of worship have been built not only in military camps, but also in public places in the Tamil region, particularly in the “post-war period.” One such main site is at Kanakārayaṅkulam on the A9 road between Vavuniyā and Yēḷppañam where a sampling of the Śrī Mahā Bodhi in Anurādhapura ‘sacred city’ has been planted on around 20 feet-high mound. The place is guarded around the clock by four soldiers who live in a nearby military barrack. One of them has revealed to my informant that those who guard the sampling are
not supposed to eat meat. A soldier also operates as a tourist/pilgrim guide at this site and gives the history of Śrī Mahā Bodhi and how the sampling was brought here after the military victory over the LTTE. According the soldier-guide, the location had been an ancient Buddhist site whereas the Tamil inhabitants from the area claim that the piece of land belongs to a farmer. [Fig. 7]

As it was mentioned earlier of the work of Mēdhānanda Thera, often one finds a lament concluding each analysis of an ancient site in reference to its current status. One such reference is that the landscape has become a private property of a farmer or any other ordinary person who is either Hindu or Muslim (non-Buddhist). The soldier-pilgrim/tourist guide also reveals to the visitors future plans of arranging for Buddhist monks to reside at the site. This, in a way increases the enthusiasm of the tourist-devotees, mostly Śiṃhala Buddhists, to contribute to the project readily. According to the tourist guide those devotees who pass through the A9 route daily in their thousands seem to donate generously to maintain and expand the site. It has been observed that the location is continuously expanding. Closer to this site, three roads in Kaṇakārayaṅkulam have been given Śiṃhala names—Kōsala Perērā Māvata, Anura Perērā Māvata, and Pūjya Yaṭirāvaṇa Vimala Thera Māvata. The first two are names of soldiers who took part in the war, and the last is the name of a Buddhist monk.81

On the same A9 road, near Maṅkulam junction one can find a newly built large Buddhist stūpa. The location is being designed as a proper Buddhist monastery with the aim of bringing in monks to reside there. A plan for expansion is visible. This junction and the above Kaṇakārayaṅkulam junction are the key business locations in Kiḷinocci (Kilinochichi) district that connect several roads from four directions, and Maṅkulam is the main junction between Vavuṇiyā and Kiḷinocci towns. [Fig. 8]

It is also a known fact that the military runs a large number of businesses in the region, particularly by the side of the A9 road. In this sense the building of a large stūpa at a key commercial junction in the region not only has a religio-military dimension, but also an economic (commercial value) aspect. Another Buddhist malāsanaya has been built at Parantaṅ junction, which connects the A9 road to two other directions. While in the Eastern Province near the seven hot water wells in Kiṇṇiyā there is a new Buddhist malāsanaya built.

This is a famous tourist location.

It is not only beside the main roads that these sites are being constructed, but also in the intersecting junctions in interior areas of the Tamil region where the military engage in farming, fishing and other small businesses. New Buddhist *malāsanayas* can be found in Mullaitivu district, and in Mallāvi, Vaṭakau and Tarmapuram in Kilinocci district. The motivation behind building these sites in public places such as main junctions is not only to secure the unitary state and the primacy of Buddhism in the land, but also to secure key commercial, economic and natural resources in the Tamil region. These types of public locations overlap with ones claiming ancient sites as Siṃhala Buddhist heritage in the case of the *malāsanaya* with Bō sampling in Kāṇakārayaṅkulam.

Buddhist *malāsanayas/pūjayanayas* have also been built at these junctions. [Fig. 9–11]

They are frequently visited by Siṃhala Buddhists who travel on the A9 road as tourists to the Northern Province. In the “post-war” era it is difficult to distinguish between tourism and religious pilgrimages. During the first year after the official completion of the war it has been estimated that at least half a million Siṃhalas travelled along the A9 road to the North as tourists. The expressed intension of most of these Siṃhalas was to visit the Nayiṅṭīvu (Nāgadīpa) Vihāraya in the North which had been under the control of Lankan security forces for a long period. While newly constructed Buddhist sites are also becoming places of devotion to them, visitors come to the many war memorials and museums built by the military exhibiting key locations and weaponry used by the LTTE. The latter locations have attracted more Siṃhalas to the region than the religious sites. However, as the war has been justified by the Siṃhala Buddhist ideology of “re-conquest”, the newly built Buddhist sites become part of war tourism endowed with a religious sense rendering it into a religious pilgrimage. Since many pilgrim/tourists stop at these key junctions commercial enterprises of the military thrive, and it is a common practice amongst the pilgrim/tourists to give donations to the religious sites there. It is not only the above category of people who frequent these locations, but also politicians, investors, business persons, constructors, Siṃhala labourers brought from the South, traders, NGOs, journalists, etc. [Fig. 12–13].

In this manner, “post-war” expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil Region is intrinsically interwoven with trade and commerce whereby the key public and economic locations of the Tamil have been occupied. This war by other means deprives the people in the
region of the wherewithal of basic livelihood. Such public locations have therefore become symbols of Sinhala Buddhist domination, and targets of Tamil resistance. Would reconciliation be possible in such a context of “war by other means”?

III. Renovation and Expansion of Modern Sinhala Buddhist Vihārayas

Vihāraya refers to a Buddhist monastery. The word “modern,” here refers to Sinhala vihārayas that were built in recent history in the Tamil region. These were built for the veneration of the Buddha by Sinhala migrant fishermen, workers, traders and state and public sector employees of the region, mostly after Independence in 1948. With the escalation of conflict these vihārayas had to be abandoned as the Sinhala migrants moved back to the South. One can find such temples on Matu Road and South Bar in Mannar district, in Kilinochi town of Kilinochi district, and in Yālppānam town in the North. In the “post-war” period these have been expanded and renovated including facilities for the Buddhist monks to reside. It is important to note how the public and state sector is in collaboration with the military in renovating these sites. At the same time, some of these renovations were followed by Sinhala settlements. One clear example is the Madhu Road housing scheme that followed the reconstruction of the vihāraya and a pilgrim house which were assisted by the military. The People’s Bank of Sri Lanka raised 60 million Lankan rupees from its employees for this housing scheme.82 The political imagination of Sinhala Buddhist ideology is so powerful that, in some Sinhala Buddhist re-readings of history, perhaps this area could fall into the category of ancient Sinhala Buddhist sites in the Tamil region. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the housing scheme (which was attended by the President’s brother Basil Rājapakṣa, a key minister of GoSL, the military officers and the saṅgha) the incumbent of the newly reconstructed Śrī Bodhirājāramaya on Madu Road, K. Siri Bharathi Nāyaka Thera, said:

A three-decade war came to an end under the correct leadership and guidance of the President and our country has seen peace once again. Madhu Road is a historic village. The residents were able to come back to the village after an unfortunate event in 1985 only by the guidance of the

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President after peace was obtained. In addition, they have made provisions for these houses to be divided amongst the people with no racial discrimination.83 However, according to a human rights observer, out of fifty houses, forty have been given to Sinhala families, five to Tamil families and five to military officials who have been assigned to the security of that village. It is not only the military that is involved but also the state and public sector employees who are ready to contribute to the furtherance of the attaching ideology expressed in such schemes. [Fig. 14]

In Tirukōṇamalai district existing vihārayas have been given vast tracts of land for expansion of vihāraya property. These lands have been taken over from displaced Tamils.84 The “post-war reconstruction” is based on the Sinhala Buddhist ideology whereby thousands of thus displaced Tamil families have not only been excluded from new housing and construction projects, but also deprived of their land. In this sense “post-war reconstruction” bodes the expansion of Sinhala Buddhism into the Tamil region and is intrinsically interwoven with the “re-conquest” of land and property by the Sinhalas.

In terms of new pilgrim resorts that have been built, both Matu Road and Kilinocci temples cater to Sinhala pilgrims who travel to the North. New facilities have been built for such pilgrims to rest. During the peace process during 2002–2006 there were many Sinhala pilgrims who travelled this route. Their point of contact or places of rest were either LTTE or Tamil civilian run shops or restaurants. The ethos of that period was based on mutual respect and parity of esteem between the two communities. In the “post-war” era this ethos has been radically transformed. The Sinhala pilgrims encounter only the Sinhala soldiers, their shops and restaurants, and rest at vihārayas. The mood is triumphalistic, justified by the Sinhala Buddhist ideology the pilgrims and hosts share. In this, dignity or parity of esteem between the two communities is absent. Instead, what exists is a dehumanising relationship of subjugation of one community by another. In this sense there have been two kinds of peace in the island during the last decade, one was based on parity of esteem and

83 Loc. cit.
the other, based on subjugation of a people by ethno-religious military might. Meanwhile providing the temples with new facilities has been prioritised, creating continuous delays and refusals of resettlement of the displaced Tamils in their villages and towns. This has deeply polarised the two ethno-nationalist communities, with Śimhala Buddhist acting as an identifiable key contributor to the polarisation. In this way “post-war reconstruction” is in practice a “war by other means”. [Fig. 15–17] The universal ethical principle of egalitarianism in Buddhism has been subordinated to a particularistic Śimhala Buddhist ethic that privileges one ethno-nationalist group over another. Could such a form of Buddhism have any potential for the building of peace in the island? The following type of expansion will demonstrate how the ideology or re-conquest is in fact reinforced through a new round of Śimhala settlements in the Tamil region.

IV. Arrival of Śimhala Buddhism with Śimhala colonies

Expansion of Śimhala Buddhism also takes place with a new round of Śimhala settlements in the Tamil regions. In this case, Śimhala Buddhists are settled by the GoSL, the military, and the Buddhist monks. Often the statement of GoSL, JHU and JVP that every citizen has a right to live wherever she chooses translates as part of the Śimhala Buddhist ideology to claim the right to the entire island. Such a right is essentially inseparable from the right to build Buddhist places of worship in the Tamil region. In a very comprehensive report issued by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) in Colombo, it has been pointed out how the process of “śimhalacisation” of the Mullaittivu and Vavuṇiyā districts has been exacerbated in the “post-war” era; a process that had already started in the Eastern, and the border regions of the Northern Provinces even prior to the escalation of the conflict. As shown in the first section of this article, this has been the practice since the colonial period and was intended to “preserve the peasantry” (Śimhala), who became landless due to expansion of plantations in the South. This process has not only engulfed any peasant revolt arising in the South, but also incorporated them into the state structure and the Śimhala Buddhist ideology. In the “post-war” era new Śimhala settlements have also been set up in the districts of Kīlinocci, Maṇṇār and Yāḷppāṇam. Some of these settlements are occupied by the Śimhala families from the South, while others are for military cantonments. The CPA report comments as follows:
When the war ended, several returned to the North in search of their land and property and began to restart their livelihoods. While some have legitimate claims, there are concerns that there is a state sponsored scheme to encourage more Sinhelas to claim land in the North, reside in these areas and commence livelihoods.85

In the Tirukōṇamalai district of the Eastern Province, a Sinhala colony of 110 families has been settled in Paccūr village in the Mūttur Division, which is a traditional Tamil village. A vihāraya and a school have been constructed to cater to the settlers’ religious and educational needs. Settlement of Sinhala Buddhists in the North and East have been recommended by Mēdhānanda Thera, who argues that had Buddhist settlements been built by the government near and around the areas of ancient sites with residential facilities for the monks, the ancient Sinhala Buddhist heritage could have been saved.86 One of the clear examples of demand for Sinhala settlements in the Tamil region could be found under the leadership of Ampitiyē Sumanaratnē Thera, the chief incumbent of the Mangalarāma vihāraya in Maṭṭakaḷappu town in the Eastern Province. The Thera carried out two fast-unto-death campaigns between September 2010 and February 2012, demanding Sinhala settlements, new vihārayas, the renovation of existing ones, the appointment of Sinhala-speaking civil servants and facilities to the temples, in the predominantly Tamil (Caiva/Vainava and Muslim) district. In a revealing interview to Sunday Leader he acknowledged the demographic and economic realities of the area.

If this was a Sinhala Buddhist area I could have gone around and collected some food. But there are no Sinhala Buddhists in Batticaloa District making my life very difficult... The only help I get to maintain this temple is from the Tamils in the area. They love the temple. This temple is a place for national unity. But many in the Tamil community in Batticaloa themselves are helpless due to extreme poverty. How can I expect them to help?87

In Tirukōṇamalai district, new land has been allocated to existing vihārayas in the villages of Pulmōṭṭai, Ilāttikkulam, Tiriyāy and Cempi-

86  Ellāvala Mēdhānanda, Pūcina Passa ..., 8.
yañ Malai. It has been reported that around 400 acres have been further granted by the GoSL to these temples at the request of Buddhist monks. In Maṭṭakkaḷappu district large numbers of Buddhist monks have been frequenting the villages of Vākarai, Kirān, Vavuṇatīvu, Vellāveli and Paṭṭippalai in search of lands for Siṃhala settlements and vihārayas. This type of expansion overlaps with claims to ancient sites as Siṃhala Buddhist heritage since, for instance, the above mentioned village, Tiriyāy is one of the places where Siṃhala settlements have been legitimised on the basis of such a claim. [Fig. 18]

On the one hand, establishment of Siṃhala settlements has necessitated the setting up of Buddhist places of worship in the Tamil region, and, on the other hand, claims to an ancient Buddhist heritage have legitimised the establishment of Siṃhala colonies. Siṃhala Buddhist monks frequent these settlements and plans are underway for their permanent residency in the region. Each of these villages with Buddhist sites and monks cannot function without the support of the military. These new settlements radically change the demography of the region and incorporate Siṃhala civilians into the military mechanism. In the existing old Siṃhala settlements, civilians were armed as home guards and were used as a buffer zone in the war (with Israeli advice), for which they became targets of LTTE counter-violence. In the “post-war” context these buffer zones have moved into the heart of the Tamil region.

Land, colonies and military have become an essential part of Siṃhala Buddhism in the Tamil region. Can the displaced Tamil then, separate this form of Buddhism from Buddhism as an ethical/soteriological tradition? Can this be a concern at all, as long as the material basis for livelihood has been denied them? Could the Buddhists in Īlam separate themselves from this form of Buddhism while they benefit from the expansion through triumphalism, trade, commerce, land, resources, colonies, income etc?

V. Organisation of Buddhist Rituals and Festivals in the Tamil Region

It could be observed that in strictly Hindu, Muslim or Catholic locations like Yāḷppāṃ town, Muruṅkaṅ, Maṇṇār town and Pēcālai village pirit ceremonies are organised for pōya days and other occa-
sions throughout the night with loud-speakers. Pirit ‘protection’ is the name of a ritual that by recital of Buddhist text in Pāli and Sinhala protects the listeners. Some of the ceremonies also have processions through the areas surrounding the vihārayas. In Yālppañam town, school children were forcibly taken by the military to perform Tamil cultural dances in the processions as ritual dances. Those parents of the children who have objected have faced harassment from the military. This shows how the Buddhist rituals and festivities have been militarised and racialised even though some of these rituals have heavy Hindu influence. [Fig. 19]

Often, the right to use loudspeakers in public places for religious festivities, ceremonies and rituals has been part of the discourse on religious freedom in the island of Ilam. In “post-war” expansion of Sinhala Buddhism this right has been interpreted as the right of military camps and the Buddhist monks to use the public address system for such practices in strictly Hindu or Christian areas where there is no Buddhist public.

The most celebrated moment of Buddhist rituals and festivals in the “post-war” Tamil region was the GoSL sponsored celebration of 2600 Vēsak festival in May 2011. Vēsak is the Buddhist commemoration of the birth, enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha. A close Sinhala friend of mine who frequents the Tamil region, after visiting Vaṇṇi during the week of vēsak in 2011, in an email sent to several friends wrote as follows:

In this tragic and contradictory situation I had the opportunity to visit the Northern part of the country, the land of the Tamils, which is now invaded under the Sinhalese armed forces. There are no Buddhists in the North except the occupying army. Though the fact is so, the whole of North, from Vavuniya to Jaffna along the A-9 road, was full of colourful vesak decorations, huge lanterns and flying Buddhist flags as if the people of the North, the Tamils are Buddhists. A number of vesak dansel had been set up in several places. All these were done by the occupying SL Armed Forces and Police who are responsible for the massacre, as a sign of subjugation of the Tamils by the Sinhalese Buddhists.89

The event was called Sambuddha Jayantiyā and it coincided with the week of the second anniversary commemorating the final battle between the GoSL and LTTE which has been named by Tamils as Mul-livāykkāl Nīnaiyvat Tiṅgam ‘Mullivāykkāl Remembrance Day’. While there were thousands of lamps and lights lit in commemoration of the Buddha during this week, the Tamils in the North and East were pro-

89 Anon. Email sent to the author, dated: 06/06/2011.
hibited by the military from conducting any memorial ceremonies for those killed in the final battle. Ironically, on *vēsamu* day the Siṃhala Buddhists decorate the graveyards of their loved ones lighting lamps to remember them. The lamps and lights of *vēsamu* signified the dhamma that has overtaken avijja ‘ignorance’, lobha ‘greed’ and dosa ‘hatred’, but as the meaning of the light of dhamma has been territorialised and racialised, there was no visible social and religious space in the Siṃhala society for the ethical/ soteriological aspect of Buddhism to see the silent weeping of the Tamilś who are desperately in need of remembering the loved ones, whose graveyards are unknown.

The military does not permit holding of public Hindu or Christian rituals to remember those who have been killed in war. These ceremonies could be conducted in private, whereas the Buddhist monks who conduct public ceremonies on pōya days in the Tamil region (solely to the soldiers) commemorate the soldiers killed in the war. This shows how “post-war” expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region has played a role in depriving Tamilś of their right to remembrance. Denial of the memory of loss of the Tamilś in war is legitimised by the “just war” logic of the regaining of a lost Siṃhala Buddhist heritage. It can be observed that there are a few Buddhist monks in the island who would lead the devotees to an inclusive remembering of the dead (both Tamil and Siṃhala) in their public rituals, but they interpret these deaths as a result of a futile war waged by the “terrorists” because of the latter’s craving for land. The unitary state structure again features as an unchangeable “given”.

Whatever the ritual form it would take, commemoration of the loss of lives is a catalyst for resistance for the Tamilś. Could that memory be erased by denial of public remembrance of loss and promotion of Siṃhala Buddhist rituals in the Tamil region?

VI. Building Buddhist Sites on or Close to Other Religious Sites

The national question in Ilam is not a religious conflict in the sense of a Buddhist-Hindu conflict, but it has serious religious implications. As seen before, it is a conflict based on two distinct and radically dif-

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90 Perry Schmidt-Leukel argues that the conflict is fundamentally a religious one based on the memory of pre-colonial Hindu-Buddhist rivalries in the Indian subcontinent that led the Theravada Buddhists to find a safe haven in the southern part of the subcontinent which is the island of Lanka. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, “Buddhist-Hindu Relations”, *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel(Munich: EOS, 2008), 143–171.
ferent forms of ethno-nationalisms; one is an ethno-religious nationalism (Sīṃhala Buddhist), while the other a secular-ethno nationalism (Tamil), each with competing claims to territory. The former claims the entire island as the heritage of Sīṃhala Buddhists, whereas the latter claims the North and East as the traditional homeland of the Tamils. The former grounds its argument based on a belief in a perennial past that has been religiously defined. The latter justifies its demand on the basis of a series of historical grievances that have been caused by colonial and post-colonial state-building.

Even though there was a demand made on the military during the 2002 peace process to vacate all the places of worship that they occupied, in the “post-war” era building of Buddhist sites on or in close proximity to Hindu and Christian sites (aided by the military) has rapidly increased. Often the Tamil parliamentarians of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) raise this issue in the parliament detailing such expansions. According to C Yokēcuvaran (S. Yogeswaran), TNA Parliamentarian for Maṭṭakalappu district in the Eastern Province, the iliṅkam (linga) in the Kanikvēḷi Civaṅkōvil in Mūṭur in Tirukōṇamalai district, Verukalpālai Murukaṅkōvil and Verukal Kallati Nilīyammanṅkōvil have been destroyed and replaced with malāsanayas/ pūjayanayas. In one of its Situation Reports the TNA also stated that in Kōkkilāy in Mullaitivu district, a Hindu temple (Pīḷḷayar kōvil) which was damaged during the war has been demolished and replaced by a malāsanaya instead. [Fig. 20]

Kōkkilāy boarders the Tirukōṇamalai district and the area is near a lagoon full of marine resources and connected to the sea. One can also travel easily to Tirukōṇamalai district by the lagoon for trade and commerce. Sīṃhala fishermen have been settled there. It has been reported by the TNA that a Buddhist statue has been placed in Kiṇṇiyā in Tirukōṇamalai district at a site where seven hot wells and a Pīḷḷayar kōvil are situated, and where the Caivas used to perform certain religious ceremonies. Kōkkilāy is one of the cases which reflects the overlapping of types of expansion through Sīṃhala settlements with the construction of Buddhist sites on or around other religious sites. Kiṇṇiyā is another case where expansion by the acquisition of public locations (hot wells are a tourist attraction), and the building of

92 M. A. Sumanthiran, Situation in North-Eastern Sri Lanka: A Series of Serious Concerns, (Tabled in Parliament on 21 October, 2011, Section, 7.3).
Buddhist sites in and around other religious sites overlap with one another. In Tantamalai, Maṭṭakkalappu district in the Eastern Province, the Kantavē Murukaṇṭ Caiva kōvil has been demolished by the Lankan military to build a malāsanaya. While a group of Sinhhalas, led by a Buddhist monk and aided by the police and the military, have started building a vihāraya in the traditional Caiva site of Kaccaikoṭi in Cuvāmimalai in the same district.93

In Maṇṭar district of the Northern Province, Muruṅkaṇṭ on the Matavācci-Maṇṭar Road had its extant small malāsanaya expanded and a new vihāraya built on. The existing small malāsanaya was set up by the military just near the Caiva kōvil and this was done in the 1980s. The new expansion is named Purāṇa Rāja Mahā Vihāra which means ‘ancient royal great monastary’, giving the impression that the location was a work of an ancient king. With the new expansion a monk has moved there for permanent residency. The location is well-lighted throughout the night for security reasons, but this lighting also gives an imposing outlook to the site which the other places of worship in the region do not have. [Fig. 21]

Kaṭakāmpikai Ammaṅ is the guardian god of Tamils in Vaṇṇi region that covers the districts of Mullaiṭṭūvū, Kiḷinocci and parts of Maṇṭar in the North. The kōvil is located on the bank of the Iranai-madu Tank in Kiḷinocci, where formerly the political headquarters of the LTTE was based. A Tamiḻ politician who supported the GoSL’s war against the LTTE, Āṉāntacaṅkari (Ananda Sangaree) has accused the military of blocking the kōvil with barbed-wire and building a vihāraya nearby named Vāvsiri Vihāraya, ‘monastery at a beautiful lake’. [Fig. 22]

In Kirusaṇapuram in the Kiḷinocci district the Caiva kōvil of god Viṇāyakar ‘Remover of Obstacles’ (Piḷḷaiyār, Gaṇeṣā) has been demolished by the Lankan military and a Buddha statue has been constructed over it. The Caiva kōvil was built 30 years ago by a population of Tamiḻ plantation workers who settled in the area after fleeing from 1983 anti-Tamiḻ pogrom.

Tirukkētisvaram, Tirukkōṅēsvaram, Nakulēsvaram, Muṇṇēsvaram, and Tōṇṭēsvaram are the five major ancient religious sites that are highly regarded by the Caivas. The first three have been occupied by the military in the North and East. In Maṇṭar district, in Tirukkētisvaram a small Buddhist place of worship named Mahātota Rāja Mahā Vihāraya was built initially by the military in close proximity

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to the Caiva kōvil and a Buddhist monk has come to reside there. The Government Agent of Maṉṉār district officially ordered the construction of a large vihāraya in the vicinity of Tirukkēṭisvaram Caiva kōvil on 04 May, 2012. The military also continues to block the renovation of the Caiva kōvil. In the meantime, a pilgrim’s rest has been built for the Sinhala Buddhists who frequent the area. [Fig. 23]

Another variant of this expansion has been reported from the Maṭṭakalappu district in the Eastern Province. In Kaṇṇaiyapuram village in Vellāveli the Special Task Force (STF) of the Lankan Government has cleared a location with the support of the Caiva villagers promising the latter that the STF would build a Caiva kōvil. Subsequently, construction items have been brought to the site to build a vihāraya. Would such an expansion result in a Buddhist-Hindu conflict?

As a reaction to some of the above developments, an organisation called Global Peace Support Group has made an appeal on 25 March, 2010 to Hindus in India under the heading “Sinhalese Buddhism is waging a war against Hinduism in Īlam”. The opening of the appeals reads as follows:

We, the Hindus of Sri Lanka, have the duty to tell the World Hindus the truth of our plight to save Sanatana Dharma — the Eternal Universal Righteousness in the Siva Bhumi Sri Lanka.

A Hindu writer admonishes Indian Hindus for aiding the GoSL to destroy what the writer calls civa-p-pūmi ‘land of Civaṇ’:

The Eelam Tamil Saivaism is an integral part of the culture and traditions of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The Sinhalese know that well, which is the reason they are building Buddhist structures all over the Tamil homeland to mark the conquest of Eelam Tamils. The Indian Hindus who cry for the destruction of even a tiny Hindu Temple in Pakistan and Bangladesh are not paying any attention to the destruction of Hindu Temples in Tamil homeland.

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97 Anon., “The Buddhist shrines and the archaeological offensive in Tamil Homel-
This seems to reflect a clash between two forms of religious fundamentalisms, rather than a conflict between two forms of nationalisms. While Hindūtva ideology upholds a pan-Hindu South Asia, the JHU sees that it is similar to Hindūtva in certain characteristics, particularly as it represents the native middle classes. The JHU theoretician, Campika Raṇavaka does not see the Tamil national movement as part of Hindūtva agenda, even though he refers to South Indian invasions in the past. Raṇavaka approvingly reveals how the Indian ambassador in Laṃkā at a meeting with the JHU leadership in Colombo saw similarities between the Hindūtva movement and the JHU. He also points out how Tiyākarājā Makēsvaraṇ, the Caiva Parliamentarian has made attempts to build a relationship with the Hindūtva movement and JHU. This reflects that the “common enemy” of both Hindūtva and Siṃhala Buddhist nationalist (Siṃhalatva) forces is the principle of secularity in their own lands, which will deprive them of their privileged position on the basis of an ethno-religious majoritarian identity. Despite the fact that there are attempts to imagine a civappūmi amongst some Tamil, these attempts have been marginal and the Tamil national movement has upheld the principle of secularity rather than an ideology based on a civappūmi.

It is not only the Caivas/Vaiṇavas who have been affected but also the Christian communities. In Tirukkēṭisvaram, the military also has blocked the construction of a Christian church. Some Christian families who have recently moved into the region continue to demand it be built. However, in an interview with a human rights activist from the area who is also a Catholic, I was told that he does not approve of the demand by Christian families to put a church in the vicinity of one of the revered sites of the Hindus. In Valveṭṭittuṟai in Yālppāṇam district a Buddha statue has been installed by the military in front of a Roman Catholic Church. This led a TNA Parliamentarian to appeal to the Vatican to take diplomatic measures to stop the construction. There are also reports of similar happenings in the predominantly Roman Catholic Maṅgār Island.

Appeals made to Vatican and to Hindus in India are perceived by the Siṃhala Buddhist nationalist groups as part of an international conspiracy to destroy the Siṃhala Buddhist collective identity of the
country. This perception continues to justify the rhetoric of victimisation that they wield, that it is the Sinhala Buddhists who are being persecuted and whose heritage has been grabbed away by others. This rhetoric forgets the fact that the GoSL could not have won the war without the political, military and diplomatic support it received from major world powers to the effect of dismantling the 2002 peace process. It was because the latter needed a strong state on the island as part of a shared geo-political strategy, that the GoSL was strengthened, so to protect the unitary state against the LTTE. This does not mean that the global powers want Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. Internally, it would be hard however, to think that the idea of a unitary state structure could be promoted without the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideology. The proponents of this ideology not only gained confidence, but also material support through the actions of the global powers to implement the agenda of “re-conquest”. In this way the material conditions for the expansion of Sinhala Buddhism into the Tamil region have been created by geo-political interests. An analysis conducted without a geopolitical perspective could fall into the danger of reducing the conflict into a perennial Buddhist-Hindu conflict.

Could India or the European Union who claim to uphold the principle of secularity be supporters of the Lankan state and continue to aid “post-war reconstruction” which manifests the expansion of Sinhala Buddhism?

VII. Declaration of Ancient Buddhist sites in the Region as Sinhala Buddhist Heritage

The Minister for Cultural and Arts Affairs of GoSL, T. B. Ekanāyaka told *Daily News* (a GoSL owned paper), that the Central Cultural Fund has already initiated the process of identifying archaeological sites in the districts of Yălppānam, Kūlinocci, Maṇṉār and Mullaittivu. It was also reported that UNESCO is contributing to the above fund.99 Identification of ancient sites in the Tamil region is one of GoSL’s “post-war reconstruction” efforts. Even though both Mēdhāṇanda Thera and the Sinhala academic, Sunil Ariyaratna admit that in the past there have been Tamil devotees of vihārayas, it is not clear, especially in the writings of the former, that there were Tamils who were Buddhists. For the Thera, all the ancient Buddhist sites in the

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North and East are evidence of Śiṃhala Buddhism and the work of Śiṃhala Buddhist kings who protected Buddhism and had authority over the entire island. The debate over Buddhist sites in the North and East has emerged into the public domain as never before in the “post-war” era. A parliamentarian from TNA, S. Sritharan, said to the Parliament on 12 December, 2011 that there is archaeological evidence to prove that there have been Tamil Buddhists in the region, but some elements connected to GoSL continue to attempt to prove that these are Śiṃhala Buddhist settlements. A Śiṃhala political commentator in the newspaper *The Nation* wrote the following response to the Parliamentarian:

Now there’s nothing to link ‘Tamil’ to ‘Buddhist’ in the evidence except the fact that these artefacts have been unearthed from areas where Tamils now form the majority. Concluding in this manner is akin to saying that there were white people who held Mayan beliefs because some Mayan artefacts have been unearthed in some spot in the Andes where whites now reside. It is like saying that the discovery of a Nestorian cross is evidence of Christians having played a key role and one equal to the role of Buddhists in building a civilization. — What is interesting about the statement is the fact that the TNA has finally understood that it has to back rhetoric and claim with fact and substantiation. The long years of Eelam posturing was bereft of any reference to ‘Tamil Buddhists’ except from the staunch Tiger-supporting Peter Schalk, whose efforts were largely ignored by the Christian-dominated articulators of Eelam mythology. The current ‘latching-on’, then, indicates a) the recognition that history will preside over claim-verification and b) there’s very little fuel in the Tamil Nationalism bus to take the country towards any significant landmark along the road to Eelam.

As the debate continues both in and outside the Parliament, the name-board for the ancient Pautta site Kantarōṭai in Yāḷḷpāṇam peninsula has been changed into Śiṃhala calling it Kadurugo Vihāraya. This, and the Mallakam Buddhist site have been named as Kadurugoda Vihāraya and Tissa Vihāraya respectively by the Ministry of Buddha Sāsana on its website. [Fig. 24–25]

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Another location that has been claimed as a Sinhala Buddhist site is Mātakal, the North-western tip of Yāḷppāṇam peninsula, one of the two ports that is closer to Tamilnāṭu in India. It is argued that the emissaries of Aśoka who brought Buddhism to the island landed at this port; and a vihāraya, a pilgrim’s rest and a tourist centre have been built in Tiruvatinnai in Mātakal area giving the impression that at the time of the arrival of Buddhism it was the Sinhalas who inhabited the location. Resembling the family members of Aśoka who brought Buddhism to the island, the family members of the Lankan President, his wife and son, brought a statue of Sanghamittā (daughter of Aśoka who was the first Buddhist woman missionary to the island), to be enshrined in the newly built vihāraya in the location.103

Even though “post-war” era in the North started in 2009 it had already begun by 2008 in the Eastern Province, after the Lankan security forces took over the LTTE-administrative areas of that region. Even prior to this period the predominantly Muslim area Dīgaḷāpī has been the site of conflict between the Muslim leadership and the JHU. The area has a good number of ancient Buddhist sites and the Muslim politicians have been accused by JHU of taking over the land of the area. The latter obtained a court order halting the resettlement of 500 Muslim families after 2004 tsunami, but that was the only area that was available for resettlement. According to a report issued by the International Crisis Group in 2008 despite the fact that the Dīgaḷāpī vihāraya already has around 500 acres, the JHU upheld that the land should be greater yet still.104

In Tirukōṇamalai district the case of Samudragiri Vihāraya is another location of “re-conquest” of the region by reference to an ancient past. It is believed that the royal emissaries who arrived from India carrying a sampling of the Bo tree under which the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment landed at this port around 3rd century CE. Both Mātakal and Tirukōṇamalai areas have geo-strategic importance which will be discussed in the next section. Claims to ancient Sinhala Buddhist sites have also resulted in the establishment of Sinhala settlements in Tirukōṇamalai district. As it was pointed

out earlier, under the type of expansion by Siṃhala colonies in the case of Tiriyāy, a Buddhist monk has demanded from the government a vast tract of land for Siṃhala settlement around the ancient site, acquiring the lands that formerly belonged to Tamils. This is a case similar to Diğavāpi.

The Lankan President has appointed a Siṃhala Buddhist monk as the curator for the archaeological sites and artefacts in the Yāḷppāṇam peninsula. The officers of the archaeological department, who are Siṃhalas, frequent the ancient sites declaring them tourist sites reflecting a “post-war” development in the region. Some of these locations are also to be established as world heritage centres with international aid. Some of these cases also overlap with a variety of expansion through the acquisition of public places mentioned earlier; such as, Kaṇṭakārayankulam where a sampling of the Śrī Mahā Bodhi has been planted beside the A9 road. Campika Raṇavaka of JHU is said to have used his portfolio as the Minister for Environment of GoSL to construct Buddhist sites in the Tamil region in the name of protecting the environment. Another prominent member of the JHU, Udaya Gammanpila, states that there are “no ethno-religious constraints in Sri Lanka”, and that the party has “never objected to the building of Hindu malāsanayas in any part of the island”. “so why Buddhist statues should be treated any differently? When the accusations of cultural intrusion were brought up, harmony among communities is disturbed by making an issue of this”. He gives three reasons for Buddhist statues existing in these areas, in a way summing up the above mentioned varieties of expansion:

Firstly, there are tens of thousands of Buddhist soldiers stationed in the area, for whom these statues are a place of worship. Also, during the war many sites of archaeological value were destroyed. Buddhist stupas and statues have been built in these areas due to this. There are also many Buddhists who make pilgrimage to the North, and on their way stop by at the many Buddha statues. So there is a clear purpose, it should not become an issue.105

It has been reported that the claim to ownership of ancient sites through archaeological findings is associated with newly planted information and archaeological artefacts. In a detailed well-researched report compiled by the Minority Rights Group International in 2011, it has been revealed by means of eye-witness accounts of some resi-

dents in Tirukōṇamalai, in the Eastern Province, that such artefacts were planted by unknown persons in some areas: They say people came at night, on motorcycles, with sacks full of items which they planted in the area. Those interviewed for this report were insistent that state officials are involved in these incidents.106

There are also reports that Lankan soldiers have threatened the Hindu priest and devotees in a kōvil in Kilinochci district, that the former would destroy the kōvil site and accusing the later of burying ancient Buddha statues, scriptures and archaeological findings under the kōvil.107 In this manner, the claim to an ancient Śiṃhala Buddhist heritage justifies the acquisition of land by the GoSL, its military, and the Buddhist monks. A report issued by the International Crisis Group (ICG) in 2008 documents how arbitrary the process of claiming ancient Śiṃhala Buddhist heritage really is, just as is the building of Buddhist sites and Śiṃhala settlements in the Tamil region. A Tamil human rights campaigner interviewed by ICG spoke as follows: “Wherever there is a peepal tree and a Buddha statue we will be in trouble”.108

Some of the locations of “re-conquest” such as Kaṇakārayapūlam are well-kept areas in the whole of North and East. Here, “well-kept” means well-cleaned, grass-moved, and aesthetically designed. The landscape has been ordered out of the “wild” as it was done during the colonial period in “discovering” the Sacred City of Anurādhapura; and made ready for religious worship, tourism, settlement and businesses. The “wild” here, in the post-colonial phase, means the de facto state of the LTTE which came into existence as a secular state structure as result of resistance to a religiously defined unitary state. As Mēdhān-anda Thera believes these locations are not archaeological sites, but ‘sacred sites’. Śiṃhalas who visit these locations make of them a part of their lives, unlike the people who visit the pyramids in Egypt.

It is clear that representations of the past have been determined by the politics of the present. Would a scientific deconstruction of history help resolve the ethno-nationalist conflict in Īḻam? Would the historical fact that there was Tamil Buddhism in the Tamil region change the

mindset of the Sinhala constituency? Such awareness may be helpful, but as long as the power dynamics behind the construction of metanarratives are not challenged from the perspectives of their victims, corrective knowledge about history will only be a marginal factor.

VIII Building Sinhala Buddhist Sites at Geo-strategic Locations

Transformation of geo-strategic locations into a “sacred space” is another type of “post-war” expansion that can be noticed in the Tamil region. The Lankan naval force has extended its base by acquiring private lands in the above mentioned Mātakal area, and are in the process of transforming the region into a “sacred place”; claiming it as a Sinhala Buddhist heritage. [Fig. 27]

The area has been declared a high security zone, where civilians are not allowed to reside while permanent naval cantonments have been constructed.109 The northern sea and the coast have been pivotal for both the Lankan state and the Tamil national movement. The former would not have direct access to Bay of Bengal without this region, while for the latter the region provides for the livelihoods of people, and helps to maintain cultural and trade contacts with Tamilnāṭu in India. The ownership of the region also provides the Tamil national movement with a military/political/strategic power balance vis-à-vis the Lankan and Indian governments in achieving the objective of the state of Tamililam. In sacralising a geo-strategic location like Mātakal on the basis of an Aśokan Buddhist lineage, the Lankan state justifies its unitary structure as having a perennial existence, while depicting Aśokan Buddhism as Sinhala Buddhism. Such an ethno-religious ideology happens to serve the interests of the major powers such as India, China and USA in securing a unitary state structure against the Tamil national movement.

The north-western sea and the coast in the Tamil region are the other closest point to Tamilnāṭu. As shown earlier, Mēdhānanda Thera’s claim (which was highlighted in the government-run Sunday Observer newspaper), that ports of this region were constructed and controlled by the Sinhala Buddhist kings and the region had Sinhala vihārayas, are attempts to sacralise geo-strategic locations in the Tamil territory. [Fig. 28–29]

On an administrative level, the entire district of Maṉṉār populated by the Tamiḷs where the North-western sea and coast are located, has been brought under the archaeological province of Anurādhapura; the imagined “sacred city” of the Siṃhala Buddhist civilisation. A large Buddha statue has been built near the Yāḷppāṇam harbour making it clearly visible to the vessels that reach the shore. In similar fashion the claim to ancient sites in the Tirukōṇamalai area is also of geo-strategic import, whereby the sacralisation of these locations mean territorialisation of Buddhism throughout the entire island (dhamma—island as dhamma), while this is possible only through the unitary state structure.

As shown earlier, a geopolitical analysis of the expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamiḻ region is of the utmost importance for us to understand the international implications of the conflict. An analysis conducted through the single state lens would therefore be seriously misleading.

IX. Destruction of LTTE Cemeteries and Monuments and Building of GoSL War Memorials

The Lankan military has built a large number of war memorials in the Tamiḻ region. These do not have necessarily Buddhist symbols. They reflect the “heroism” of the soldiers. However, in the inscriptions on the memorials it is written that they offered their lives for the baunika akandatvaya of the country, i.e. ‘the territorial integrity’ [of the island]. [Fig. 30–33]

War museums too have been built in Kilinocci and Mullaitṭīvu to display the weaponry that was used by the military and the LTTE during the war. Some key properties that have been damaged by war are being displayed as tourist attractions, for instance, a giant water tank damaged during the war has become such an exhibit. Observers say that the construction of these memorials, exhibits, visitor’s centres and restaurants have been prioritised in the “post-war reconstruction” efforts of GoSL. All of these memorials and centres lie amid thousands of displaced people who live in temporary huts, with only bear minimum access to basic facilities, or none at all! This process was preceded by the destruction of all the LTTE cemeteries and memorials. In effect, it is not only ancient history that has been reinterpreted, and selectively and exclusively depicted, but also the most recent history (of the last 10–20 years) has been so falsely represented. [Fig. 34]
Denial of the memory of resistance is essential for the consolidation of the military might of the Lankan state and its ethno-religious ideology. Such denial is not only a denial of memory but also a denial of the aspirations to a secular state in the Tamil region. Broadly, it blocks the memory of the multiple socioeconomic, agricultural, fisheries, and cultural, educational, artistic as well as political achievements of the Tamil national resistance that has been destroyed.

X. A Siṃhala Buddhist Stūpa at Muḷlivāykkāl

Muḷlivāykkāl is the location in Vaṇṇi where the last battle between the Lankan military and the LTTE took place. For the Tamils, the name of the location is associated with the memory of mass atrocities committed by the GoSL’s security forces during the last phase of the war. Since the formal end of the war, the last day of the final battle is remembered by the Tamils as Muḷlivāykkāl Niṅaṅvat Tiṇam. The name of the location has informed the popular imagination of Siṃhala society as recalling war victory. Campika Raṇavaka of JHU who is also a key Minister of GoSL used this name in a press conference to threaten Tamil Parliamentarians saying that the latter should not try to create another hundred Muḷlivāykkāls. If they try, the GoSL and the JHU are ready for it. The particular location has become a tourist attraction for the Siṃhalas, but Tamils who travel across the area are not allowed by the military to get down from their vehicles so to visit the location. A new Buddhist stūpa has been constructed at the site with full Siṃhala name boards, opened on the third anniversary of the final battle. This construction reflects the role that Siṃhala plays in deeply polarising the Tamils and Siṃhalas. [Fig. 35, 49]

A location that symbolises mass atrocities for one community has become a place for the triumphalism and religious fervour of another community. While this and other types of expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism have become symbol of subjugation for the Tamils, there is a new process that has been initiated to additionally memorialise the war victory throughout the entire island by building Buddhist stūpas which will be discussed in the next section.

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XI. Consolidation of Siṃhala Buddhism throughout the Entire Island.

The website of the GoSL’s defence ministry has announced a new [“post-war”] project to build nine Buddhist stūpas in nine provinces of the island. The defence ministry website states that this is done “in appreciation of the noble service rendered by the armed forces and the police to defeat terrorism and bring lasting peace to the country.”\(^{111}\) The titles given to the stūpas read differently in English and Siṃhala. For example, the English version “Triumphant Stūpas,” whereas the Siṃhala wording is saṇḍahiru seya, meaning ‘stūpas of the sun and the moon’. The combination of the images of sun and the moon imply eternity. The image on the website gives the impression that they are to be built on ancient ruins. [Fig. 36–38]

A well-coordinated island-wide network has been established to encourage the public to contribute to the fund. All the police stations and all the branches of the Bank of Ceylon and People’s Bank of Sri Lanka have set up counters to sell tickets that would raise funds to buy cement and bricks.

It is important to recall that the nine provinces are colonial legacies that were carved out of diverse regions for administrative purposes. Building nine stūpas in nine provinces reflects a belief in a perennial existence or imagined past, even as these provinces were colonial demarcations actually. Notably, for this project the public are requested to contribute to the buildings. Moreover, the defence ministry is charged with its oversight and not the Buddha Sāsana Ministry or Cultural Ministry. This shows that defence is inseparable from Buddhism, and the manner in which the Siṃhala Buddhist public are motivated by this religio-military imagination.

Building nine stūpas in nine provinces will contribute to internally consolidate the power of the Siṃhala Buddhist ideology throughout the island. At the same time, the GoSL has taken steps to build its image as a Buddhist country internationally. As a mark of celebration of the 2600\(^{th}\) vēsak festival Buddha statues similar to Samadhi statue will be sent to Lankan overseas missions worldwide. A large number of these statues were brought from the Māтарa in the Southern Province to Colombo in a procession accompanied by a large number of Buddhist monks chanting pūrṇa throughout the procession. The Minister for Foreign Employment Promotion, Dilan Perera, has told the

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media that the aim of this action is to promote Theravāda Buddhism internationally:

These Buddha statues will help promote Theravada Buddhism in the world and also promote characteristics of Lankan Buddha statues. Sri Lankans abroad will get the chance to worship these Buddha statues.¹¹²

[Fig. 39–41]

As another move of this Sinhala Buddhist missionary effort a Bō sapling of Śrī Mahā Bodhi was donated to Bodh Gayā in India in order to commemorate the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha’s enlightenment. The sapling was paraded throughout Yālppānam peninsula accompanied by Buddhist monks with heavy military protection before it was sent to India. A stone inscription was set up in Mātakal to mark the occasion. It stated both in Tamil and Sinhala that it is the President Rājapakṣa as śrī trisīmhalādhiśvara the ‘Lord of Three Sinhala Regions’ who sent the sapling to India. Emperor Aśoka is mentioned in the inscription as the one who sent the first sapling to the island of Laṁkā indirectly depicting the President as another emperor.¹¹³ [Fig. 42–43]

Building of the stūpas locally, sending a Bo sapling to India and sending Buddha statues globally reflect the state sponsored movement towards both internal and external consolidation of the Sinhala Buddhist image of the island. The Prime Minister also has launched a programme to teach English to the monks with the intention of sending them overseas to preach dhamma. This appears to recall the Aśokan model of propagation of Buddhism, nevertheless, what is questionably getting propagated is an ethno–religious ideological complex, characterised by a belief in an exclusivist form of national identity and a unitary state structure. In this, a particularistic ethic has been championed as opposed to the universal appeal of Buddhism. Such particularistic ethic denies responsibility for any violation of human rights by GoSL and its military in the war against LTTE.

Could the above image-building save GoSL from growing accusations of human rights violations including war crimes and crimes against humanity? What about the global powers de facto responsible for creating the material conditions for such crimes? Could the uni-


versal appeal of Buddhism calling for treatment of all peoples as equals be applied both to GoSL and the global powers in seeking justice for the victims of war? Would that not be the true Aśokan model of Buddhism?

Conclusion

What are the ethical/soteriological, legal, religious and political/ideological issues arising from the “post-war” expansion of Sinhala Buddhism into the Tamil region and in what way might these be resolved? To answer this question, in the preceding section, after the analysis of each type of expansion I attempted to raise certain pertinent questions that would give some points for reflection. Let me now systematically explore the various available responses to this question raised above.

There are those who propose a paradigm based on national unity through promotion of Buddhism in the Tamil region. The idea of national unity has two aspects. One is turning Tamils, particularly Tamil Caivas/Vaṅavas, into devotees of vihārayas and the other is incorporating Tamils into Sinhala culture, and converting them to Buddhism. With regard to the first aspect, as earlier shown, Mēdhānanda Thera, admits that there have been Tamil devotees of vihārayas in the past when arguing for the unitary state structure. The monk in Maṭṭakkaḷappu town sees the existence of the vihāraya in the town as having strategic importance for national unity under the unitary state construction where Tamils and Sinhelas can meet. The paradigm of national unity could be seen in the statements of chief monks of various Buddhist Chapters in the Sinhala Buddhist sāsana. In an article titled “An Analysis of the Selected Statements Issued by the Mahanayakas on the North-East Problem of Sri Lanka” written by Venerable Akuratiyē Nanda Thera this paradigm is explained as follows:

Page 2 has raised the question of resettling displaced Sinhalese who lived in the Jaffna Peninsula before 1997. They are 23,000 in number. In the same statement, the present and the future conditions of the sacred Buddhist sites scattered all over in the North and East are reminded of. Since most of the Sinhalese who are displaced are Buddhists, their resettlement and renovation of the sacred Buddhist sites seem to have been considered

114 Ellāvala Mēdhānanda, Pācīna Passa ..., 462–468.
inter-connected. The dreamland of the Mahanayakas is a united Sri Lanka where all communities can live together. To bring Sri Lanka back to lasting peace, the right of all communities to live anywhere within Sri Lanka according to their wish has to be re-established. Sri Lanka should belong to all, irrespective of ethnicity and should be the homeland of all. None of the statements provided herewith goes against this. Therefore, resettlement of the Sinhalese in Jaffna is essential to create a Sri Lanka of trusted peace. This becomes most significant and imperative in the context that the LTTE has extended its hand of friendship to the displaced Muslims.115

What is the difference between the above position of chief monks and that of JHU? Both positions claim a Siṃhala Buddhist heritage in the Tamil region and promote settlement of Siṃhalas wherever they wish to live. Does this mean that the chief incumbents are also followers of the JHU ideology? This aspect of the paradigm of national unity is moralising and takes for granted both unitary state structure and cultural homogenisation. It features reference to lost heritage that has been gained and to a “re-conquest” of one’s own land which was deprived of one for a long time.

Is there yet a moderate form of Buddhism, particularly as a public discourse in Īlam? The Buddhism that exists in the country is inextricably interwoven with the unitary state, the Siṃhala ethnicity and the territorialisation of dhamma. Could such Buddhism be moderate? The role of JHU is to be the vanguard of this ideology which is shared by Siṃhala society. Is such an ideology redeemable?

The other aspect is promoted by the Siṃhala academic Sunil Āriyaratna in his work Demaḷa Bauddāyā, where he clearly acknowledges the existence of Tamil Buddhists in the Tamil region, who had contributed to the development of Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent. He argues that the conflict in the island could have been resolved had the Siṃhala monks preached dhamma in Tamil and built a Tamil Buddhist sāsana instead of building a Siṃhala Buddhist sāsana in the Tamil region. If this had happened, the perception that the Tamil are enemies of Buddhism and that the Siṃhalas are enemies of Tamils could have been avoided.116 The Prime Minister who is also the Minister for Buddha Sāsana and Religious Affairs announced a programme to teach Tamil to Buddhist monks with the aim of serv-

116 Āriyaratna, Demaḷa Bauddāyā, 9–10.
ing the above two aspects of national unity.\textsuperscript{117}

Could Buddhism unite Tamils and Sinhala? Could \textit{dhamma} be preached in an ideological vacuum purely as a way to spiritual emancipation? If \textit{dhamma} was to become meaningful to its listeners should it not address the concrete realities that they encounter which entail socioeconomic and political issues of the day? Within the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist discourse, the unitary state has to be protected first, for the \textit{dhamma} to be preserved and for this purpose the path to \textit{nirvāṇa} can be postponed in following a military path. With such a justification of war could the victims of this war, mainly the Tamils, be attracted towards \textit{dhamma}? With such justification of the war on offer in what way could the memory and the pain of loss be interpreted? In a song written by Sunil Āriyaratna, Emperor Aśoka’s regret for waging wars is recalled to convince the LTTE in an indirect way about the futility of war which is caused by attachment to land. Such attachments are not seen in the problematic of the unitary state structure, which is taken for granted as an unchanging entity.

Another response is based on legal perspectives. Legally, Īlam does not have special laws that regulate construction of places of worship. This is given as evidence of religious freedom in the country where any person can practice one’s religion without any obstacle.\textsuperscript{118} General laws that govern any other construction are meant to regulate religious constrictions too. The argument of JHU is that there are many Hindu shrines in predominantly Sinhala areas. Similarly, there can be Buddhist shrines in the Tamil areas too.\textsuperscript{119} Those who analyse the crisis in the country as a result of the collapse of law and order therefore might emphasise the need to introduce special laws to govern the construction of religious sites as there are hundreds of both such constructions, and demands to remove them that have led to religious disharmony in the country. They would also reiterate the need for due process and mechanisms of accountability based on the notion of good governance in resolving the issue. The Tamil National Alliance


(TNA) which continue to oppose the building of Siṃhala Buddhist sites in the Tamil region in a Parliamentary debate reported in the *Daily News*, revealed that that there are at least 1700 places of worship in the region that have been destroyed by war. The TNA Parliamentarian has appealed to the government to pay grants allocated for the renovation of these places directly, rather than channeling the funds through local authorities who are corrupt in the area.\textsuperscript{120} These places include majority of Hindu temples, Christian churches and Muslim mosques, and a few vihārayas which were built before the war. There are three main points in the Parliamentarian’s appeal; attending to “post-war reconstruction”, adoption of an equidistant approach to all religions and tackling of corruption. All of these constitute good governance.

The biggest question however, is could the above move originate from a state structure that is ideologically fixed on privileging Siṃhala Buddhism? Could the political will to change this state structure be generated without deconstructing the imagined community of the Siṃhala Buddhist nation?

The types of expansion discussed above have clearly shown how “victor’s peace” translates into consolidating the unitary state structure based on the ideology of “re-conquest”, rather than adopting an equidistant approach to all ethnic and religious groups. The model of good governance based on law and order does not resolve the fundamental issues of the unitary state structure and its constitutive ideology. It is only by a process of changing the power dynamics (both local and international) which currently maintain the unitary state; and, by a process of exposing the contradictions within the imagined exclusivist community of Siṃhala Buddhist nation that the “National Question” in Īlam can be resolved.

What are the ethical and political aspects of this process?

While new Siṃhala Buddhist sites are being built in the Tamil region it has been revealed by a member of the Opposition in the Parliament that at least 2016 vihārayas have been closed, mainly in the Siṃhala areas, due to lack of resources to maintain them.\textsuperscript{121} While schools in the Tamil region have been destroyed by war [Fig. 45], it has also being reported that hundreds of rural schools in the Siṃhala


\textsuperscript{121} Marasinghe et al., “Government...”
areas have been closed due to increasing poverty and privatisation of the education system. A large number of *daham pasal* 'Dharma (Sunday) Schools', have been closed in the rural areas, while in urban areas the number of students has dwindled due to competitive education system that demands attendance of tuition classes on Sundays. The move made by the GoSL to make attendance at *Daham Pasal* compulsory for educational qualifications from 2012 will exclude the children of the Sinhala Buddhist rural poor from the mainstream education further still.122 [Fig. 43]

Ironically, as this happens the Tamil school children are forced to sing the “national anthem” in Sinhala in the Tamil region. According to *Divaina* newspaper which champions the ideology of “re-conquest” and gives publicity to the work JHU and Mēdhānanda Thera (who has been removed from party leadership since 19 June, 2010) from January to May of 2012 there have been 113 destructions of archaeological sites which have been destroyed by treasure hunters. 338 arrests have been made.123 Daṁbara Amila Thera giving an interview to the same paper holds Mēdhānanda Thera responsible for spreading a wrong view about ancient sites giving the impression that these have treasures like gold and silver.124 While the nationalist euphoria of “re-conquest” is kept alive through different types “post-war” expansion of Sinhala Buddhism into the Tamil region, as exemplified by the construction of *Triumphant Stupas* in all nine provinces of the island, a crisis deepens in the Sinhala society.

Might raising public awareness about above contradictions help deconstruct the exclusivist nationalist ideology, so to change the power dynamics of the unitary state?

However, while Tamils are continually subjugated those differently oppressed social classes amongst the Sinhala are made to believe that the entire land belongs to them. The mechanism of “preservation of peasantry” that was started during the colonial period is modified in many ways to the end of re-enforcing the unitary state structure and incorporating the Sinhala poor into its ideology. 2600 children were to be given lower ordination at the celebration of the 2600th *vē-

sak. According to the Prime Minister these children were to be chosen from the poor Sinhala families, so that turning them into monks would mean they are taken out of the cycle of poverty to be educated in monasteries. The public were even invited to donate, and the government promised to allocate funds for the task. The state also has inaugurated a scheme to pay a monthly subsistence to the monks in the North and East who face economic hardships and thereby encourage them to move to the Tamil region. The new Sinhala settlements and military cantonments, just as the many privileges given to the security forces and police, including special allowances, facilities, and permission to start businesses, farming, and fishing in the Tamil region, have incorporated different lower social strata of the Sinhala society into the state structure and its ideology. The commercial and trading sectors that belong to the Sinhala middle classes have been given almost all the contracts of “post-war reconstruction” in the Tamil region, where many Sinhala labourers have been brought from the South to work in the region. These moves have united different Sinhala social classes with the political elite under the ideology of “re-conquest”, who would otherwise have many a social and economic divisions separating them.

The Prime Minister held a ceremony in the Tirukōṇamalai District to honour the relatives and family members of Buddhist monks who ‘sacrificed” their lives in war to protect Sri Lanka. In that ceremony it was announced that the government will grant Rs. 10,0000 to 502 places of worship in the region. Through such schemes besides the many Sinhelas, some Tamils and Muslims will be incorporated into the unitary state. However, such incorporations cannot contain large sections of oppressed social classes in the Sinhala society, such as workers, fishermen and women let alone the Tamils. Within two years after the formal completion of the war there already were two massive demonstrations amongst the Sinhelas against the GoSL demanding reduction of fuel prices and reversal of pension cuts. During these protests one fisherman and a worker were killed and many others were injured due to shooting by the police. At the time of writing there are continuous demonstrations in the Tamil region against kill-

ings, abductions, “disappearances” and rapes, and demanding access to land, farming, fishing etc. These are political locations that have a potential to challenge the power dynamic of the Sinhala political elite and the middle class intelligentsia, who uphold an imagined Sinhala Buddhist nation. [Fig. 46]

Does Buddhism in Ilam have potential to contribute to such a process?

Another perspective regarding the construction of Sinhala Buddhist sites in the Tamil region is put forward by NGOs and humanitarian workers: Why should such activities be prioritised when there are hundreds of thousands of displaced Tamils (and Muslims) without facilities? This arises from the principles of humanitarianism that uphold basic human needs such as food, shelter, clothing and healthcare as fundamental to life over any religious observance. This perspective could perhaps draw on Buddhism for humanism, which doctrinally upholds ethical/soteriological principles as the most fundamental teachings of the Buddha.

In a field visit by a NGO which was joined by a Buddhist monk and a few Christian leaders to Mullikkulam area in Mannar district where around 400 displaced Tamil families have been living under trees for years Buddhiyagama Candraratana Thera, who was a member of the field team, shared his thoughts with the people which can be found in the report compiled by the NGO concerning the people of Mullikkulam. I received this unpublished report in an email dated 20 January, 2012:

I was shocked to see this situation. I am a sinner to see all these sufferings of the people here in Mullikulam. What is the crime these people committed to live under the trees like animals? All these people are brothers and sisters of our society. We all have serious responsibility to see the situation critically and to help them. We should be shamed to see these people living like this.127 [Fig. 45, 47]

In the exclusivist ideological interpretation of Buddhism in Ilam where it is argued that the unitary state has to be protected for the dhamma to be preserved, a war has been justified which killed, maimed, raped and displaced thousands of Tamils. The Sinhala soldiers who fought the war are either seen as guardian gods or as those who acquire merits to reach nirvāṇa. This interpretation and its military path promoted by the middle class intelligentsia, the saṃgha and the Sinhala political elite have subjugated the Tamils, structurally

and culturally destroyed the Tamil region, and has suppressed the ethical/soteriological principles of Buddhism. Even the author of *Mahāvaṃsa*, the post-canonical Pāli chronicle which justified war to protect Buddha sāsana (note: not Siṃhala Buddhist sāsana) could not hide the regret of the warrior king about the killing of non-Buddhists in war. In the colonial and post-colonial racialisation of Siṃhala Buddhism in Īlam such regret is missing from the public domain regarding the killings of Tamiḷs. Instead, a triumphant mood prevails in the country. This triumphant mood is given a religious dimension where the Siṃhala Buddhists are made to believe through the expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism into the Tamil region, that the Buddhadhamma can permeate throughout the island with a military victory. The leaders have become bodhisattvas or incarnations of ancient kings and the military has become guardian gods. This type of religion has buried the collective conscience of the Siṃhala society. It is only the victims who have the power to awaken the collective conscience of Siṃhala society and light the path of dhamma. Candra-ratana Thera’s above statement reflects a sense of guilt and compassion that can contribute to the awakening of collective conscience within the Siṃhala society. Intellectuals like Professor Sucharita Gam-lat (Sucharita Gamlath) and artists like Dharmasiri Bandaranāyaka have taken a principled position in their works against the ideology of “re-conquest”. Professor Gamlat has been writing a well-researched set of articles to a mainstream Siṃhala newspaper deconstructing the ideology of “re-conquest”. Even though such voices have been marginalised they carry the potential to awaken the moral conscience within the Siṃhala society. Both secular and religious humanists need to politically engage in changing the power dynamics that reinforce the Siṃhala Buddhist ideology. The said reinforcement is fomented through alliances between the political elites and the middle class intelligentsia. Without a political engagement of ethical/soteriological principles of Buddhism, they will remain abstract categories within the Siṃhala society ensuring that the ideology of “re-conquest” is predominant. This ethical/ stereological political engagement requires identification with the Tamiḷs and their collective aspirations, and the oppressed Siṃhala social classes. It is only such an identification that can compound the power dynamic of the ideology of “re-conquest”.

The report of the Minority Rights Group International documents a statement of a Tamil human rights campaigner which expresses how Tamiḷs view the “post-war” expansion of Siṃhala Buddhism:
In Sri Lanka there has always been Tamil Buddhism. Tamils also believe in aspects of Buddhism and respect it. Now they are trying to Sinhala-cize all of this and they don’t acknowledge Tamil Buddhism.\(^{128}\)

Tamil resistance to colonial and post-colonial practices of oppression has given rise to Tamil national consciousness based on the modern principles of nationhood, homeland and self-determination. Buddhist sites in the region are treated as an ancient cultural heritage in this modern mode of national consciousness. There are also some modern writings in Tamil that have captured the ethical/soteriological principles based on compassion within the context of suffering of the Tamils, where the Buddha is depicted crying at seeing the killing of Tamils. Professor Kārtikēcu Civattampi (Karthigesu Sivathamby)—one among many Tamil intellectuals who had a rapport with Sinhala and Buddhist progressive intellectuals—laments over the lack of Sinhala translations of these works.\(^{129}\) One of the well-known Tamil poets of the modern generation puts across in powerful metaphorical language how Sinhala Buddhist nationalists have to “kill the Buddha” first in order to carry out the expansion of Sinhala Buddhism to Tamil areas by killing Tamil people and destroying their culture and region. The background to the poem is the burning of the Yālpāṇam Library in 1981 by Sinhala racist groups backed by Government ministers:

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Last night, in my dream,
Lord Buddha was shot dead
Government policemen in plain clothes
Shot him.
He lays on the steps
of Jaffna Library,
soaked in blood.
In darkness of the night
the ministers arrived, furious:
“His name wasn’t on our list.
so why did you kill him?”
“No, no”, they said,
“No mistake was made, But,
if we hadn’t killed him,
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\(^{129}\) Karthigesu Sivathamby, Being a Tamil and a Sri Lankan (Colombo: Aivakam, 2005), 184.
we wouldn’t have been able to kill even a fly. Therefore...

“Alright. But get rid of the corpse at once”, the ministers said and disappeared.

The plain-clothes policemen dragged the corpse inside.

They covered the Buddha’s body with ninety thousand books
and lit the pyre with the Sikalokavada Sutta.

Lord Buddha’s body turned to ashes.
and so did the Dhammapada.¹³⁰

Buddhism among Tamils in the modern period can have meaning only to the extent that there is space in Sinhala society for the new interpretation of the Buddha given by the Tamil poet. The politicisation of such literary, cultural and social spaces of new interpretations could contribute to a movement of resistance to the oppressive military campaign of Sinhala Buddhist re-conquest that not only subjugates Tamils, but also “kills the Buddha” among the Sinhalas!

In a move to reinterpret Buddhist principles within the context of war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed against the Tamil people by the GoSL, Sulak Sivaraksa, one of the judges of the People’s Tribunal of Sri Lanka makes a special appeal to the Sinhala Buddhists:

We would like to appeal to the Sinhala Buddhists first of all to acknowledge the crimes that they committed against their own Tamil sisters and brothers... Rejoicing at the war victories, when thousands have been killed, “disappeared”, maimed, raped and hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced and detained, is totally against the dhamma ... It is the ideological attachment to a majority dominated state that has caused the war and led to enormous suffering. The notions of minority and majority are wrong perceptions. We are interrelated or “interbeing.” One who realises interbeing is fearless. It is this fearlessness that can help transform the colonial construction of the Lankan unitary state. This construction is based on greed and hatred... The Lankan state needs a transformation.¹³¹

¹³¹ Permanent People’s Tribunal, People’s Tribunal on Sri Lanka (Dublin: PPT and
In internationalising the context, the Tribunal also found the US-led Governments and the EU responsible for the breakdown of the 2002 peace process with the dismantling of parity of esteem between the GoSL and the LTTE.\textsuperscript{132} The ideology of “re-conquest” could not have succeeded if not for the material conditions created by the above powers in view of protecting the unitary state structure as a strategic location in South Asia. In envisioning and building a future movement of resistance to the conquest it is important to focus both on the transformation of local power dynamics and a politicisation of ethical/soteriological principles of Buddhism, as well as the geopolitical dimensions of the ethno-nationalist conflict in the island of Īlam.

IFPSL, 2010), 23–24.

\textsuperscript{132}\ Permanent People’s Tribunal, People’s Tribunal..., 20.