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Jathika Chinthanaya and the Executive Presidency

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Introduction

The *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement², ever since its emergence in the 1980s³, has been a prominent voice dedicated to articulating and promoting Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist thought in Sri Lanka. Over the years, its 'ideological children' have formed different political parties and movements representing Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in the country. But ever since the 1980s, the principal and unfailing proponents of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* have been Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekera and Professor Nalin de Silva.⁴

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the concept of political leadership and the issue of Executive Presidency in particular, have been discussed, promoted and critiqued in the political writings⁵ of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* proponents. This involves an examination of how these proponents construct a narrative concerning the State and political leadership which can be considered to be reflective of, and at the same time appealing to, the political sensitivities of the majority Sinhala-Buddhist population in the country; thereby making a project such as the abolition of the Executive Presidency an arduous one.

² 'Movement' here is only meant to be a convenient reference to the writers and proponents of the *Jathika Chinthanaya*.

³ The rise of which has been acknowledged by international commentators; see Samuel P. Huntington (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster): p.94.

⁴ Dr Gunadasa Amarasekera, a dental surgeon by profession, is a leading novelist, poet and critic. He is also the President of the Patriotic National Movement (PNM). Professor Nalin de Silva, an academic (who was attached to the Universities of Colombo and Kelaniya), is a prominent writer and columnist. One of his important early works (first published in 1986) is the exposition of the concept of *Nirmanathmaka Sapekshathavadaya* (Constructive Relativism); see N. de Silva (1999) *Mage Lokaya* (3rd Ed.) (Maharagama: Chinthana Parshadaya) [Sinhala]. This chapter is almost exclusively an examination of their political writings.

⁵ Much of the publications referred to in this chapter are in Sinhala. Writers such as Amarasekera and Nalin de Silva, though bilingual, have published most of their major publications in Sinhala.

Jathika Chinthanaya, the State and Political Leadership: An Introduction

What is meant by *Jathika Chinthanaya*? What forms of political structure and leadership get promoted under this concept? This section attempts to address these questions, very briefly. This would provide the broader conceptual backdrop within which an assessment of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement's political approach towards the Executive Presidency can be undertaken.

*What is Jathika Chinthanaya?*⁶

Very often, the phrase '*Jathika Chinthanaya*' gets translated as 'national thought'. This was perhaps the early meaning attached to the phrase, when explained by Gunadasa Amarasekera in 1986.⁷ Therefore, 'national thought', 'national thinking' and 'national ideology' are some of the popular ways in which the phrase gets referred to in English commentaries.

Jathika Chinthanaya refers to the thread that binds and unites the different aspects of a culture together⁸; it is the thread that runs through and holds together the literature, arts, customs, ethics,

⁶ This section is not meant to be a detailed examination of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* concept; rather it attempts to provide an introduction to the basic and defining features of the concept.

⁷ This was in an article published in *Irida Divaina*, 17th August 1986; see the essay titled '*Marxwadi Chinthanaya Saha Jathika Chinthanaya*' in G. Amarasekera (2000) *Deshapalana Samaja Vichara I (1986-1993)*(Colombo: S. Godage) [Sinhala]: p.1-8. It is evident that the use of the phrase by Amarasekera seems to be heavily influenced by A. Walicki (1979) *A History of Russian Thought From Enlightenment to Marxism*(Trans. H. Andrews-Rusiecka) (Stanford: Stanford University Press). Here, the words "Russian thought" were interpreted by Amarasekera as "Rusiyanu [Russian] chinthanaya." However, this attempt has been recently critiqued by Nalin de Silva; see N. de Silva, '*Chinthanaya Saha Jathika Chinthanaya*', *Kalaya*<http://www1.kalaya.org/2013/05/blog-post_3.html> accessed 15th July 2013 [Sinhala].

⁸ G. Amarasekera (2006) *Ganadura Mediyama Dakinemi Arunalu* (4th Ed.) (Boralessgamuwa: Visidunu) [Sinhala]: p.61.

political and social norms of the people.⁹ More specifically, as Nalin de Silva points out, what is referred to here is the ‘*chinthanaya*’ of a nation, which, originally, was a reference to the ‘*chinthanaya*’ of the Sinhals.¹⁰ ‘*Chinthanaya*’, in broad terms, is “a thread that binds all those things that have been created by the human being in a particular culture”, such as science, arts, dancing, music, even aspects such as cooking or the mode of dress – it is a “thread that binds all these things together.”¹¹

The ‘thread’ is largely that version of Theravada Buddhism as practiced by a majority in Sri Lanka; i.e. Sinhala-Buddhism. Amarasekera once stated succinctly, that a most convenient and simple way in which the question ‘what is *Jathika Chinthanaya*?’ can be answered is to say that it is Sinhala-Buddhist thought (“*sinhala bauddha chinthanaya*”).¹² In that sense, Sinhala-Buddhism or the Sinhala-Buddhist cultural identity¹³ plays a defining role in much of what gets promoted as, or within, the *Jathika Chinthanaya*.¹⁴ Sinhala-Buddhism takes on the role of an overarching and all-

⁹ Ibid.: p.39.

¹⁰ N. de Silva, ‘*Chinthanaya and Modernity*’ *The Island* <<http://www.island.lk/2004/09/01/midweek4.html>> accessed 15th July 2013. ‘Sinhals’ – a term which has been popularised by advocates of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* (and especially, Nalin de Silva) – is considered to be slowly replacing the reference made to ‘Sinhalese’, a shift which appears to be “directed by a measure of purism”; M. Roberts (2004) *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period 1590s to 1815* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications): p.xvi.

¹¹ As briefly explained by N. de Silva, ‘*Buddhism, science and development: a synthesis – Prof. Nalin De Silva*’ *YouTube* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZ0fAllF9ZY>> accessed 15th July 2013, especially at 4.05-4.50 minutes.

¹² Amarasekera (2006): p.31.

¹³ The Sinhala-Buddhist identity is not a fixed one; it is subject to change, with the Sinhala Buddhist community being susceptible to be named differently over the course of time: N. de Silva, ‘*Intellectual Invertebratism: The Stillborn Artificial Sri Lankan Identity – V*’, *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/i080806.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹⁴ It is also a concept that “recognises the importance of culture, economics and politics in the making of social forces and as an eastern system of knowledge is also aware of the fact that they are interrelated and not mutually exclusive”: N. de Silva, ‘*The Bare Doctrine of Blair the Bear*’, *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/i990427.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

encompassing culture, since it is regarded as being applicable to the vast majority; so it is said that over the past two-thousand years or more, the different peoples of Sri Lanka have lived under the shade of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* of the Sinhala-Buddhist majority.¹⁵ In claiming so, the *Jathika Chinthanaya* concept enables the promotion of a myth necessary for political unity and cohesiveness: the myth of a single, overarching, culture under which all peoples have historically co-existed, and therefore should continue to in the future.

And to be sure, this narrative does not leave out the different other numerically smaller minority groups aside. Rather, the cultural identities and distinctiveness of the Tamil and Muslim people get recognised. There is a celebration and promotion of their cultural distinctiveness. Nalin de Silva, for example, has emphasised the importance of Sri Lankan Tamils developing a “truly Sri Lankan Tamil culture” which is not influenced by South India (Tamil Nadu).¹⁶ Reviving the Sinhala people and placing emphasis on the importance of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* is considered to be an exercise which is essential to prevent the destruction, not only of the Sinhala people, but of the Tamil people as well.¹⁷ And, *Jathika Chinthanaya* is not to be regarded as a nationalist ideology per se; rather “a nationalist ideology has to be worked out in a *Jathika Chinthanaya*.”¹⁸ More importantly, there is also a taking into consideration of the particular sensitivities of the minority communities regarding the phrase ‘Sinhala-Buddhism’. So for example, Amarasekera once wrote that if the use of the term ‘Sinhala-Buddhist’ (“*sinhala bauddha*”) to define the essence of this overarching culture is felt to be unpleasant, then it is necessary to use a different term.¹⁹

¹⁵ Amarasekera (2006): p.45.

¹⁶ N. de Silva, ‘*Statements and Western Statesmen*’, *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i060621.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹⁷ Amarasekera (2000): p.26.

¹⁸ N. de Silva, ‘*Beyond the Numbers Game*’, *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i010905.html>> accessed 15th July 2013. Therefore ‘*chinthanaya*’ is viewed as a concept which should not be easily translated as ‘thought’ or ‘ideology’.

¹⁹ Amarasekera (2006): p.45-46.

Yet, Sri Lanka is required to be viewed as a country in which the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people inherit a single overarching culture, under the shade of which the respective different cultures have space to develop and flourish. In other words, the cultural identities of the Tamil and Muslim people are categories or different varieties of the broader cultural identity of the Sinhala people.²⁰

This is also because the Sinhala people are regarded as the original inhabitants of the country. The Sinhalas (or *Hela*) people – whose historical roots are popularly traced back to the arrival of Prince Vijaya from Northern India, as per the *Mahavamsa* chronicle²¹ - have originated in Sri Lanka²², and are not migrants. They are the proud inheritors of Buddhism, which has been the religion of a vast majority of the people of the country ever since the arrival of Arahant Mihindu, the son of Emperor Ashoka of India, during the period of King Devanampiya Tissa.²³ In that sense, *Jathika Chinthanaya* is also a unifying thread, that runs through these different peoples and cultures within the country, which binds them together, transforming Sri Lanka into a single, largely cohesive, nation; a Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

What is interesting about this narrative is that it promotes the distinctive cultural identities of the different minority groups within a broader assimilationist project. While all come together to make a single cohesive unit, there is always the Sinhala-Buddhist

²⁰ Ibid.: p.45.

²¹ W. Geiger (2007) *The Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon* (Trans.) (Dehiwela: Buddhist Cultural Centre).

²² N. de Silva, 'Of Sinhalas and Tamils',

Kalaya <<http://www.kalaya.org/i030305.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

Therefore it is important to note that writers such as Nalin de Silva do not consider the Mahavamsa to be the final word on the historical roots of the Sinhalas. The use of the Mahavamsa is a more political and strategic exercise to him: in other words, the Mahavamsa text is defended largely at times when it is sought to be attacked by critics of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

²³ This does not mean, however, that the people were unaware of the Buddha's teaching before the arrival of Arahant Mihindu. What happened with the arrival of Arahant Mihindu is the establishment of the *Buddha Sasana*, argues Amarasekera (2006), at p.34.

community dominating the picture. That the Sinhala were the original inhabitants of the country is also a claim to (benevolent) ownership of the Sri Lankan territory and State, under whose protection the others would come to live. Under such a context, the framework of the State is that which accords to the wishes of the majority. Different cultures co-existing under an overarching culture is different is not the same as different cultures co-existing respecting each other's culture and autonomy. The latter understanding promotes greater equality, while the former creates a hierarchy wherein everything appears to be fine until a different cultural entity raises a claim for equality which upsets the silent supremacy of the majority community.

Apart from the above, one of cardinal ideas behind the *Jathika Chinthanaya* is the need to look at the problems confronting the people of Sri Lanka through the prism of their own *chinthanaya*. This is because the Sinhala people and the other ethnic communities, according to Amarasekera, have lived in the country in a civilised manner for centuries, having developed a distinct and splendid culture, providing them with the ability to address their problems without imitating the West.²⁴

Colonialism rattled this situation, upsetting the further flourishing of the *Jathika Chinthanaya*; and the impact of Western-inspired colonialism, in all its forms and manifestations, has had a debilitating impact on the country and its people. This partly explains why the critique of the West – especially Western systems of knowledge, including Western-science²⁵ - remains a constant and recurring theme in the writings of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement. In that sense, there is a strong assertion of the need for true independence, both from Western-rule and Western-

²⁴ G. Amarasekera (1991) *Arunaluseren Arunodayata* (Maharagama: Chinthana Parshadaya): p.156-157.

²⁵ This is not surprising given that the advocates of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* are extremely critical of Western systems of knowledge (and the 'Judaic Christian chinthanaya' which guides the construction of such knowledge), and have vehemently critiqued Western-science in particular. See: N. de Silva (2006) *Ape Pravada* (Boralesgamuwa: Visidunu Prakashakayo); N. de Silva (2008) *Ape Pravada – 2* (Boralesgamuwa: Visidunu Prakashakayo); N. de Silva (2010) *Ape Pravada – 3* (Boralesgamuwa: Visidunu Prakashakayo).

dominated knowledge and thought systems.

The Sinhala-Buddhist State

As stated before, Sri Lanka is considered to have been originally inhabited by the Sinhals and one which has a long and unique history of preserving the teachings of the Buddha; a history which is without parallel in the world.²⁶ What emerges now is the Sinhala-Buddhist State of Sri Lanka. According to Nalin de Silva²⁷, the Sinhala-Buddhist State was established by King Dutu Gemunu, the first king who united the country.²⁸ Ever since then, the people of the country were Sinhala-Buddhists. Their culture was Sinhala-Buddhist. The State was Sinhala-Buddhist. A distinct phrase or label (i.e. 'Sinhala-Buddhist') was unnecessary to explain the character of the State and its people. Sinhala-Buddhism was natural.²⁹

The central pillars of governance were threefold: the King; the *Sangha* (the Order of Buddhist Monks or *Bhikkus*); and the people (who were predominantly Sinhala-Buddhists). This structure, originally established by Emperor Ashoka of India, is considered to have been inherited, further developed and established in Sri Lanka³⁰; a political structure which is regarded to have been continuously maintained in Sri Lanka for over two thousand years,

²⁶ For a recent articulation of this position by a representative of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist party, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), see: '*The Constitutional Form of the First Republic: The Sinhala-Buddhist Perspective: An Interview with Udaya Gammanpila*' in A. Welikala (Ed.) (2012) ***The Sri Lankan Republic at 40: Reflections on Constitutional History, Theory and Practice*** (Colombo: CPA): p.899-932. As Gammanpila states: "We have been practicing Buddhism as the majority religion for the last two thousand four hundred years. There is no other country in the world which has practiced one religion as the majority religion for such a long period of time"- p.908.

²⁷ See generally, N. de Silva (1998) ***Nidahase Pahan Temba: Sinhala Bauddha Rajya Pilibanda Hendinweemak***(Maharagama: Chinthana Parshadaya).

²⁸ Ibid.: p.5-6.

²⁹ Ibid.: p.2.

³⁰ G. Amarasekera (2011) ***Amathakawu Urumaya: Kavandayata Hisak*** (Boralesgamuwa: Visidunu): p.62; De Silva (1998): p.9.

disturbed significantly (though not totally destroyed) due to colonial invasion.³¹

Also importantly, Sri Lanka has always been a ‘unitary’ State. The famous battle between the Sinhala King, Dutu Gemunu, and the Tamil King, Elara, was a battle undertaken by the former to unify the country, leading to the establishment of the Sinhala-Buddhist State. What King Dutu Gemunu did was unify (*eksesath*) the country; the term ‘*eksesath*’ meant ‘*ekiya*’ (unitary).³² In contemporary parlance, then, King Dutu Gemunu established the unitary Sinhala-Buddhist State, with a single legislative body (a *raja sabhawa* or King’s Council), and a system of administrative decentralisation (not devolution).³³ This is a narrative which asserts that the Tamil people never had a territorial entity (or State) akin to the *eksesath rajya* developed by King Dutu Gemunu.³⁴ It vehemently rejects the ‘traditional homeland’ concept promoted by the Tamil nationalists. Therefore, writers such as Nalin de Silva have forcefully asserted that the current Tamil problem in the country is nothing but a Tamil racist problem created by the colonial powers and the Tamil nationalists.³⁵

Unsurprisingly, the importance of devolution of powers does not figure in the idea of State-reformation advocated by the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement. Rather, Amarasekera argues that the principal aim is to see how a humanist, socialist, society based on the principle of equality can be constructed³⁶; which cannot be

³¹ Amarasekera (2011): p.57.

³² de Silva (1998): p.7.

³³ Ibid: p.10.

³⁴ Ibid: p.8.

³⁵ See generally, N. de Silva (2000) *Prabhakaran: Ohuge Seeyala, Baappala Saha Massinala* (3rd Ed.) (Maharagama: Chinthana Parshadaya) [Sinhala] <[http://www.kalaya.org/files/Prabhakaran Ohuge Seeyala Bappala ha Massin ala.pdf](http://www.kalaya.org/files/Prabhakaran_Ohugge_Seeyala_Bappala_ha_Massin_ala.pdf)> accessed 15th July 2013; N. de Silva (1997) *An Introduction to Tamil Racism in Sri Lanka* (Maharagama: Chinthana Parshadaya); N. de Silva (2009) *Demala Jathivadaya Erehiwa* (Maharagama: Chinthana Parshadaya) [Sinhala]; also see, N. de Silva (2013) *Dekma-I* (Colombo: S. Godage) [Sinhala].

³⁶ Amarasekera (2011): p.80 (“*manawa hithawadi, samanathmathawa mul karagath samajawadi samajayak*”).

achieved either through Capitalism or Marxism.³⁷ Rather, what can lead to such a society is a form of Dharmic Socialism (*Dharmika Samajawadaya*)³⁸, or Buddhist socialism.

The above provides a broad outline of the nature of the Sinhala-Buddhist State that gets promoted through the *Jathika Chinthanaya*. Some of its central features and purposes are clear: the preservation and maintenance of the unitary character of the State, the protection of Buddhism, as well as the Sinhala language and culture (of the majority community). Protecting Buddhism is regarded only as a protective measure taken by the Sinhala-Buddhists, since they believe that it is their duty to provide protection to the religion. It is meant to be a purely defensive concept, which aims to protect one's culture, religion and nationality from foreign intervention.³⁹

Also, emphasis has come to be placed on the notion termed "*Sinhalathva*": which refers to the prominence of the "Sinhala Nation, Sinhala language, Sinhala history, Sinhala culture and finally the Sinhala life style."⁴⁰ What seems to be asserted here is that the prominence of Sinhala-Buddhism – which is considered natural and clear to anyone given the ethnic composition of the country – has to be recognised; the kind of prominence which is thought to be ignored or dismissed by those attempting to view Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country. As de Silva states:

“Sri Lanka is a Sinhala Buddhist country and is not multi-national or multi-religious. However, the identification of Sri Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist

³⁷ Ibid. Note here, that Marxism did play a significantly influential role for writers such as Amarasekera, who attempted to give a nationalist flavour to Marxism in his early writings on the *Jathika Chinthanaya*. Nalin de Silva, on the other hand, was originally a member of the leftist Nawa Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and passionately advocated the right to self-determination for the Tamil people. However, Marxism later came to be thoroughly critiqued by these writers, especially by de Silva.

³⁸ Amarasekera (2011): p.81-87.

³⁹ de Silva (1998): p.15.

⁴⁰ N. de Silva, 'Bishops, Generals and Ambassadors', *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/i030108.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

country does not imply that non-Sinhala Buddhists are in any way second class citizens. All are equal before the law. The Sinhala Buddhist identity is a reflection of the country's history and the present social composition. It also implies that the main component of the common culture of the country is Sinhala Buddhist."⁴¹

The logical conclusion of Sinhala-Buddhism being the thread that binds all the people is precisely this. At every moment, that identity rises to the surface, submerging the ability to give equal prominence to other religions and cultures. The claim that Sinhala-Buddhists are the overwhelming majority is obvious enough; and to that extent, the *Jathika Chinthanaya* concept seems unproblematic. But it is in the fierce rejection of the multi-cultural or multi-ethnic labels, in the vigorous assertion of the need to recognise Sinhala-Buddhism as the dominant identity, that the dangers lie. The inability on the part of the Tamil community and leadership to recognise this predominance makes them Tamil 'racists' in the minds of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* advocates.

Political Leadership in a Sinhala-Buddhist State

Within this political and governance structure of the Sinhala-Buddhist State, the King comes to play a dominant role.

Traditionally, it has been noted that: "In the view of Sinhalese Buddhists, the duty of the king is to protect his people, making their life safe, happy and comfortable. He intended to achieve this goal in two ways: first, by providing all that is needed for their material advancement and second, by providing all that is needed for their spiritual advancement."⁴² This conception of kingship placed importance on righteous rule and meritocracy, as famously promoted through the tenfold duties (or perfections) of the king

⁴¹ de Silva (1997): p.4.

⁴² J.B. Disanayaka (2007) *Lanka: The Land of Kings* (Sumitha Publishers): p.32.

(*dasa raja dhamma*, or *dasa paramita*)⁴³ and other Buddhist sources, including conceptions such as the Chakkavatti Monarchy.⁴⁴ There was tremendous veneration and respect, for the King was also regarded to be a *bodhisattva*, one who was aspiring to be a future Buddha.⁴⁵

This form of leadership was sought to be ensured within the Sinhala-Buddhist State, through the three pillars represented by the King, the *Sangha* community (the *bhikkus*) and the people. In this triangular structure, the *Sangha* community played the important role of advisors and guardians, stepping forward to ensure, when necessary, that the king did not use his powers to the detriment of the governed.⁴⁶ The *bhikkus* therefore were involved in ‘politics’ in an advisory capacity, involved even in the creation and nurturing of future kings, but not in active politics.⁴⁷

The King, on the other hand, was the ruler of the country and of all the people, and was supposed to rule according to the Dhamma, treating all the people with equality. In this way, a harmonious balance was sought to be established, resulting in the formation and maintenance of an ethical society.⁴⁸ This, it is often stated, was the classic form of political community organised under the rulership of Emperor Ashoka, who was the model of ideal or righteous kingship.

⁴³ These were *dana* (generosity, munificence); *sila* (morality); *pariccaga* (self-sacrifice and liberality); *ajjava* (honesty); *maddava* (gentleness); *tapo* (self-restraint, patience); *akkodha* (without malice); *avihimsa* (non-violence); *khanti* (forbearance); and *avirodana* (agreeability, non-obstruction): *ibid.*: p.35.

⁴⁴ See generally, N. Ratnapala (1997) *Buddhist Democratic Political Theory and Practice* (Colombo: Sarvodaya); L. de Silva (2003) *Cakkavatti Monarchy of the Pali Canon as a Democratic Meritocracy* (Dehiwela: Buddhist Cultural Centre).

⁴⁵ Dissanayaka (2007): p.34.

⁴⁶ For a classical discussion on the role of monks in Sri Lankan politics, see W. Rahula (1974) *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu* (Colombo: S. Godage & Brothers, 2003 Second Impression).

⁴⁷ In this regard, writers such as Nalin de Silva have been very critical of Buddhist monks being engaged in active *electoral* politics; see, for example, N. de Silva (2004) *Mathiwaranaya Saha Haamuduruwo* (Maharagama: Chinthana Parshadaya) [Sinhala].

⁴⁸ Amarasekera (2011): p.62.

In Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist writings, a form of ideal or commendable kingship gets represented by the likes of Kings Devanampiya Tissa, Dutu Gemunu and Maha Parakrama Bahu. They are often lauded for having protected the religion of the majority (Buddhism) as well as the territorial integrity of the country. Not all kings have been successful in this task, and maintaining the Sinhala-Buddhist State and its unitary character has not been easy. However, even during the most calamitous times, the broader framework of the Sinhala-Buddhist State was sought to be protected. Such was the case until the most serious threat to this framework was exerted by colonial invasion by the European powers; especially in 1815, when the British captured the Kandyan Kingdom.

Interestingly, it has also been asserted that the king did not always have to be Sinhala-Buddhist in origin. What was required, in principle, was his commitment to the protection and promotion of Buddhism, as well as righteous rule. It is argued, therefore, that this was the reason why the Sinhala people were even ready to accept Tamil Kings of Indian origin – such as those belonging to the Nayakkar dynasty⁴⁹ in general, and kings like Sri Vijaya Raja Sinha in particular – as their own leaders. Here, the ethnic or religious identity of the leader in question did not matter, and they came to be regarded as “Sinhala kings.”⁵⁰ Therefore, this meant that even a Tamil can become the president of Sri Lanka, as long as he accepts that the main culture in Sri Lanka is the Sinhala-Buddhist culture (just as the kings of the Nayakkara dynasty did during the 18th and 19th centuries).⁵¹ Here again, it is not simply a Tamil who can become a king; rather, it is a Tamil who is committed to accepting the dominance or significance of Sinhala-Buddhism that can become the ruler..

But calamity struck in 1815, which was a significant blow to the

⁴⁹ The Nayakkar dynasty had four main kings: Vijaya Raja Sinha (1739-1747); Kirti Sri Raja Sinha (1747-1782); Rajadhi Raja Sinha (1782-1798); and Sri Vikrama Raja Sinha (1798-1815). Hindus by faith, these kings extended patronage to Buddhism by building royal temples and Buddhist shrines, while also promoting the welfare of the *Sangha*. See Disanayaka (2007): p.50-51.

⁵⁰ Amarasekera (2006): p.36. See also, Amarasekera (2011): p.66.

⁵¹ de Silva (2009): p.147 & 216.

continuation of king's rule in the country with the fall of the Kandyan kingdom. And a few decades later, in 1848, the great rebellion led by leaders such as Puran Appu and Gongalegoda Banda was crushed. It has been the strong contention that ever since then, the British had deliberately prevented the emergence of truly Sinhala-Buddhist leaders in the country. The Sinhalas, therefore, lacked a proper, indigenous, leader of their own since the early 19th century. Nalin de Silva writes:

“It is unfortunate that since 1848 the Sinhalas have had no leadership of their own, except for a short period during the [heyday] of Anagarika Dharmapala who was defeated by the British and their appointed leaders. After the independence struggle of 1817-18 the British massacred brutally the Sinhala leadership and installed their own agents as the leaders of the Sinhalas. Ordinary people like Puran Appu and Gongalegoda Banda who were not leaders in the eyes of the Sinhalas were forced to take up the leadership at the second independence struggle of 1848. Since then the anglicised, culturally as well as religion wise, set of people who were endowed with land, position and other privileges have been appointed as leaders of the Sinhalas by the British.”⁵²

It is within this context that Anagarika Dharmapala⁵³, who pioneered Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist revivalism (especially in the early 20th century), becomes the epitome of truly authentic, indigenous, Sinhala-Buddhist leadership. He is a figure who comes to be revered by the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement (and perhaps Sinhala-Buddhists in general) as the most admirable Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist figure to have emerged in the country since 1848.

⁵² N. de Silva, ‘*Changing Leaders*’,

Kalaya <<http://www.kalaya.org/i020807.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁵³ For a useful collection of his writings, see A. Guruge (Ed.) (1991) *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala* (Sri Lanka: Ministry of Cultural Affairs & Information). See also for a biographical account, B. Sangharakshita (1964) *Anagarika Dharmapala: A Biographical Sketch* (3rd Ed.) (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society); G. Amarasekera (1980) *Anagarika Dharmapala Marxwadida?* (Kalutara: Sampath Prakashana Samagama) [Sinhala].

Jathika Chinthanaya and Post-Independence Political Leadership

The above examination provides a basic introduction to how the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement understands and promotes the notion of political leadership and the Sinhala-Buddhist State. The symbiotic relationship between the two is clear; the kind of political leader that gets promoted as well as his/her functions are founded on the nature of the political community or State within which that leader needs to function, and vice-versa. In that sense, the leader of Sri Lanka is often regarded as having to protect, preserve, promote and give prominence to the unitary character of the State, Buddhism, and the Sinhala-Buddhist culture (which is said to have been the case, even when the kings were not Sinhala-Buddhist in origin). And the successful maintenance of the Sinhala-Buddhist political structure, in turn, depends on the nature of the leader in power.

What this section attempts to do is to briefly examine how the *Jathika Chinthanaya* proponents have approached the issue of supporting or critiquing post-independence political leaders of Sri Lanka (albeit without discussing the merits of the arguments made). The impact of this broader political approach of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement on the debate concerning the Executive Presidency will be discussed in the final section of the chapter.

Bandaranaike and the 'Revolution' of 1956

Perhaps the first post-independence political leader who comes to be most discussed and appreciated by the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement is Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, elected in 1956, a pivotal year in the political story of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. This was a 'revolutionary' moment in the country's history, not because of the election of Mr. Bandaranaike, but because it was a result of the galvanisation of the five great forces (*panca maha balawegaya*) of the country: the Buddhist monks (*sangha*), indigenous doctors (*weda*), teachers (*guru*), farmers (*govi*) and the labour force (*kamkaru*). This social mobilisation enabled Mr. Bandaranaike attain power, ably facilitated by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) which had been, at its inception in 1951,

liberal in outlook.⁵⁴

This ‘1956 revolution’⁵⁵ was the culmination of the Buddhist revivalism that was initiated by Anagarika Dharmapala.⁵⁶ The path was now paved to initiate a period of rule which put the *Jathika Chinthanaya* to good use. Mr. Bandaranaike’s task was to give leadership to the social forces – the popular nationalist wave – which elected him, and govern the country with the *Jathika Chinthanaya* in mind. In a broader sense, “the programme of fifty six”, as de Silva states, represented “nothing but the freedom struggle from western Christian cultural political and economic colonialism.”⁵⁷ The ‘Sinhala-Only’ policy, which defines the Bandaranaike-era, addressed a grievance of the Sinhala people, and rectified an injustice perpetrated by colonial rule.

But the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement’s appreciation of this era is not wholly celebratory in tone. It is critical, when pointing out that Mr. Bandaranaike was unable to provide the much needed national leadership to the nationalist forces that elected him. On the one hand, it had to be remembered that the popular nationalist wave of this era was not Mr. Bandaranaike’s creation alone; he even lacked a certain degree of Sinhala-Buddhist authenticity to be regarded as a true Sinhalese leader.⁵⁸ But even more critically, Mr. Bandaranaike was determined to hold on to power. Amarasekera argues that Mr. Bandaranaike could be regarded as the creator of the deplorable, power-hungry political culture that bedevils the

⁵⁴ Amarasekera (2006): p.178.

⁵⁵ The importance attached to 1956 is also reflected in the phrase “Children of Fifty Six” (“*Panas Haye Daruwo*”), coined by Nalin de Silva in his Bandaranaike Memorial Lecture delivered in 1989. See, for instance, N.de Silva, ‘*Panas Haye Daruwo*’, *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/files/d040125.pdf>>; ‘*Panas Haye Daruwo (Dewana Kotasa)*’, *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/files/d040208.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013 [Sinhala].

⁵⁶ Amarasekera (2006): p.178.

⁵⁷ N. de Silva, ‘*The SLFP-JVP Alliance*’, *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/files/i040121.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁵⁸ Since Mr Bandaranaike was born into an anglicised family and had to change his religion, “he could not become a cultural Sinhala Buddhist”; N. de Silva, ‘*Changing Leaders*’, *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/files/i020807.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013.

country today.⁵⁹ This is not to suggest that he was a crass opportunist; and yet, his main shortcoming was his inability to provide that all important intellectual leadership to the popular social mobilisation of 1956.⁶⁰ It is considered a lost opportunity for the Sinhala-Buddhist masses.

Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike's arrival in the political scene is regarded to have been viewed by the Sinhala-Buddhists as a continuation of the journey that began in 1956.⁶¹ Moreover, the leadership she provided during the 1970-77 era has been broadly considered to be a praiseworthy one, given her anti-imperialist stance, and the attempt made to resuscitate the humane, socialist, Sinhala-Buddhist heritage. The argument goes that had she been able to desist from engaging in certain unnecessary practices during that period, much progress could have been made, especially to proceed in the direction that was expected by a vast majority of the people.⁶² This may partly explain why the introduction of the first republican constitution of Sri Lanka in 1972 – with its commitment to the unitary character of the State and the prominence afforded to Buddhism – has been welcomed by Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces.

J.R. Jayewardene, the Executive Presidency and the Authoritarian Era

Mr. J.R. Jayewardene first mooted the need for a strong executive

⁵⁹ Amarasekera (2006): p.179. So, while his 'Sinhala-Only' policy of 1956 receives applause, the 1957 Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact is seen as evidence of Mr. Bandaranaike's intention to remain in power, especially by appeasing the Tamil nationalists.

⁶⁰ Amarasekera (2006): p.179. Amarasekera argues that Mr. Bandaranaike, who was undoubtedly confronted with numerous political challenges, was capitulating and moving closer to the capitalist camp, and it was the unfortunate shooting by Somarama which, ironically, saved Mr. Bandaranaike from disgrace; Amarasekera (2011): p.16.

⁶¹ Amarasekera (2011): p.16.

⁶² Ibid. Much of the criticism here seems to be directed at the Marxist/Leftist members of the then regime, with its policy of taking over land being regarded as an inhumane policy that was guided by hatred and jealousy, lacking the support and blessings of a majority of the people; *ibid.*: p.17.

in 1966, arguing that a “strong executive, seated in power for a fixed number of years, not subject to the whims and fancies of an elected legislature; not afraid to take correct but unpopular decisions because of censure from its parliamentary party” was necessary “in a developing country faced with grave problems.”⁶³ He won the elections in 1977, having promised to usher in a *dharmishta samajaya* (righteous society). He attempted to portray himself as the ideal leader, the righteous king; and even proceeded to enunciate ten pledges he would take as the Executive President.⁶⁴

The proponents of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* have been critical of President Jayewardene’s policies. The introduction of the Executive Presidential system gets hardly appreciated in their early writings. In broad terms, President Jayewardene emerges as a hypocritical ruler, who made opportunistic use of the concept of a *dharmishta* society for electoral purposes, knowing very well the concept was popular among the Sinhala-Buddhist masses. Amarasekera asserts that President Jayewardene was never honest about ensuring such a righteous and humane society.⁶⁵

Widely criticised in this regard is President Jayewardene’s open-economic policy, which is said to have facilitated the creation of an unjust, unequal, society. This was a policy which was pro-US and neo-imperialist in character, a policy which ran contrary to the humane and ethical economic policies of a righteous society, and one which was responsible for tensions that erupted in 1988-89.⁶⁶

Furthermore, the Jayewardene regime’s policies on the Tamil question have attracted much critical commentary. On the one hand, it is said that the violence committed in 1983 against the

⁶³ J.R. Jayewardene (1979) *Selected Speeches and Writings, 1944-1978* (Colombo: H.W. Cave & Company Ltd.): p.86; see ‘*Science and Politics*’, Speech at the opening of the Twenty Second Annual Sessions of the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science, Colombo (14th December 1966).

⁶⁴ Ibid: p.175-185; see ‘*Democratic Socialism through Development*’, Speech made at the Convocation Ceremony of the University of Sri Lanka (31st May 1978).

⁶⁵ Amarasekera has claimed that the plan to make use of the *dharmishta* concept could have been promoted by the American CIA; Amarasekera (2011): p.18.

⁶⁶ Ibid.: p.72.

Tamil people was evidence of the inability of that regime to ensure law, order and accountability. It was carried out by the Jayewardene-government, in particular by a certain minister and his goons; a deliberately orchestrated inhumane attack, with the intention of teaching the Tamil people a lesson.⁶⁷

But on the other hand, equally problematic was the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987, which paved the way for the provincial council system via the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution.⁶⁸ According to Nalin de Silva, President Jayewardene thereby “admitted that the north and the east were the Tamil traditional homelands, introduced the Thirteenth Amendment to the constitution and set up provincial councils, and made Tamil an official language by going further along the same course of action under the Indian government’s pressure and influence.”⁶⁹ Also, President Jayewardene introduced the Thirteenth Amendment to mask the shame and ignominy that befell him as a consequence of having to sign the Indo-Lanka Accord.⁷⁰ His reluctant admission that certain injustices had been committed against the Tamil people was one of his ploys to gain Tamil votes, for he knew that Tamil votes were necessary for practical political purposes as the Sinhala votes often got divided between the two main parties, the UNP and the SLFP.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Amarasekera (1991): p.106. Amarasekera proceeds to question how one expects people to have any confidence in law, justice and fairness when killing was sought to be institutionalised by the government.

⁶⁸ However, note that writers such as Amarasekera were initially more sober in their critique of India’s role in Sri Lankan affairs during this period. Writing the preface to the first edition of *Ganadura Mediyama Dakinemi Arunalu* in 1988, Amarasekera argued that India was never regarded as one of Sri Lanka’s enemies but rather as a powerful neighbour and relative who wished for Sri Lanka’s welfare. If we were prompted to act with this attitude, argues Amarasekera, we would even be able to set aside the adverse or harmful elements (“*ahithakara kotas*”) of the Indo-Lanka Accord. Amarasekera goes on to state that acting as if India is an enemy, without adopting such a careful approach, would spell disaster, further threatening Sri Lanka’s sovereignty. See Amarasekera (2006): p.12-13.

⁶⁹ de Silva (1997): p.69-70.

⁷⁰ G. Amarasekera (2003) *Deshapalana-Samaja Vichara II (1994-2000)* (2nd Ed.) (Colombo: S. Godage): p.35.

⁷¹ de Silva (1997): p.72.

In the final analysis, the Jayewardene-era had given rise to nepotism, and has come to be recognised as one wherein acts of electoral violence and malpractice, attacks on the judiciary, and the violation of peoples' freedoms in general were rampant. Amarasekera argues that it was the Executive Presidential system and the manner in which the system was used that need to be held responsible for much of this nepotism and undemocratic rule witnessed during the Jayewardene era.⁷² Also, President Jayewardene had created an all-powerful presidential system, through strong centralisation of powers, in order to preserve his capitalist, open-economic system.⁷³

As regards President Ranasinghe Premadasa, the approach of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement has also been a mixed one.

Much admired has been President Premadasa's perceived stance towards the West. He is regarded as one of the unique leaders, not overly influenced by the West, and therefore, not bound to please the West.⁷⁴ So, his decision to declare the then British High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, David Gladstone, *persona non grata* has been widely appreciated.⁷⁵

However, President Premadasa's economic policies have not received much admiration and support.⁷⁶ He is perceived as having attempted to perpetuate President Jayewardene's policies, by

⁷² Amarasekera (2006): p.174.

⁷³ Amarasekera (2003): p.38.

⁷⁴ N. de Silva, 'The Leadership of the Sinhala's', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i030115.html>> accessed 18th Mar 2013. This was also the case with President D.B. Wijetunga, who succeeded President Premadasa for a brief period after the latter's assassination.

⁷⁵ Ibid. This episode has often been reminded to succeeding Presidents whenever foreign diplomats were considered to be meddling unnecessarily in the affairs of the country; see for example, N. de Silva, 'Norwegian Humbug', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i010516.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁷⁶ See G. Amarasekera (1993) *Jathika Chinthanaya Saha Jathika Arthikaya* (Maharagama: Chinthana Parshadaya), written in response to the challenge posed by President Premadasa, when the latter challenged his critics to come up with an alternative to the economic policy implemented at that time.

further opening up the economy to the detriment of the country and its industries. Amarasekera, in critiquing this policy – adopting a pro-Third World approach, critical of the policies carried out by certain International Financial Institutions (IFIs) – demanded the revival of a more humane and ethical economic system, one which was structured around the village-based agricultural economy.⁷⁷

Similarly, the Premadasa-era had not inspired much hope regarding the possibility of defeating the LTTE. As is well known, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist groups have been extremely critical of President Premadasa's handover of arms to the LTTE (to fight the IPKF). That the political leadership of this era was not convincing enough in its ability of defeating the LTTE is reflected in the writings of this era, some of which strongly called for the need to have an able, strong and dedicated political leadership to defeat the LTTE, without antagonising India.⁷⁸

Kumaratunga, Wickremasinghe and the LTTE Problem

After the assassination of President Premadasa, President D.B. Wijetunga was in power for a brief period (1993-1994). During this period, President Wijetunga was reported to have made a number of statements claiming that the Tamil problem in the country was only a terrorist-problem, and not an ethnic one.⁷⁹ This approach was widely welcomed and praised by writers such as

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 21-27. However, the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement's understanding and policy prescriptions regarding economic development have been critiqued by modern Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist politicians such as Patali Champika Ranawaka. See, P.C. Ranawaka (2001) *Sihala Abhiyoghaya* (Colombo: Dayawansa Jayakody & Co.), especially p. 157-164.

⁷⁸ N. de Silva (1999) *Jathika Urumaya* (Rajagiriya: Sanskruthika Urumayan Rekagenime Sanwidanaya): p.1-6. (being an article published in the *Irida Divaina* newspaper, dated 24.05.1992).

⁷⁹ A number of these statements have been referred to in N. Satyendran, 'Ethnic Problem? What Ethnic Problem?', *Tamil Nation* <<http://tamilnation.co/saty/9310ethnic.htm>> accessed 15th July 2013.

Amarasekera⁸⁰, who hoped that this perspective had to be implemented on the ground (i.e. defeating the LTTE), with the assistance of India as well.⁸¹ This, however, was not to be, as Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga came to power in 1994.

In broad terms, proponents of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* hold that in 1994, the SLFP-led government headed by President Kumaratunga was elected to get rid of (the Jayewardene-dominated) 17-years rule of the UNP, which had damaged Sinhala-Buddhist civilisation.⁸² But having attained power, it did not take long for the SLFP to expose its political nakedness, for it too was perceived as having made opportunistic use of popular nationalist sentiment to attain power and forget the people thereafter.⁸³ It seemed almost like an extension of the erstwhile UNP-era. This perception was largely a consequence of President Kumaratunga's policies concerning the Tamil-problem (and the LTTE); policies which ranged from holding peace-talks with the LTTE to the drafting of pro-devolutionary constitutional proposals. Such policies were considered to have been promoted by 'non-national' forces (especially by NGOs), and it was believed that President Kumaratunga was ideologically committed to granting a federal solution. As Nalin de Silva stated: "Chandrika Kumaratunga is ideologically committed for a federal solution. Unlike JR Jayawardene she ideologically accepts that the Tamil people have been subjected to injustices. The non-national forces promoted her as the presidential candidate in 1994 because of this view [...] She is the first national leader to be in the camp of Tamil racism ideologically."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ See generally, Amarasekera (2000): p.156-161.

⁸¹ Ibid.: p.161.

⁸² Amarasekera (2006): p.8.

⁸³ Ibid. At the 1994 parliamentary elections, Amarasekera expressed his support for the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), not the SLFP. This was largely as a consequence of the MEP's claim that there was no ethnic problem in the country: Amarasekera (2003): p.28. Also, the SLFP had metamorphosed into a Sinhala Buddhist party especially in the eyes of its supporters and sympathisers, but the leadership did not seem to have undergone the same change; N. de Silva, 'No to Federalism', *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/i030122.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁸⁴ de Silva (1997): p.81.

Such pro-devolutionary policies ran counter to the perceived mission of President Kumaratunga. The “people” had “voted her to power not to grant federalism” even though “she became the presidential candidate on the strength of the non national forces.”⁸⁵ Given that the problem was a Tamil racist problem, conducting peace-negotiations with the LTTE, or granting greater devolution, was not the solution. Rather, Tamil racism had to be defeated both militarily (by defeating the LTTE) and politically.⁸⁶

Therefore, negotiations with the LTTE as well as the draft constitutional proposals – such as the 1995 and 2000 proposals of the UPFA Government – attracted a lot of criticism; and, any attempt at holding a referendum to change the Constitution was considered unconstitutional.⁸⁷ On many matters concerning the Tamil problem (including the role of the Norwegian government which acted as peace-facilitator), President Kumaratunga was seen to be following a cowardly tradition which was a result of the colonial legacy; one which was contrary to the tradition of Anagarika Dharmapala. Alas, the great misfortune of the Sinhalese was the absence of their own leaders.⁸⁸

But here again, one could see that the attack directed at President Kumaratunga was tempered with some realism, largely because of the emergence of Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe as the Prime Minister in 2001 and due to the decision he took to enter into a Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) in 2002 with the LTTE; a decision widely regarded by the Sinhala majority as amounting to an appeasement of the LTTE, thereby threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

⁸⁵ Ibid: p.83.

⁸⁶ N. de Silva, ‘*Fatchett Arrives*’, *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i981104.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁸⁷ N. de Silva, ‘*The Referendum of the President*’, *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i010808.html>> accessed 15th July 2013. For a critique of political proposals which were publicised during this period, see de Silva (1999); Amarasekera (2003): p.29-38 & 48-52.

⁸⁸ N. de Silva, ‘*Chandrika Kumaratunga Ha Sinhala Nayakathwaya*’, *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/files/d030119.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013 [Sinhala].

What this meant was not only that the CFA and the Wickremasinghe-government had to be critiqued. It was also necessary for the Sinhala nationalist forces to give critical support to President Kumaratunga to avert the dangers posed by the CFA.⁸⁹ It is within this political context that one finds President Kumaratunga being requested to de-merge the North and the East⁹⁰, and being urged to use her Executive Presidential powers to avert any damage that could be done to the sovereignty of the country, not only by the Wickremasinghe-regime and its pacts with the LTTE, but also due to the actions of the Norwegian government and its envoys in the country.⁹¹ President Kumaratunga had to be strengthened, politically.⁹²

And once again, when the second term of President Kumaratunga was reaching its end, she came to be criticised as it was felt that she was trying to extend her term by abolishing the Executive Presidency (due to the two-term limit imposed by the constitution), and introducing a Prime Ministerial system with an 'Executive Cabinet'. This was perceived as evidence of President Kumaratunga's desire to establish a federal state.⁹³

This alleged political motive did not materialise. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa was now set to contest the Presidential election of 2005.

Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Defeat of the LTTE

⁸⁹ N. de Silva, 'Eelam by Another Name', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i020313.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁹⁰ N. de Silva, 'Demerger of North and East – Need of the Hour', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i020828.html>> accessed 15th July 2013. This was in 2002. The de-merger took place only in 2006, upon a decision of the Supreme Court.

⁹¹ N. de Silva, 'Ali Koti Valassu Nari', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i030101.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁹² N. de Silva, 'Ali Koti Valassu Ha Nari', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/files/d021229.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁹³ N. de Silva, 'The PA-JVP Alliance, Constitution and Some Questions', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/i040324.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

It might be of some interest to note that the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement has not been entirely uncritical of Mahinda Rajapaksa. For example, writers such as Nalin de Silva have been somewhat skeptical about Rajapaksa's nationalist credentials; especially when it was realised that Mahinda Rajapaksa (as the then Prime Minister) was maintaining a studious silence on the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) which was sought to be introduced by the then government. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist groups came to view the P-TOMS as a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Therefore, it was questioned whether Prime Minister Rajapaksa was either ignorant or was attempting to be non-committal in order to obtain the support of both nationalist groups as well as the NGOs.⁹⁴

But as the Presidential election of 2005 approached and his candidature announced, Mahinda Rajapaksa became the inevitable option for Sinhala nationalist groups. He came to be seen as a political survivor, loyal to the SLFP, a 'child of 1956.'⁹⁵ The Presidential contest was one between the nationalist forces and the non-nationalist forces: the former being represented by Mahinda Rajapaksa, the latter being represented by the opposing Presidential candidate, Ranil Wickremasinghe.⁹⁶ The policy plan of Mahinda Rajapaksa – the *Mahinda Chinthanaya* – contained the commitment, inter alia, to preserve the unitary character of the State.⁹⁷ There was also the promise that once elected, he would abide by the advice given to King Devanampiya Tissa by Arahat Mahinda Thero about the responsibilities of the king; which was a promise that the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement had hoped

⁹⁴ N. de Silva, 'The SLFP Will Decide', *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/i050608.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁹⁵ N. de Silva, 'Coming Presidential Elections', *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/i050803.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁹⁶ N. de Silva, 'Non National Forces and Bandaranaike Puthra', *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/i050914.html>> accessed 15th July 2013; See also, N. de Silva, 'Theeranaya',

Kalaya <<http://www.kalaya.org/files/d051113.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013 [Sinhala].

⁹⁷ N. de Silva, 'Mahinda Chinthanaya', *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/i051019.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

Rajapaksa would keep.⁹⁸

Like President Premadasa, Rajapaksa was considered a rare leader who was not a creation of the West. With the victory at the 2005 Presidential election, he came to be regarded as the only true Sinhala leader to have emerged after Anagarika Dharmapala; his victory now being hailed as a significant victory, inter alia, for the unitary conception of the Sri Lankan State.⁹⁹

Thereafter, President Rajapaksa was able to attract the steady support of the nationalist forces. This was largely due to his anti-LTTE policy and the attempt he was seen to be making to defeat the LTTE militarily; a policy which had been advocated for a long time by numerous Sinhala-nationalist forces, especially by the advocates of the *Jathika Chinthanaya*. Ever since the emergence of the LTTE as a unit which threatened the Armed Forces, they had consistently maintained that the LTTE should, and can, be militarily defeated with the proper kind of political leadership and commitment.

Finally, they came to see in President Rajapaksa such a leader who was determined to defeat the LTTE, and who could, in the process, withstand external (Western) pressure. The defeat of the LTTE in May 2009 was therefore a remarkable achievement, thanks mainly to the political leadership of President Rajapaksa. Amarasekera points out that it was unsurprising then that the people had come to regard Mahinda Rajapaksa as the leader who, after King Parakrama Bahu VI, saved and united the country.¹⁰⁰

In this political context, the stance adopted by the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement during the Presidential election of 2010 was unsurprising. The challenge posed by the former Army Commander and Presidential-candidate, Sarath Fonseka, was to be opposed. While Sarath Fonseka had been admired and praised as a military leader before, his decision to challenge President

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ N. de Silva, 'Ekiya Rajya Sankalpaya Jayagani', *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/files/d051120.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013 [Sinhala].

¹⁰⁰ Amarasekera (2011): p.19.

Rajapaksa – with the backing of the Wickremasinghe-led UNP and other parties, such as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which was always regarded as a proxy of the LTTE – made the task of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement and other Sinhala nationalist forces that much easier.

The picture, then, was quite clear: President Rajapaksa was (like in 2005) the representative of the nationalist forces, while Sarath Fonseka represented the non-nationalist forces.¹⁰¹ The 2010 Presidential-election was now the most crucial battle in the fight against non-nationalist forces, which were perceived to be having the support of Western powers as well.

In particular, the electoral promise made by Sarath Fonseka to the effect that he would abolish the Executive Presidential system once elected, was not taken seriously by the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement. Writers such as Nalin de Silva were confident that such claims were not believable. In other words, Fonseka will not abolish the Executive Presidency¹⁰², as the promise to abolish the Executive Presidency was always a political condition attached to the manifesto of politicians which never got implemented.¹⁰³

Such political promises did not materialise, given the resounding victory achieved by President Rajapaksa. The nationalist forces had won. And at the time of writing this chapter (July 2013), their long march continues.

Jathika Chinthanaya and the Politics of Presidentialism: An Assessment

In assessing the politics of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement, a

¹⁰¹ N. de Silva, 'The West and the Jathikathva', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/files2/i091216.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹⁰² N. de Silva, 'The Uncommon Candidate', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/files2/i091118.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹⁰³ N. de Silva, 'Swan Song', *Kalaya*<<http://www.kalaya.org/files2/i091202.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013: abolishing the Executive Presidency "has been a condition that has been included in the agreements signed between political parties when they did not have anything else to agree on", and therefore, nobody "is fooled by these agreements on abolishing the Presidency and the General [Fonseka] if elected would be the last person to abolish it."

number of factors come to light.

i. Jathika Chinthanaya: Between Flexibility and Dogmatism

The *Jathika Chinthanaya* concept is, like all other concepts, a constructed one. It is flexible in character, and can be articulated to promote different projects.

Predominantly, its promotion has been such that it has appeared to be a concept which is dogmatic, tribalistic (in its negative sense) and assimilationist in approach, promoting the predominance and superiority of Sinhala-Buddhism (and the inevitable inferiority of different ethnic and religious communities), asserting a rigid conception of the 'unitary' State, while also degenerating into an anti-Western screed. Within such a conception then, the role of the political leader (or the Executive President) can get easily reduced to the function of: giving prominence to Buddhism and Sinhala-Buddhist culture, and the rigid defence of the unitary character of the State. It is this version of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that is more popular, and one which recently formed Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist groups and advocates tend to be promoting so vigorously today.¹⁰⁴

Its attraction perhaps lies, partly in this dogmatic and militant character (thereby satisfying some of man's natural impulses and urges in the midst of surrounding uncertainty), but partly also in its seeming humane character and the embrace of the other. As observed earlier in this chapter (section 2.1), the concept is seemingly flexible and tends to promote a narrative which appears to stand for some form of unity and togetherness; one which is at times mindful of the sensitivities of different communities; one which seeks to embrace distinct and different cultures (while only pointing to what, for a lot of people, will be the obviousness of

¹⁰⁴ Such support for the Executive Presidency has been more recently extended by ultra-Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist groups such as the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS). As its General Secretary is reported to have stated: "As long as President Rajapaksa maintains the unitary state we will support him and protect him. It doesn't matter to us how long he will govern as long as Sri Lanka is a unitary nation"; see J. Padmasiri & K. Pathiraja, '*Indo-Lanka Accord remains invalid – Champika*', *InfoLanka* <<http://www.infolanka.com/news/IL/dm874.htm>> accessed 15th July 2013.

prominence of Sinhala-Buddhists and Sinhala-Buddhism); a narrative which invokes a sense of pride in the people (at least, the majority community and their language and religion); a narrative which is critical of the West but is accommodative and understanding when necessary; and as a concept which promotes democratic politics and the idea of a humane socialist society (centred around, and inspired by, Buddhism).

In the absence of this mix, the *Jathika Chinthanaya*, or the broader Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist political project it gives expression to, cannot have succeeded in the country. It is this mix which gives the concept a certain pragmatic and realist flavour, so necessary for a dominant political ideology. In this sense, it is perhaps like any other form of ethnic nationalism. It is also due to this flexibility that one comes across the staunch and unflinching defence of the Executive Presidency in some writings, while critique of the same (especially of the Executive Presidency during the Jayewardene-era) in some others. And as long as such different readings are possible, as long as you retain enough to both support and critique the Presidency where necessary, the Sinhala-Buddhist masses would not be convinced that the broader politics of the kind promoted by a concept such as the *Jathika Chinthanaya* is entirely anti-democratic and deplorable.

ii. *Kings as Presidents and the Cultural Challenge*

There is a historical and cultural dimension which plays a prominent role in the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement's discourse on political leadership (and the Executive Presidency). Fundamentally, it is a discourse inspired by the history and culture of Sri Lanka, especially the ancient model of kingship. Constant reference is therefore made to ancient kings, and the need to return to a state which resembles an ancient and glorious past. Reverting to a political system akin to that maintained by King Dutu Gemunu, for example, has been the desire of certain writers.¹⁰⁵

But the reason why this political discourse connects with the masses is also because it is not based on abstract theorising. And the

¹⁰⁵ de Silva (1998): p.16.

apparent glorification of the ancient kings and the lost past does not necessarily mean that what is advocated is a total return to an old form of kingship. Amarasekera, for example, states that thinking of such a return is even naïve and impractical: therefore, the task today is to construct a system of governance and a political philosophy that enables the work of such a ‘king’ or ruler.¹⁰⁶

For this, the Executive Presidency – the monarchical presidential system – appears to be a perfect match. This is especially so, now that the President can, at least in theory, remain in power indefinitely (as a consequence of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution), as was possible for ancient kings. That there was no great public outcry over the introduction of the 18th Amendment suggests that deep within the cultural consciousness of the Sinhala-Buddhist masses in particular, there was if not an explicit endorsement, a tendency to silently accept, a leadership model which is both powerful, even long lasting, as long as the ability to change the leader is guaranteed. While the popular criticism is that President Rajapaksa has transformed himself into the “self-appointed king of Sri Lanka”¹⁰⁷, the far more critical question for the critics is why the masses did not have a problem with a constitutional structure that created such a ‘king’.

Proponents of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* have a firm understanding of this cultural dimension that underlies the debate on the Executive Presidency. As Amarasekera points out, it was because of this dimension that the introduction of the 18th Amendment went unopposed by the people. Is this not, Amarasekera asks, a manifestation of the people’s need to revive the idea of kingship, by having an Executive President with powers similar to a King, sans a fixed term limit?¹⁰⁸ In a political environment and culture wherein a President is called ‘*Maha Rajano*’ (‘Great King’),¹⁰⁹ and

¹⁰⁶ Amarasekera (2006): p.49.

¹⁰⁷ M. Samaraweera, ‘Mahendra Percival Rajapaksa is now the King of Sri Lanka’, *Transcurrents* <http://transcurrents.com/tc/2010/09/mahendra_percival_rajapaksa_is.html> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Amarasekera (2011): p.100.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*: p.101.

gets portrayed in the press as “the epitome of sovereign power” akin to an old Sinhalese King or as a “manorial lord of the past”¹¹⁰, Amarasekera’s query cannot be lightly dismissed.

Amarasekera believes that the reason why such developments were embraced by the people had much to do with the ancient cultural recollection as well as due to the manner in which President Rajapaksa conducted the war against the LTTE. The people thereby came to acknowledge that without such power, Prabhakaran’s terrorism could not have been effectively defeated.¹¹¹

This explains why abolishing the Executive Presidency would not just be a simple political act but one which, in the present post-war context, will come to represent a significant democratic and ideological revolution; especially if the abolition of the Presidency is to take place in reaction to, and as a way of opposing, the current Rajapaksa-dominated rule.

iii. *Political ‘Realism’*

The *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement has also shown a sufficient amount of realism and pragmatism in its support for the Executive Presidency. Over the past few decades, the movement has been willing to support the Executive Presidency even on a conditional basis (which was largely evident during President Kumaratunga’s era), which makes its support and critique of the system contradictory to some, but pragmatic and realistic to others (especially, to the masses).

But also, there are a number of factors – a confluence of political and geopolitical factors – which make the contemporary position adopted by the movement on the Executive Presidency seem far

¹¹⁰ M. Roberts, ‘Mahinda Rajapaksa as a Modern Mahavamsa and Font of Clemency? The Roots of Populist Authoritarianism in Sri Lanka’, *Groundviews Journalism for Citizens* <http://groundviews.org/2012/01/25/mahinda-rajapaksa-as-a-modern-mahavamsa-and-font-of-clemency-the-roots-of-populist-authoritarianism-in-sri-lanka/?doing_wp_cron=1374034470.3772990703582763671875> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹¹¹ Amarasekera (2011): p.101.

more realistic and convincing to a majority community. These factors make the task of the anti-Executive Presidency camp extremely challenging.

Firstly, the present demand for abolishing the Executive Presidency takes place under a context wherein another polarising debate on the Thirteenth Amendment has taken place; and what is to be noted here is that the more popular view within the country (even according to certain opinion polls) seems to be that the Thirteenth Amendment needs to be abolished, largely because the full implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment (especially in the North) will pose a threat to the sovereignty of the country. And one of the principal motives of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement has been to ensure the repeal of the Thirteenth Amendment,¹¹² wherein the role of the President is clear: “The President was bestowed absolute power, not once but twice. It was not meant for indulging in political cunning but to take the necessary measures, such as holding a referendum with a view to getting rid of this disgraceful amendment. That should have been the first act.”¹¹³

Within a context wherein the Executive President with such powers is considered to be the main guarantor of the country’s sovereignty, any movement which attempts to abolish the Executive Presidency will be perceived by the majority community as one which is far removed from political realities. Also, the popular sense that the full implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment could seriously threaten the sovereignty of the country would make the groups proposing the abolition of the Executive Presidency silent about issues such as political devolution. Within such a context, what could be expected at best is some form of reformation of the Executive Presidency, not total abolition.

Secondly, the debate on abolishing the Executive Presidency comes just a few years after the end of a three-decades long armed conflict,

¹¹² G. Amarasekera, ‘*Why the 13th Amendment should be repealed*’, *The Nation* <<http://www.nation.lk/2011/06/05/newsfe6.htm>> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹¹³ Ibid. In this regard, great importance has come to be placed on the statements against the implementation of the 13th Amendment made by the Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, Gotabaya Rajapaksa. See, G. Amarasekera, ‘*Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s Statement*’, *The Island* <http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=76075> accessed 15th July 2013.

wherein the popular perception in the country is that it was principally political leadership given by the Executive President that enabled the defeat of the LTTE. The popular perception, in other words, is that without a strong political leader (Executive President), such success would not have been possible. This has been the dominant view of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement, as well as other Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist groups. This was why the anti-Executive Presidency slogan became meaningless, especially during the 2010 Presidential election, just months after the victory against the LTTE.¹¹⁴

In this context, the task before the anti-Executive Presidency groups is a difficult one; the masses need to be convinced that defeating the LTTE was the only positive outcome of the Executive Presidency. But in addition, the masses would also need to be convinced that the perceived threats posed by different elements – ranging from political groups in Tamil Nadu to ‘Tamil diaspora’ groups elsewhere – could be adequately met by the new system that is proposed in place of the Executive Presidency. In strange ways, promising that the alternative would be as strong as the Executive Presidency in protecting the country’s sovereignty would raise the question within the nationalist masses as to why, if then, the current system needs to be abolished entirely (without introducing suitable amendments, if necessary).

Both the above factors strengthen the view that abolishing the Executive Presidency is an immensely challenging and contentious task, as it has “an integral connection with the concept of sovereignty.”¹¹⁵ And also, as long as the majority polity is seen to be unwilling or unable to think more broadly about sovereignty, the ‘unitary’ concept, and devolution, anti-Executive Presidency formations will have an extremely tough task confronting the more ‘realistic’ politics of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, as promoted by the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement. Also, to attempt to abolish the Executive Presidency under the above mentioned circumstances

¹¹⁴ N. de Silva, ‘*Janadipathiwaranaya*’, *Kalaya* <<http://www.kalaya.org/files2/d091122.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013 [Sinhala].

¹¹⁵ H.L. de Silva (2008) *Sri Lanka: A Nation in Conflict* (Boralesgamuwa: Visidunu Prakashakayo): p.432.

could lead to policy confusion, as is seen in the recent positions adopted by the UNP on the Executive Presidency.¹¹⁶ And also, abolishing the Executive Presidency under such circumstances would even result in a return of the same system, now under a different garb and a different title.

iv. The Inadequacy of Abolishing the Executive Presidency

What is also clear from the politics of the the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement is that the mere abolition of the Executive Presidency would not be enough. This is especially the case, when noticing the critical admiration that these advocates have had for Prime Ministers S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Sirimavo Bandaranaike. In other words, it is to be remembered that one of the most appreciated leaders of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement is a Prime Minister (Mr. Bandaranaike). It is a stark reminder that the kind of leadership per se (Prime Ministerial or Presidential) does not affect the political positions adopted by Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. To think that it does would amount to a simplistic understanding of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

But more critically, it is to be further noted that even the proponents of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* tend to be ideologically against the current Executive Presidential system. For example, Nalin de Silva while arguing that it is necessary to have a legislative body which has the sole monopoly over law-making at the centre, which should be the sole repository of legislative power¹¹⁷, points out that “[s]uch a structure has no place for the executive presidential system.”¹¹⁸ It has also been the view that under the

¹¹⁶ See, ‘UNP draft proposal for a new constitution’, *The Island* <http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=80114> accessed 15th July 2013. In addition, the UNP’s views on the Executive Presidency were confusing given earlier reports that the UNP had ruled out the possibility of abolishing the system; see, ‘UNP says no abolishing of Executive Presidency’, *Daily Mirror* <<http://www.dailymirror.lk/news/29546-new-constitution.html>> accessed 15th July 2013. Such confusion may also reflect the impact Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist sentiment, which is not entirely opposed to the Executive Presidency.

¹¹⁷ de Silva (1997): p.98.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

party-political system that exists today, neither the Presidential system nor a Prime-Ministerial system makes any significant difference since both systems, by giving prominence to the political party which undertakes governance, results in promoting a powerful party-leader.¹¹⁹ It has also been argued that there is a need to have a system which promotes a national politics rather than party politics, a governance structure with minimum state-intervention with a decentralised system of strong village and town councils, and one which re-introduces the king-*sangha*-people triangular framework by replacing the king with a *manthrana sabhawa*.¹²⁰ An entirely different governance structure is thereby advocated.

What this means then is that the challenge confronting any movement which stands for the abolition of the Executive Presidency is to ensure not simply the change of the system, but whether this change comes about as a result of a change in the principles and attitudes that people hold concerning the notion of political leadership, about the character of the State, about issues concerning pluralism, etc.¹²¹ But such a change, in the abstract, would be what the proponents of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* demand too. Therefore going further, the even greater challenge for the anti-Executive Presidency camp is to see whether or not their proposed change would result in a system promoted by *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement.

Perhaps it is also to be noted that the reason for the absence of any serious and detailed evaluation of the Executive Presidential system (and the importance of re-introducing the Prime Ministerial system, for example) by writers such as Amarasekera and Nalin de Silva, is because from an ideological perspective, such evaluation is meaningless; especially because the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement does not place too much importance on whether what is existing is a Presidential or a Prime-Ministerial system. This could well be a

¹¹⁹ de Silva (1998): p.14.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ This aspect has been briefly but usefully discussed, for instance, in C.R. de Silva, 'The Overmighty Executive? A Liberal Viewpoint' in C. Amaratunga (Ed.) (1989) *Ideas for Constitutional Reform* (Colombo: Council for Liberal Democracy): p.313-325.

position that is closer to the understanding of the Sinhala-Buddhist masses who may be guided by the observation that in principle, no political system is wholly good or bad; inspiration for holding such a view (which is accurate in principle) may be derived from the Buddha's lack of preference for any single form of political system! Therefore under normal circumstances, to give the impression that anything is better than the existing Executive Presidential system may not be entirely convincing for the masses of the country.

v. *Immediate Prospects: Abolition, Reform or Retention?*

As discussed above, proponents of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* would ideologically stand for a system which is not a Presidential system. And in their earlier writings examined in this chapter, there was a critique of the Presidential system and the kind of nepotism it gave rise to (especially in relation to the Jayewardene-era). The Buddhist (and at times, 'socialist') strands in the writings of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement tend to promote a strong critique of the authoritarianism and dictatorial system that the Executive Presidency has come to represent (even though such a critique has not been forthcoming in recent times).

All this provides space for the promotion of significant reformation of the Executive Presidential system, if required. Also to be noted here is that reformation has been considered necessary by certain Sinhala nationalist groups and individuals, in recent times. For instance, it has been pointed out by the JHU that the Constitution is flawed given that there are certain powers entrusted on the President which are unnecessary.¹²² Sinhala nationalist advocates have, more recently, called for the repeal of provisions such as Article 35 of the Constitution; which confers upon the President immunity from suit, barring the possibility of instituting proceedings against the President in a court or tribunal "in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by him either in his official or private capacity."¹²³ Therefore, some form of reformation is

¹²² 'The Constitution is flawed says Gammanpila', *Ceylon Today* <<http://www.ceylontoday.lk/51-32229-news-detail-the-constitution-is-flawed-says-gammanpila.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹²³ S.L. Gunasekara, 'Eliminating the Scourge of Thuggery', *Daily*

indeed advocated by Sinhala nationalist groups today.

Yet, in practical terms, it is extremely questionable whether reformation would be a prominent theme in the political agenda of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* advocates, anytime in the near future. What needs to be remembered is that in recent times, many of them: have supported the repeal of the 17th Amendment to the Constitution and the introduction of the 18th Amendment; believe that the massive majority received in parliament to adopt the 18th Amendment, making the present government one of the strongest in Asia, was a good omen for the country¹²⁴; and, have defended the Presidential (and constitutional) powers enabling the swift removal of the former Chief Justice.¹²⁵ This is in addition to other Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist groups defending the Executive Presidency more explicitly.¹²⁶ These factors tend to foreclose any realistic prospects for a considerable and meaningful reformation of the Executive Presidential system anytime soon.

The only inference one can reach is that reformation, or even abolition, of the Executive Presidency under the Rajapaksa-regime will take place *only* as a tactical or strategic ploy to evade strong ‘international’ pressure. Only a drastic situation would lead to drastic measures being taken in respect of the Executive Presidency. But importantly, this kind of reformation would have the support of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement, as long as the incumbent regime and its main opposition (or perceived alternative) are labelled respectively as ‘nationalist’ and ‘non-

Mirror <<http://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/172-opinion/28726-eliminating-the-scourge-of-thuggery-.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹²⁴ N. de Silva, ‘*Vyavastha Sanshodanaya*’,

Kalaya <<http://www.kalaya.org/files2/d100912.pdf>> accessed 15th July 2013 [Sinhala].

¹²⁵ Writers such as Nalin de Silva were in the forefront of defending the move to impeach the former Chief Justice. See, for example, N. de Silva, ‘*More on Attempt to Impeach the CJ*’, *The*

Island <http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=65959> accessed 15th July 2013; N. de Silva, ‘*Judging the Judges*’, *The Island*, <http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=69447> accessed 15th July 2013.

¹²⁶ See for instance, U. Gammanpila, ‘*In Defence of the Executive Presidency*’, *Ceylon Today* <<http://www.ceylontoday.lk/76-29770-news-detail-in-defence-of-the-executive-presidency.html>> accessed 15th July 2013.

nationalist' in character; as was the case during the 2010 Presidential election.

Conclusion

Abolishing, or significantly reforming, the Executive Presidential system is an important and serious political task. However it is an exercise which inevitably demands the support of the Sinhala-Buddhist majority, which is sympathetic to the political ideology represented by groups such as the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement. And as always, the question is about how the Executive Presidency is reformed or replaced, under what context, and by whom.