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Sinhalaness and its Reproduction, 1232-1818



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I address the issue of Sinhala identity over time¹ with a focus on the period 1232-1818, the middle period as I shall call it in order to escape from European periodisation. This periodisation begins with the decline of the Polonnaruva civilisation and the shift of the principal Sinhala kingdoms to the hill country and south west; and ends, quite deliberately, with what has usually been termed (misleadingly) as “the Kandyan Rebellion” of 1817-18.² Within this broad span of time the emphasis is on the period 1400-1818. The analysis has an eye on the subsequent re-working of the Sinhala sentiments displayed in the rebellion during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a result of the processes of capitalist transformation and modernisation in a world era marked by the consolidation of nation-states.

Addressing such a large span of time involving a substantial scholarly literature which has had to cope with mere fragments of source material for certain stages and localities poses a methodological problem of generalisation. Conclusions must necessarily be cautious and suggestive. The definitive hues permeating some statements that follow are subject to this preliminary caveat.

The terms “*sinhala*” or “*sīhala*,” or its synonym, “*hela*,” were used as a self-reference by the people who spoke *hela* or *sinhala* (Sinhala

¹ This essay has profited greatly from the comments on an initial draft provided by C.R. de Silva, Anoma Pieris and Alan Strathern in April 2012. It also draws on the personal communications from Charles Abeysekera, K.N.O. Dharmadasa, K.B.A. Edmund, Sandadas Coperahewa, Asoka de Zoysa, J.B. Disanayake, Srinath Ganewatte, Dharshani Gunatilake, Sirima Kiribamune, D.S. Mayadunne, P.B. Meegaskumbura, Rohini Paranavithana, R.C. Somapala, A. Tissakumara, Ananda Wakkumbura and D.P.M. Weerakkody that enabled me to formulate my work in M. Roberts (2004) *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590s to 1815* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa), notably its critical second chapter on ‘*Modes of Communication, Orality and Poetry in the Middle Period.*’ None of these individuals should, of course, be held accountable for any errors of fact or judgement that remain.

² See M. Roberts, ‘*Variations on the Theme of Resistance Movements: the Kandyan Rebellion of 1817-18 and Latter-day Nationalisms of Ceylon*’ (1972) *Ceylon Studies Seminar*, 1970-72 series, No.10, and the revision elaborated in Roberts (2004): pp.139-40. The term “Kandyan Kingdom” is misleading because it was known as *Sīhalē* and the forces that fought “the War against the English” in 1803, for instance, fought as *lankāvē senaga* or *sinhala sena* not as “Kandyans” (*kandaudayo*).

as language). This twinning of language and people was consolidated, as we shall see, by the use of the terms “*Lankā*,” “*Laka*,” “*Sīhalē*,” “*Heladi*,” “*Sinhaladvīpa*,” “*Tunsinhala*,” et cetera³ to identify the island territory as a state. The Sinhala language in its erudite forms had variations marked by what one can term Palicised-Sinhala, Sanskritised-Sinhala and Elu (Hela) forms of Sinhala. Nevertheless, it retained a remarkable degree of uniformity over time and locality, so that the thirteenth-century *Pūjāvāliya* can be read and understood by literate Sinhalese today. This literature was penned on palm leaves (*ola*). However, its dissemination was aided by the flexibility of the Sinhala language and its amenability to chanting. Most prose texts can be turned into an oral chant by people with a modicum of skill. The people were versed in mnemonic capacities so that folk tale, song, *kavi* (poetry with various sub-types) and *tēravilī* (riddles in verse) were powerful modes of cultural transmission.⁴ These understandings were seconded by the meanings embodied in sculptures, architectural form and wall paintings at temples. Such dissemination of knowledge was compounded by the degree to which ordinary people travelled long distances on foot – as indicated much earlier in the centuries six to nine BC by the verses written on the wall of Sigiriya Rock by individuals from all parts of the island.⁵

³ These words should be transliterated without a capital letter, but I have deliberately adopted the capital beginning to prevent confusion and assist the English-reading public. Note that there were at least 21 variant *sīhala* (*hela*) terms for the island of Sri Lanka: see Roberts (2004): pp.58-59.

⁴ K.N.O. Dharmadasa, ‘*Literature in Sri Lanka: the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries*’ in K. M de Silva (Ed.) (1995) *University of Peradeniya, History of Sri Lanka*, Vol.II, (Colombo: Sridevi): pp.471-90; S.J. Sumanasekera Banda (1986) *Uvā dāyāda* (Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha); K.D.P. Wickremasinghe (Ed.) (1970) *Pārakumba Sīrita* (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena); W.A. de Silva, ‘*Some Poetical Works of the Sinhalese: The Lovāda Saṅgarāva*’ (1910) *Ceylon National Review* (March) 9: pp.136-57; M.H.P. Silva, ‘*Sinhala praśasti ha hatan kāvyavālin pīlimbu vana jātika hāngīm*’, [Nationalist sentiments reflected in war poems and panegyrics] in P.B. Sannasgala (Ed.) (1964) *Sinhala praśasti saha hatan kavi* (Colombo): pp. 281-84; R. Obeyesekere, ‘*The Sinhala Literary Tradition: Polemics and Debate*’ (1992) *South Asia Bulletin* 12: pp.34-41; D. Winslow, ‘*The Anomastic Discourse of Folk Etymologies in Sri Lanka*’ (1984) *Social Analysis* 16: pp.79-90; Roberts (2004): Ch.2.

⁵ R. Obeyesekere, ‘*A Survey of the Sinhala Literary Tradition*’ in T. Fernando & R.N. Kearney (Eds.) (1979) *Modern Sri Lanka: A Society in Transition*

Pilgrimages and tales brought back by travellers were one modality that generated a wider awareness. The mobilisation of men for war through *corvée* duty (*rājakāriya*) was another mode that came into play sometimes and with great frequency in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On occasions bodies of troops numbering 12,000 to 15,000 – a “peoples’ militia” drawn from wide stretches of the country – were assembled for battles.⁶ This highlights not only mobilising capacity, but also implies the dissemination of the sentiments aroused by war. Again, the breadth of geographical knowledge reposing within the literati is attested by the boundary descriptions and the lore in the *kada-im-pot*, *bandāravaliya* and *vitti-pot*⁷ as well as the travelogue-poetry known as *sandēsa kāvya*.⁸

The *sandēsa kāvya* span the fifteenth to twentieth centuries. The early poems were mostly written by *bhikkhus* and usually described a journey from the king’s capital to a shrine of a guardian deity in

(Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School, Syracuse University): pp.265-85: p.26 and Obeyesekere (1992): p.36. Also J.C. Holt (1996) *The Religious Works of Kirti Sri* (New York: OUP) and Roberts (2004) for temple wall paintings.

⁶ These figures are after C.R. de Silva who discounts the exaggerated Portuguese estimates that relate to the battles of Randenivela (1630), Gannoruwa (1638) and the siege of Colombo (1630) respectively: see C.R. de Silva (1972) *The Portuguese in Ceylon, 1617-1638* (Colombo: Cave & Co.): pp.106,119,134 and 154. Note that the siege of Colombo in 1587-88 by Rājasinha I of Sītāvaka’s forces may have involved as much as 30,000 men: C.R. de Silva, ‘*The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Sitawaka*’ (1977) *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies* 7: pp.1-43 at p.37. Also see Roberts (2004): p.110. In brief some assemblages were larger than those gathered together recently by the LTTE for their assaults.

⁷ H. A. P. Abeyawardana (1999) *Boundary Divisions of Medieval Sri Lanka* (Polgasovita: Academy of Sri Lankan Culture); A.S. Kulasuriya, ‘*The Minor Chronicles and other Traditional Writings in Sinhalese and their Historical Value*’ (1978) *Ceylon Historical Journal* 25: pp.1-33 at pp.16-23; and D.G.B. de Silva, ‘*New Light on Vanni Chiefs, based on Historical Tradition, Palm-leaf Manuscripts and Official Records*’ (1996 [1998]) *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Sri Lanka*, n.s. being the Sesquicentennial Special Number, 1996, vol. LXI: pp.153-204. Note that the 1996 issue appeared in 1998.

⁸ W.A. de Silva, ‘*The Popular Poetry of the Sinhalese*’ (1915/16) *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch* 68: pp.27-66; C.E. Godakumbura, ‘*Praśasti kāvya bihikala kavikāra maduva*,’ [The king’s minstrelsy that generated praise poems] in Sannasgala (1964): pp.306-12; P.E. Pieris, ‘*Parangi Hatane*’ in P. E. Pieris (1909) *Ribeiro’s History of Ceilão* (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries Co.): pp.244-70.

order to seek a specific boon for king or kingdom. These poems mostly originated in the low country of the south west. Anoma Pieris contends that those coined during the Kottē period “stressed the importance of geographic belonging.” In this evaluation the “us-ness” embedded within the poems emerges in association with an emphasis on “the processes of unifying...territory.”⁹

The diversity embraces ethnic differentiation, noting the presence of Muslim trading emporia at such ports as Weligama, Matara and Beruwala; and referring, for instance, to Tamil, Malayāli, Tuluvar and Sinhala men in Prince Sapumāl’s army. Such references are mostly descriptive, and identify the enemies of *Lak Dīva* from specific parts of India, suggesting a sense of a national geography and reminding one of the previous reference in the *Pūjāvāliya* (1266) to Māgha and his invading force as *para saturan* (alien enemies).¹⁰ However, this is a battle-specific reference and Pieris has found no generalised hostility to the *demala* (Tamils) in the *sandēsa kāvyā* she has studied.¹¹

A little later, when Sapumāl (himself of mixed Malayāli/Tamil lineage) secured the kingship of Kottē after a tussle with other contenders, he encountered a revolt in the heartland that is intriguingly referred to as *sīmhala samge* (“Sinhala war”) and *sīmhala peraliya* (Sinhala insurrection) in two different sources. The implications of this label have proved to be a puzzle for historians. Alan Strathern’s recent overview suggests that the most plausible reading of the scant evidence is that it was an effort “to invoke an indigenist sensibility by referring to the foreign displacement of Sinhalese,” that is, focusing upon the extent to which Sapumāl relied on a coterie of Tamil and Indian courtiers whom he had

⁹ Email note to Roberts from Anoma Pieris (22nd April 2012) amending her earlier article and discarding her reference to “a nascent national consciousness”, while moderating her stress on “ethnic difference and racial enmity”: A. Pieris, ‘*Avian Geographies an Inquiry into Nationalist Consciousness in Medieval Lanka*’ (2010) *South Asia* 33: pp.336-62 at pp.342 and 356-57 respectively.

¹⁰ Pieris (2010): p.358; Roberts (2004): p.25.

¹¹ Pieris (2010): p.343 and email note to Roberts, 22nd April 2012.

brought along with him from up north where he had ruled as a *yuvaraja* after its subjugation.¹²

Such fragments of historical data from the fifteenth century herald sentiments that recur in the centuries that followed, Sinhala sentiments that gained in political sharpness from the enmities and sufferings associated with episodic warfare against the Portuguese (1560s-1650s) and, thereafter, on the odd occasion against the Dutch and the British.

Strathern has identified currents of “indigenism” and “Sinhala-ness” in his studies of the Portuguese period,¹³ thereby linking up with my elaboration of Sinhala consciousness in the seventeenth-to-early nineteenth centuries. Thus far, both of us have refrained from imposing the term “nationalism” to describe this ideological strand because of the meanings that accrued to the concept after the principles of the French Revolution secured dominance in an era when capitalist market relations established primacy. Strathern is prepared to refer to this body of sentiment as a form of “politicized ethnicity” and as “patriotism.”¹⁴ However, I would now go further and describe it as a form of “nascent national consciousness” as long as it is understood with adjunct caveats (see below and note the emphasis).

Any corpus of political thought, and any tale, has ingredients in its composition. In tracing the picture of Shaka Zulu that has been bequeathed to southern Africa, Carolyn Hamilton studied the existing tales with an eye on discerning “their residual continuities

¹² A. Strathern, ‘*The Role of Sinhala Group Identity in the ‘Sinhala Rebellion’ against Bhuvanekabahu VI (1469-77)*’ in G. Perera (Ed.) (2010) *The Portuguese in Sri Lanka and Goa* (Kandy: ICES): pp.13-27.

¹³ A. Strathern (2007) *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-century Sri Lanka* (Cambridge: CUP); A. Strathern, ‘*Towards the Source-criticism of Sitavakan Heroic Literature. Part 2: The Sītāvaka Hatana: Notes on a Grounded Text*’ (2008) *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 34; A. Strathern, ‘*Treachery and Ethnicity in Portuguese Representations of Sri Lanka*’ in R. Roque & K. Wagner (Eds.) (2011) *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History* (London: Palgrave): pp. 217-34.

¹⁴ Email memo from Alan Strathern to Roberts dated 27th April 2012 and Strathern (2011): p.227.

with ancient materials.”¹⁵Continuity involves the reproduction and re-working of “materials” (or “ingredients” in my conceptualisation) across generations and in new circumstances. Where any “ingredient” appears with some frequency over a period of time, one can also treat it as a “thread” (understood and qualified always by evaluations in relation to context).

The source material in the middle period enables one to compose a picture of the main ingredients and threads in Sinhaleseness over that long span of time; and to mark some of the processes and moments which implanted such sentiments within segments of the Sinhala-speaking people who had voice and power. This argument does not mean that all Sinhala-speakers in all localities adhered to these sentiments throughout their life span. Collective identity is rarely that catholic and universal.

There were jungle localities such as the Pānāma area in the south-eastern corner of Sri Lanka and the Nuvarakālāviya and Bintāna regions of old where the residents eked out an existence for many centuries and where modern anthropological work has indicated that Sinhalese, Tamil and, in some instances, Vādda families were intermarried and did not adhere to strict ethnic differentiation.¹⁶ In brief, these were localities of “subsistence hybridity” where we can surmise that politics was organised around shifting familial factions.

A different form of hybridity, “*entrepot* hybridity” as I shall term it, was probably found in the north-western coastal belt extending from Mutwal to Pooneryn – a region which served as an entry point for traders, mercenary soldiers, migrant clusters, pearl fishermen and fishermen from the neighbouring Indian

¹⁵ C. Hamilton (1998) *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention*: p.26.

¹⁶ For instance, G. Obeyesekere, ‘Where have All the Vaddas Gone? Buddhism and Aboriginality in Sri Lanka’ in N. Silva (Ed.) (2002) *The Hybrid Island: Culture Crossings and the Invention of Identity* (Colombo: SSA): pp. 1-19; J. Dart, ‘The Coast Veddās: Dimensions of Marginality’ in K N O. Dharmadasa & S.W.R. de S. Samarasinghe (Eds.) (1990) *The Vanishing Aborigines* (New Delhi: Vikas): pp.67-83; N. Yalman (1971) *Under the Bo Tree: Studies in Caste, Kinship, Marriage in the Interior of Ceylon* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press): pp.310-15; J. Brow (1978) *Vedda Villages of Anuradhapura* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press).

subcontinent. This was a polyglot area where some peoples were bilingual in Tamil and Sinhala and sometimes polyglot in identity. It must be recalled that bodies of Indian migrants who became incorporated into Sinhala society as Karāva, Salāgama, Durāva, Ambātta (Panniki) and Navandanna castes (or, rather, parts thereof) moved into Sri Lanka at various moments between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries and generally resided along the coastal littoral.¹⁷

The kings of Kottē and, later, those of Kandy-as-Sīhalē brought people from India to colonise depopulated territory, while Indian mercenary troops were hired by the Sinhala dynasts at various moments.¹⁸ Again, the island residents and powers had close ties with Kerala. Brahmin *pantarams*, *purohīts* and men of learning were among those that were part of the court society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Strathern has shown and one can follow Anoma Pieris in speaking of “the hybrid culture of the Sinhala court” in the time of the Kottē Kingdom.¹⁹ This form of “elite cosmopolitan hybridity” was compounded by the process of Luzitanisation once the Portuguese gained a foothold in the Kottē court circles from the 1540s and once their missionaries succeeded in converting some Sinhalese in the coastal lowlands.

¹⁷ M. Roberts (1982) *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: the Rise of a Karāva Elite in Sri Lanka, 1500-1931* (Cambridge: CUP): pp.1-2,18 et seq.,31-32,48-50,62; and, for the Kandyan Navandanna, see H.W. Codrington, ‘The Kandyan Navandanno’ (1909) *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch* 21: pp.221-53. The Ambāttayo barbers seem to have come across as affiliates of the Karāva migrants: Roberts (1982): pp.92-93. Panniki is another term used to describe barbers.

¹⁸ D.G.B. de Silva (1996); C.R. de Silva (1972): p.93.

¹⁹ Pieris (2010): p.357; Strathern (2007): pp.128,185; Strathern (2011). On trading and other exchanges with Kerala and elsewhere as well as the immigration of peoples from India between the 13th and 16th centuries, also see S. Pathmanathan, ‘Kingship in Sri Lanka: A.D. 1070-1270’ (1982) *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 8: pp.120-48; S. Pathmanathan, ‘Buddhism and Hinduism in Sri Lanka: Some Points of Contact between Two Religious Traditions circa 1300-1600’ (1986) *Kalyani: Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Kelaniya* 5 & 6: pp.78-112; A. Liyanagamage, ‘Keralas in Medieval Sri Lankan History: A Study of Two Contrasting Roles’ (1986) *Kalyani: Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Kelaniya* 5 & 6: pp.61-77; J. Holt (2004) *The Buddhist Vishnu: Religious Transformation, Politics and Culture* (New York: Columbia UP): pp.34-57.

Needless to say, the polyglot cosmopolitan aspect of the port settlements, such as Hambantota, Tangalla, Devundara, Weligama, Galla, Dodanduwa, Beruwela, Panadura, Kolontota, Mutwal, Negombo and Kalpitiya,²⁰ was compounded throughout the middle period by the seafarers and traders traversing the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean, so that Indians of varied ethnicity, Chinese, Malays, Arabs, Maldivians, Mapillas and Iranians would have been among the diverse people who came within the awareness of some coastal Sinhala-speakers, and thus sparked a sense of “Us Sinhala” in differentiation from these specific others in the course of interpersonal exchange.

We must not only allow for different forms of hybridity, but note that it can sharpen ethnic difference especially where it interlocks with competition for resources, power and status. Indeed, I stress that hybridity in such contexts is one of the conditions of ethnic conflict. Leslie Gunawardana’s implicit argument that the widespread use of Tamil in the Kottē literate circles indicates a limited degree of Sinhalaness is astonishingly naive.²¹ Cosmopolitanism does not preclude prejudice or xenophobia.²² Strathern has revealed how “many of the most redoubtable [Sinhala] rebels [against Portuguese rule in the low-country] came from strongly Lusitanised backgrounds” and concluded that “indigenism co-existed with strong cosmopolitan tendencies; so

²⁰ Also see the essays in M.A.M. Shukri (1986) *Muslims of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Aitken Spence for the Jamiah Naleemia Institute, Beruwala).

²¹ R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, ‘*The People of the Lion: Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography*’ in J. Spencer (Ed.) (1990) *Sri Lanka: History and Roots of Conflict* (London: Routledge): pp.45-86 at pp.66-67.

²² Anagārika Dharmapāla kept his diary in English and read English novels besides Sinhala and Buddhist texts: M. Roberts, ‘*For Humanity, For the Sinhalese: Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat*’ (1997) *Journal of Asian Studies* 56: pp.1006-32. Some of the most virulent Sinhala nationalists in contemporary times are competent in English. The civil servant ‘Tsar’, N.Q. Dias, who directed the Sinhalaicisation of the administrative services for the SLFP governments from 1956-65, may have been the first CCS official to wear the Ārya Sinhala dress; but “he was not fluent in Sinhala...played tennis at one of Colombo’s elite clubs and lunched regularly at the Galle Face Hotel terrace to the accompaniment of his favourite aperitif, gin and tonic”: N. Jayaweera, ‘*Into the Turbulence (a chapter extracted from the author’s unpublished memoirs titled Dilemmas*’, *The Island*, 5th October 2008, available at: <http://www.island.lk/2008/10/05/features2.html> (last accessed 17th October 2012)

that the “xenophobia [that appeared] was...inconsistent and spasmodic rather than generic.”²³

It is only after displacing the erroneous paths²⁴ propagated by arguments about hybridity, print technology and collective identity as a form of fragmented fluidity that we can review the threads that helped constitute “Sinhala-ness” as a form of “politicized ethnicity” through the middle period, with particular emphasis here on the stage 1400-1818. Sinhala patriotism was especially marked during the Kandyan period (1593-1815/18) – a period that can be distinguished from the Kottē period because the sixteenth century was characterised by the existence of several sub-kingdoms and the prevalence of dynastic feuds that raise doubts about the breadth of loyalty to any concept of *Lankā* or *Sīhalā*.

Since this is a composite summary it requires a fundamental caveat: we require more nuanced work from many historian-hands in order to mark the temporal variations as well as the processes that re-worked, or reproduced, these component ingredients and threads at different points of time within the span covered here.

Summary Overview

In overview one can mark several ingredients in the thinking which constituted Sinhala-ness during the middle period, ingredients which often – though not always – threaded together and folded into one another. I shall number them alphabetically for convenience:

²³ Strathern (2011): p.7; Strathern (2007): p.240.

²⁴ Note my criticisms of Marcus Banks and other post-modernists in M. Roberts, ‘*Ethnicity after Edward Said: Post-Orientalist Failures in Comprehending the Kandyan Period of Lankan History*’ (2001a) *Ethnic Studies Report* 19: pp.69-98. M. Banks (1996) *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions* (London: Routledge). This essay was anticipated in M. Roberts, ‘*Nationalism, the Past and the Present: the Case of Sri Lanka*’ (1993) *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16: pp.133-66; and M. Roberts, ‘*Beyond Anderson: Reconstructing and Deconstructing Sinhala Nationalist Discourse*’ (1996) *Modern Asian Studies* 30: pp.690-98.

- A. the terms *sinhala* and *sīhala*, or the synonym *hela*, for the principal body of people and their language;
- B. the term *Sīhaladvīpa* (and equivalent variants) for the island as entity, both a geographical unit as *dvīpa* (or *dīpa*) and a political entity;
- C. the idea that people and place were invested with a special inheritance destined to preserve the Buddha *sāsana* ('order' in its Theravāda form) for posterity – in brief, the *Dhammadīpa* concept identified by Tambiah and others as a central ingredient in what has been depicted as “political Buddhism” and/or the “*vamsa* ideology” in today’s context;²⁵
- D. the vesting of this inheritance in the hands of a *cakravarti* figure²⁶ who was ideationally overlord of the whole island as a single entity – a persona who was regarded as the living representative of a line of kings emanating from the mythical founder of Sinhala civilisation, namely, Vijaya, himself a figure that has been implanted in folk tales as well as wall paintings (such as those plastered at the Dambulla rock temple in the eighteenth century), all adding up to practices marking the “historical self-consciousness” of the Sinhala people.²⁷

²⁵ S.J. Tambiah (1986) *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (London: I.B. Taurus): pp.57-64,70,87-88; S.J. Tambiah (1992) *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* Chicago: Chicago UP): pp.58-65,102-08; Spencer (1990): pp.4-7. For other data pertinent to this interpretation, see the essays in B.L. Smith (Ed.) (1978) *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka* (Chambersburg, Penn.: Anima Books); S. Kemper, ‘J. R. Jayewardene: Righteousness and Realpolitik’ in Spencer (1990): pp.187-88; S. Kemper (1991) *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics and Culture in Sinhala Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP); R. Obeyesekere (1992); Roberts (2004): pp.21,25,44-45,67,91,114,122, 154,157 et seq.

²⁶ Apart from the information in Roberts (2004), for this concept and its importance, see especially Strathern (2008): pp.15,19-22,25.

²⁷ G. Obeyesekere, ‘Buddhism, Nationhood and Cultural Identity: A Question of Fundamentals’ in M.E. Marty & R.S. Appleby (Eds.) (1995) *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press): pp.231-56 at p.232; J. Holt (1996) *The Religious Works of Kirti Sri* (New York: OUP): p.70; R. Obeyesekere (1992); Roberts (2004): pp.21,28. Gananath Obeyesekere’s reference to “historical self-consciousness” is directed towards the history of Buddhist lands; and the essay moves on to mark the process by which a community is being developed in particularistic ways to fence off the Sinhalese

- E. the episodic threats to this inheritance from Tamil invaders in the past, heightened by the relatively recent memory of the “Tamil conflagration” under Māgha that had engulfed the Polonnaruva civilisation in the thirteenth century.²⁸

These ideas were transmitted over time and interlaced powerfully to sustain a “We-ness” among the Sinhala-speakers that was heightened from the sixteenth century onwards by the violent threats posed by the Portuguese imperial thrusts, which included periodic assaults on Buddhist edifices and the Buddhist priesthood.

Elaboration

The Sinhalaness seen in the *sandēsa kāvyā* developed in an era when Parākramabāhu VI of Kottē (1412-67) revealed a capacity to weld the whole island into an entity through military force. The subjugation of the kingdom of Yālpānam in the north by Prince Sapumāl Kumāra was one aspect of this process. At the same time Parākramabāhu VI sent six tributary missions to the Chinese emperors who had extended their imperial overlordship to the island through Zheng He’s (1371–1433) huge expeditions in the service of the Ming dynasty.²⁹ As Zoltan Biedermann suggests, “paying external tribute to the Chinese completed the internal overlordship, as the king could control the means of

of Sri Lanka. He suggests that for the pre-British context the term *sāsana* is the closest equivalent to the English concept of “nation”: G. Obeyesekere (1995): p.239. While this idea is pertinent, Obeyesekere neglects the use of such terms as *sihala dana* (people) and *sihala senaga* (troops, people) in the war poems.

The two processes have to be brought together.

²⁸ See A. Liyanagamage, ‘A Forgotten Aspect of the Relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils’ (1978) *Ceylon Historical Journal* 25: pp.95-142 at pp.102-03,127; A. Liyanagamage (1968) *The Decline of Polonnaruwa and the Rise of Dambadeniya, c. 1180-1270 A.D.* (Colombo: Government Press): pp.110-28; C.R. de Silva (1999) *Sri Lanka: A History* (2nd Rev. Ed.) (New Delhi: Vikas): pp.83-84,98-101.

²⁹ Zheng He led seven expeditions across the Indian Ocean between 1405 and 1433, five of which touched Sri Lanka. In 1411 he inflicted a military defeat on the King of Kottē, Vīra Alakēsvera, and took him as captive to China to pay homage: G.P.V. Somaratne (1975) *The Political History of the Kingdom of Kotte, 1400-1521* (Nugegoda: Deepanee Printers): pp.65-76.

symbolic...interaction with a distant state known to [have the capacity] to overthrow anyone in the island.”³⁰

What we see here, therefore, is the layered overlordship so characteristic of the *mandala* model of “galactic polities.”³¹ This form of “tributary overlordship” may have often been ideational rather than rigorously enforced by ritual or administrative acts. The ideational concept was nevertheless significant and sometimes marked by the act of homage/vassalage known as *dākum*, *ṣanduru ṣakkudam* et cetera.³²

The acceptance of the Kottē king’s overlordship by the various sub-kingdoms and the *vannirajavaru* within Lanka after Parākramabāhu VI passed away seems to have been fitful. There is no evidence that the kings of Yālpānam accepted the claim through emissaries or acts of homage in the late fifteenth or the early sixteenth centuries; and the Cinkaiariyan dynasty established in 1467 seems to have been an independent entity.³³ Despite this, “the monarchs of Sītāvaka [in the late sixteenth century] considered themselves...to be emperors of the whole island” and, half a century later, Rājasinha II of Kandy-as-*Sīhalē* asserted that “the black people of this island...wheresoever they might be [are] my vassals by right” – in effect presenting a “constitutional proclamation.”³⁴

³⁰ Z. Biedermann ‘*Tribute, Vassalage and Warfare in Early Luso-Lankan Relations*’ in F. de S. Gracias, C. Pinto & C. Borges (Eds.) (2005) **Indo-Portuguese History: Global Trends** (Goa: Maureen & Camvet Publishers): pp. 185-206 at p.191.

³¹ S.J. Tambiah (1985) **Culture, Thought and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective** (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP): Ch.7; S.J. Tambiah (1992) **Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka** (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press): pp.173-76; Strathern (2007): pp.27-31,142,146,222,231.

³² Roberts (2004): pp.20,44,60-64,70,75-76,153-54.

³³ C.R. de Silva & S. Pathmanathan, ‘*The Kingdom of Jaffna up to 1620*’ in K. M de Silva (Ed.) (1995) **University of Peradeniya History of Sri Lanka**, Vol. II, (Colombo: Sridevi): pp.105-06, who suggest, however, that King Pararājasēkeram (1472-79) may have “accepted the nominal overlordship” of the Vijayanāgara Empire. By 1619-21 the Kingdom of Yālpānam had fallen into Portuguese hands.

³⁴ C.R. de Silva (1977): p.42; D. Ferguson, ‘*Raja Sinha II and the Dutch*’ (1904) **Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Ceylon Branch** 18: pp.166-276 at p.194;

In both prose and verse texts in Sinhala, says Strathern, “it is the island of Lanka and the overlordship over it that is exalted.” Even in the *Alakesvara Yuddhaya* of the late sixteenth century, a text that is free of xenophobia and we-ness, there is “a generic reverence for kingship.”³⁵ The kings were seen as a source of order and associated with the sustenance of the Buddha *sāsana*. Thus, some forty years or so later, the king Senarat of Kandy-as-*Sīhalē* was praised thus in the *Rajasīha Hatana*: “[Senerat was told that he] is a king who should be *cakravarti* of the island, having united the Tri Sinhala and protected the *sāsana* and killing many enemies.”³⁶

While the *cakravarti* concept appears only at one point in the *Sītāvaka Hatana*, the terms *naranindu* and *nirindu* mark the exalted respect accorded to the Sinhala king, namely, Māyādunnē of Sītāvaka, who was vested with the island’s overlordship. This act of eulogy sat alongside the emphasis on “*Siri Laka*” – blessed Lanka – as another ideal. Thus, concludes Strathern, “the Sītāvaka kings and Lanka were conflated via the *cakravarti* ideal, and there seems to be a similar conflation of the Lankan with the Sinhala.”³⁷ Rājāsīha I of Sītāvaka is not only termed *rajasīha devi* (god Rājāsīha), but his campaigns against both the Portuguese and the sub-kingdom of Senkadagala (Kandy) are depicted through “images of unity and harmony.”³⁸ Significantly, his forces are never depicted as “men of Sītāvaka,” but as troops of Lanka (*lankāvē senaga*) or Sinhala forces (*sīhala sena*) motivated by love of their polity – “*nītarāma rata ālē*.”³⁹ There are many references,

T.B.H. Abeyasinghe ‘*The Kingdom of Kandy: Foundations and Foreign Relations, to 1638*’ in K.M. de Silva (1995): pp.157-58; Roberts (2004): p.78.

³⁵ Strathern (2007): p.240; A. Strathern ‘*Towards the Source-criticism of Sitavakan Heroic Literature. Part One: The Alakesvara Yuddhaya: Notes on a Floating Text*’ (2006) *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 32: pp.23-39.

³⁶ H. M. Somaratna (1968) *Rajasīha Hatana* [Rājāsīha’s War] (Kandy): v.43 which runs thus: “*Tri Sinhalayama eka, Satkāyra lev sasun rayka, Nasamin rupi noyeka, Dīpa sakviti wanda nirendeka.*” I thank C.R. de Silva for the reference and the “loose translation.”

³⁷ Strathern (2008): pp.16,19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*: p.24.

³⁹ Strathern (2008): pp.15,16,25. The quotation comes from a context where the Sītāvaka forces were pitted against a local Sinhala opponent and not the Portuguese, but “*rata* seems to mean Lanka” in this verse says Strathern in a footnote caveat.

therefore, that indicate “a deep connection between the ‘us’ and the land of Lanka.”⁴⁰

The Portuguese personnel who were at the interface of their programmes in Sri Lanka had no hesitation in seeing the “Chingalas” as a *nacao*, or nation, in the vocabulary they used for themselves in its early modern Portuguese sense. While the seventeenth-century Portuguese historian Queyroz never visited the island, unlike several modern scholars beset by Benedict-Andersonitis and postmodernism,⁴¹ his assiduous use of varied sources enabled him to perceive that oral transmission was a powerful medium that fostered a sense of nationality in its contemporary sense among the Sinhalese. This perspective was shared by several Portuguese chroniclers – all of whom came to the conclusion that “the Sinhalese had long held a clear sense of themselves as a distinct people.”⁴²

The recent researches by Strathern and Pieris, therefore, confirm the verdict presented in *Sinhala Consciousness* (2004), a conclusion derived on the foundations of (a) the war poems of the seventeenth century and the *Ingrīsi Hatana* of 1803; (b) assorted and fragmentary material from Dutch sources and (c) documentary material in English and Sinhala from the period 1796-1818.

As argued therein, this data supports a picture of *cakravarti* figures vested with superhuman capacities, devotional followers and fighters, *sīhala sen*, all oriented towards defending a valued territory that was variously referred to as *Lankā*, *Lakdīva*, *Heladiv*, *Sīhalē*, *Tun Sinhalaya*, *Siri Laka* or *uda pāta rata*. Such indications added up to a collective identity of Sinhaleanness linked to territory. Underpinning this sentiment was an explicit notion of sovereignty, as Gananath Obeyesekere has noted⁴³ – though I add here that it was not a form of sovereignty that was supported by a theory of

⁴⁰ Strathern (2007): p.240.

⁴¹ See Roberts (1993) and Roberts (1996) for an appraisal of Anderson, and Roberts (2001a) for an extended critique of fashionable trends in ethnic studies.

⁴² Strathern (2011): p.10.

⁴³ G. Obeyesekere (1995): p.235. Note Rājasinha II’s explicit encompassment of all “the black people” on the island – an act that I read as “a constitutional proclamation”: Roberts (2004): p.78.

self-determination based upon the principles of jurisprudence that were developed in Europe after 1789.

Nor was there the egalitarian ideal and democratic thrust associated with the idea of popular sovereignty. That was impossible in a deeply hierarchical society.⁴⁴ But the resistances mounted by the people of *Sihalē* in support of a hierarchically constituted dynastic state did amount to practices of liberation oriented around the king, the polity, the island territory, the people and the Buddhist dispensation. Provided, then, that our reading is hedged with the caveats outlined above, we can speak of a Sinhala patriotism that amounted to a nascent national consciousness.⁴⁵

Sinhalaness as “Us” versus “Them”

The evidence marshalled by myself and Strathern also elaborates upon C.R. de Silva’s early suggestion (1983) that warfare and interaction with the Portuguese was a major factor in promoting a sturdy attachment to the collective identity “we Sinhala” among significant segments of the Sinhala-speaking people during the Portuguese era. Once the king Dharmapāla of Kottē became a client Portuguese vassal, Sinhalese resistance to Portuguese imperialism was led by Māyādunnē of Sitāvaka and his son, Rājasinha I. Thereafter, from the 1590s, resistance was mounted

⁴⁴ So, there was “a collective identity that was decidedly king-centred and [that] thereby reflected... a hierarchical form of unity”: Roberts (2004): p.115. Note the complications within 20th and 21st century democracy in Sri Lanka because of the persistence of hierarchical notions and the practices *pirivarāgena*: M. Roberts, ‘Mahinda Rajapaksa: Cakravarti Imagery and Populist Processes’ *Thuppahi*, 28th January 2012, available at: <http://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2012/01/28/mahinda-rajapaksa-cakravarti-imagery-and-populist-processes/> (last accessed, 12th October 2012).

⁴⁵ Thus, I am going beyond my conceptualisation in Roberts (2004). Note that it is feasible to refer to “English patriotism” in Shakespeare’s writings and to speak of the development of English national consciousness in the Tudor period. Some historians go further back and highlight the after effects of the Hundred Years War with France (1337-1453). Adrian Hastings notes that: “one can find historians to date ‘the dawn of English national consciousness’ (or some such phrase) in almost every century from the eighth to the nineteenth” A. Hastings (1997) *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: CUP): p.35; see esp. Chs.1,2. All this is contested terrain of course.

by the Kingdom of *Sīhalē* centred on Senkadagala, a polity that adhered to the idea that it was the legitimate overlord of the whole island (and one that is referred to in modern thought as “the Kingdom of Kandy”). Thus the period 1560s to 1650s was marked by episodic warfare that could be seen as more or less continuous in its implications – justifying Strathern’s reference to the militarisation of society in this phase of history covering the period 1550s-1650s.⁴⁶

In consequence, the literature – especially the war poems – is marked by a virulent disparagement of the Portuguese that accompanies the expression of loyalty to polity and place. The Portuguese are represented as violent, cruel and thereby unethical.⁴⁷ Worse still, they are repulsive beings addicted to flesh, alcohol and opium. In one of his letters to the Dutch in 1676 Rājasinha II referred to them as prone to “send forth from their stinking mouths some stinking words (as is the custom of that nation).”⁴⁸ The war poems sometimes refer to them as *parangi* rather than the more neutral collective noun, *pratikal*. In the Sri Lankan context this term was also a designation for the suppurating syphilitic disease of yaws; so its usage in this manner was disparaging in the extreme.⁴⁹

Such abusive word-pictures of the Portuguese enemy are compounded by the denigration of the various foreign elements making up the Portuguese armies: so that in one verse in the *Sitāvaka Hatana* the Vadakkara, Mukkaru, Doluvara, Kavisi and Uruvisi who came with the “vast foreign armies” (*para senega*) are depicted as being cut into pieces in battle.⁵⁰ Again, in the seventeenth century *Rajasīha Hatana* the collection of personnel fighting for the Portuguese are denigrated thus:⁵¹

⁴⁶ Strathern (2007): p.7.

⁴⁷ Strathern (2008): p.17; Roberts (2004): pp.125-30.

⁴⁸ Ferguson (1904): p.235.

⁴⁹ M. Roberts, I. Raheem & P. Colin-Thomé (1989) *People In-between Vol.1: The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformations within Sri Lanka, 1790s-1960s* (Ratmalana: Sarvodaya): pp.5,7,16,18-19; Roberts (2004): pp.125,137.

⁵⁰ Strathern (2008): p.17; Roberts (2004): pp.116-30.

⁵¹ *Rajasīha Hatana* v. 395 (i.e., Pieris (1909): v. 405). P. E. Pieris (1909): pp.244 –270. This poem is the same as the *Rajasīha Hatana* edited by Somaratna, though the verses are adjacent in their numbering rather than precisely matching.

gerimas kannata ek vū erata upan tuppā *sit*
pirivāssan āndaka sinnarukam karanā aya pā *sit*
mari mastaka Kavisit Kannadi Parangi nandē *sit*
sulu mas vāda kotana lesin damā tānin tāna pā *sit*

Those country-born Thupāssis who feed on beef and ape the *senhors* in their trousers – Kavisi, Kannadi, Parangis and men from many a land – all are struck down as when fishermen kill their prey at night.

Such data leads Strathern to the conclusion that “the result of generations of constant warfare was an indigenous discourse that can only be described as patriotic and xenophobic, in love with the shining image of the island of Lanka and exulting in its kings.”⁵² Needless to say the demonisation of the enemy in such a pejorative manner sustained an emphasis on “Us” meting out awful punishments upon an intruding body of “Them” outside the legitimate fold of the Sinhala polity.

These motifs appeared again in 1803 after the Sinhala troops of the Kingdom of Kandy vanquished the English regiments who had seized the capital Senkadagala. The *Ingrīsi Hatana* paints the English as *jada* (filthy and ferocious), *nivata* (weaklings) and similar to elephants-in-musth (*rupu madātun*);⁵³ while verse 33 embraces others in its denigration:

“Impelled by ambitions beyond their country by greed directed towards one’s own country the English enemies engaged in battle, uttered words of challenge and brought *kavisi* [Blacks?], Ormuzi and other foreign soldiers and built ramparts [only to be] vanquished by our king who emerged triumphant. Aho, is there any other king who is like our king (and who) radiates so much wealth and glory?” (emphasis added).⁵⁴

⁵² Strathern (2007): pp.7,182-3,245-47; Strathern (2011): p.227.

⁵³ *Ingrīsi Hatana* (1951) [The war with the English] (Matugama: Vijayasinghe Press for K. R. Jayatunga) Original composer Vāligala Kavisundara Mudali: v. 81,61,38,29.

⁵⁴ Translation provided by Sandadas Coperahewa and adjusted in consultation with P.B. Meegaskumbura. One change was the rendering of *siya rata* as “one’s own country” rather than “this land.” Another change

While the war poems were a means of inspiring and mobilising men for war, the expression of such oral refrains would not have been confined to men on the march. It is probable that they featured in the *kavikāra maduwa* organised at the court or at stately mansions (*valavva*). It is equally probable that some fragments entered the commentary of exorcist ceremonies (*tovil*) and other performative rituals. Quite centrally, we know from Knox's experience as a captive in the seventeenth century that the villagers kept him awake by their episodic singing late at night; while Davy's travels in the 1810s led him to conclude that "every Singalese (*sic*) is, more or less, a poet; or, at least, can compose what they call poetry."⁵⁵ One can confidently surmise that some popular lyrics were disseminated along rural circuits by the militiamen who survived the wars.⁵⁶

The war poems, I stress, were panegyrics⁵⁷ in praise of specific kings – acts of devotional submission. They were also like *mantra*. As Ronald Inden has indicated for the *kāvya* tradition in India, such fare carried illocutionary force.⁵⁸ They were meant to reproduce the potency of the king. Their constitutive power also embodied expectations, demands. Obligations were cast upon the king-on-high. Power/potency had its price.

was the use of *Aho!* to convey the meaning of *sīsi* or *chī chi*.

Meegaskumbura indicated that this was a means of registering a sharp rebuke against the English. Coperahewa's translation of the last line was as follows: "Is there any other king who is like our king (and) glows with glory in a manner that resembles the radiating splendour of the moon." Meegaskumbura also wondered whether *kavisi* could refer to a category of people from India rather than Blacks from Africa.

⁵⁵ R. Knox (1989) [1681] *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* (J. Ryan, Ed.) (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons): p.131; J. Davy (1969) [1821] *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon* (Colombo: Tisara Prakasakayo): p.177.

⁵⁶ For background see Godakumbura (1964); R. Obeyesekere (1991) *Jewels of Doctrine: Stories of the Saddharma Ratnāvaliya* (New York: New York State UP): pp.xi, xiii, xvi, xxiii; R. Obeyesekere (1992): pp.35-36; Roberts (2004): pp.23,25-26,29-30,93,115,153 and note the authority of most of the personnel consulted for my work on *Sinhala Consciousness* (see fn.1, *supra*).

⁵⁷ On panegyrics among the Sinhalese of this period, also see K.N.O.

Dharmadasa, 'Literature in Sri Lanka: the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries' in K.M. de Silva (1995): pp.475-76; Strathern (2008): p.19.

⁵⁸ R. Inden (1990) *Imagining India* (Oxford: Blackwell): p.232.

Historical Heritage & Associational Logic

The expressions of Sinhaleseness in the verse and prose productions were girded on occasions with references to their historical inheritance – incorporating specific ideas embedded in the *Mahāvamsa*. A letter to the British from the Kandyan court dated 27th November 1811 commenced with “King Wijaya” and the manner in which he brought human culture to Lanka. Vijaya’s sovereignty, it is said, passed on to Dēvānampiyatissa in whose reign the light of Buddhism took root.⁵⁹ It then proceeded to relate the Dutugāmunu episode:

“Dutugeymanu God and Lord Supreme, like the great Prince of Lions cleaving the crowns of Elephants, as foreign Enemies attaining to the Sovereignty, having destroyed and expelled the Host of Seyde Malabars, like a gross mass before a gigantic Wind (?), increas[ed] the Prosperity of the World and Religion in the happy Isle of Lanka.”

What we see in this letter is a distilled history that covers some 23 centuries and in effect reiterates the main theme of the *vamsa* chronicles by presenting – in effect though not in so many words – the island as a *Dhammadīpa* associated with the Sinhalese and their kings. A subsequent letter dated 8th February went on to assert confidently: “besides, not only the English host, although the Dutch, French, Caffre, and many foreign Hosts united should come and make war against the happy isle of Lanka, most assuredly they cannot conquer. This is for no other Cause, (but) by the Power of the Gods called Vishnu, Sumana, Karttika, Wibhisana who protect the

⁵⁹ Ahālēpola to D’Oyly, 27th November 1811, encl. in Wilson to Liverpool, 26th February 1812 in CO 54/ 42: pp.47-51. This letter is not reprinted in the books by Vimalananda Tennekoon where there is a gap in the documents between c. 1806 and 1812. See T. Vimalananda (1973) *The British Intrigue in the Kingdom of Ceylon* (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co.); T. Vimalananda (1984) *Sri Wickrema, Brownrigg and Ehelepola* (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co.).

entire Religion of Srighana, and by the Power of our God and Lord Supreme.”⁶⁰

Even more remarkable is the reference to the Tamil enemy of past time with the trope “Seyde Malabars” (or “Seyde Demala” in the letter dated 8th February 1812). This simile is one that had been embodied in the story of the Sinhala king Dutugāmunu in the 5th/6th century *Mahāvamsa*. In this tale the young prince tells his mother the queen that he could not sleep stretched out because the rump Sinhala kingdom was compressed between “the fierce Tamils to the north and the unfathomable sea to the south” (*uturen sādi demalui, dakunen golu muhuda*).⁶¹

The telling word here is *sādi* (also rendered as *hādi*). It is a powerful invective that can be translated as “filthy,” “cruel,” “wicked,” “fierce” and “unruly.”⁶² Thus, metaphorically speaking, it is a hammer with multiple heads. Insofar as “filthiness” (*kunu kasala sahita*) and “savagery” are both vile, it could be rendered as “vile-cum-fierce.” However translated, there can be no doubt about the disparaging implications attached to this trope.

⁶⁰ Roberts (2004): p.159.

⁶¹ See Roberts (2004) for a clarification of this translation. To what extent the categories “Sinhala” and “Tamil” were opposed to each other in the centuries BC is a moot point. The conventional acceptance of this division as an integral part of the political scene can be called into question. The fifth century *Dīpavamsa* does not mark the antinomy sharply and does not indicate that Elāra, the king whom Dutugāmunu defeated, is Tamil, though some previous invaders are described as Tamil. It is in the *Mahāvamsa* composed in the fifth-sixth century AD that the enmity is emphasised. While this may well be a reading of sixth century conditions into the second century BC, one should note that these Pali texts were based on Sinhala texts known as the *Sīhalatthakatāmāhavamsa* (now lost) that were repositories of oral tradition.

⁶² G. Obeyesekere, ‘*Dutthagāmini and the Buddhist Conscience*’ in D. Allen (Ed.) (1993) *Religion and Political Conflict in Asia* (New Delhi: OUP): pp.135-60 at p.152; P.E. Pieris (1909): v.31,38; K.N.O. Dharmadasa (1992) *Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Michigan Press): pp.46-47.

It was not an isolated moment. The epithet crops up in some of the war poems directed at the Portuguese. Take just one example from the *Rajasīha Hatana*.⁶³

<i>sebalun saha lata</i>	<i>ra</i>
<i>sādi demala sen pūwata</i>	<i>ra</i>
<i>goda bāsa vit nohā</i>	<i>ra</i>
<i>nāsu vilasin pera Anurupu</i>	<i>ra</i>

As when long ago the cruel Demalās did land and sack our city Anurapura.

At times, too, this classical opposition could be framed within the vast mythological canvas of outstanding enmities, namely the conflict between the Asuras and Suras and that between Rāma and Rāvana. Take verse 130 in the *Rajasīha Hatana*:

*mahat vānara rakus ganimin Rāma Rāvana kala
yudek dhō*

*nohot vepasit Asura sen saha esak Sura sen kala
yudek dhō*

*yalit upata va Gāmunu niriñdun Demala senangat kala
yudek dhō*

*viyat kaviyara balā pāvasati meyudha kavurun kala
yudek dhō*

Is this a war fought between Rāma and Rāvana where the great monkey defeated the demons?

Or is it a war fought between the Asura and Suras of the god Sakra?

Or is it a war fought by Gāmunu reborn against the Tamil armies?

⁶³ *Rajasīha Hatana*: v. 26, with the free paraphrase coined by Pieris and Goonetilleke in P.E. Pieris (1909): v.31, also see v.33.

Oh poets of wisdom, gaze with your muse and tell us
whose was this war?⁶⁴

Sādi demala!! I was stunned when I chanced upon this phrase in the letters of 1811/12 during my historical journeys. One could anticipate hostility to a contemporary enemy; but a reference to an enemy whose presence as a political force had long disappeared was beyond my rationality.⁶⁵ What we find here, therefore, is a different mode of thinking.

Both Ranajit Guha and Richard Young enable us to break free from modernist fetters and comprehend this mode of reasoning. Guha elaborates upon the analogic reasoning of tribal peasants in British India who saw the moneylenders and officials as part of a ‘coalition’ with their principal oppressors, the landlords, so that their acts of resistance targeted the former as well. This was a form of analogic reasoning that occurred within a synchronic moment of time.⁶⁶

The more apt illustration, however, comes from within Sinhala society in the middle period through the findings of Young and Senanayaka, who coined the concept of “associational reasoning” when deciphering a corpus of Sinhala texts assembled in a palm-leaf manuscript penned in

⁶⁴ This verse in Somaratna’s *Rajasīha Hatana* is presented in M.H.P. Silva (1964): pp.79-80 as part of another text, the *Maha Hatana I*. I have used the latter version for the precise text because Ananda Wakkumbura indicated that the Somaratna edition has several printing errors. The translation is by Wakkumbura; while the translation found in P.E. Pieris (1909) (verse 138 in this edition) can be found in Roberts (2004): p.134.

⁶⁵ Thus, my rationality was (is) at fault.

⁶⁶ Guha refers to the reasoning as “the atidesa function” and clarifies it by reference to analogy, because it involves “extended applications, application by analogy, transference of one attribute to another, attraction of one case or rule to another”: R. Guha (1983) *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: OUP): p.23. He shows how “rebel violence tended to spread analogically developing its initial attack on any particular element among the peasants’ enemies into a general attack on all or most of them, a process by which insurgency came to permeate an entire domain constituted by such authorities”: *ibid*: p.25).

1762.⁶⁷ These texts addressed issues of salvation from a Buddhist viewpoint and took an adversarial stance towards rival religions. Here, textual characters that were represented in one temporal context under one name popped up in “another [context] under a different name without losing their identity in the roll-over from story to story.” One such character was the figure of Īsvara, that is, Sīva, who was presented in these texts as “the fount of all evil.” But Īsvara was also called “Ispittu,” that is, Spiritus or “Lord God” in the Indian world subject to Christian proselytisation. It is the “mechanics of associational logic” that explains how the Christian god and the Saivite god were merged “within an environment of intersecting and interacting elements of religion...and language.” Among those Sinhala Buddhists caught up in the adversarial rivalries of religious debate in the late middle period, the Christian heresies of their day, say Young and Senanayake, “would not have seemed dissimilar to the heresies of antiquity,” that is, to the Saivite challenges of the early middle period-and-before.⁶⁸

Parenthetically, one should not rush into a conclusion that religious bigotry was prevalent in the Kingdom of *Sīhalē* (Kandy). Connecting with a long tradition of measured debates on the relative merits of the various Asian religions King Narendrasinha (1707-39) assembled pundits on occasions to argue the case for their respective faiths, while also permitting Catholic missionaries to actively proselytise for

⁶⁷ R.F. Young & G.S.B. Senanayake (1998) *The Carpenter-Heretic. A Collection of Buddhist Stories about Christianity from 18th Century Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Karunaratne & Sons): pp.21-22. Though assembled in 1762, several texts were probably coined earlier, albeit after the advent of the Portuguese. The authors were probably *bhikkhus*.

⁶⁸ Ibid: pp.21-22. Note that anti-Saivite expressions entered a range of Sinhala texts intermittently from the tenth century onwards: see *Sahassavattupparakana, Sadharmākārāya and Rasavāhini* (personal communication from Tissa Kumara, 3rd February 2000). Also see *The Cūlavamsa* (1953) Vol.II (Trans. W. Geiger) (Colombo: Ceylon Government Information Department): pp.226-7; C.H.B. Reynolds (Ed.) (1970) *An Anthology of Sinhalese Literature up to 1815* (London: Allen & Unwin): pp.272,269; C.E. Godakumbura (1955) *Sinhalese Literature* (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries Co.): p.245.

converts in the lands directly under his administration.⁶⁹ The Buddhist populace in the kingdom would certainly have indulged in the syncretic forms of worship which have led them – over many centuries – to propitiate deities from the Saivite and Vaishnavite worlds who had been embraced by the Buddha’s *varama* (warrant) at shrines serviced by intermediaries (including *pantarams* from India).⁷⁰ Again, some Sinhala Catholics from the low-country are known to have found refuge from Dutch persecution within the Kingdom of *Sīhalē*.

There were, nevertheless, limits to tolerance as well. When the Catholic missionaries propagating the faith in Senkadagala town and the Kandyan heartland were deemed to be gaining too many adherents during the time of Srī Vijaya Rājāsinha in the 1740s, the king is said to have become “vehemently indignant” and, targeting “the infamous Parangis, the infidels,” ordered “their houses and their books destroyed.”⁷¹

The picture, therefore, cannot be depicted in black and white terms on all fronts. But there is plenty of evidence to argue that the Sinhala kings were a central pillar in a body of thought with interlocking threads that sustained the notion that there was a long-standing polity embracing the whole island, one associated with the Sinhala people and the Buddha *sāsana* (order).

This body of sentiments was insidiously supported by a semi-subterranean template in the Sinhala-speaking world that has informed alliance-making and faction-relations over several centuries. An inside/outside metaphor is deeply embedded within the practices of the Sinhala language and sustains a “segmentary form” in language-pattern that is like a Chinese-box, thereby producing a confederative structure of successive

⁶⁹ Email note from John Holt in May 2012; L.S. Dewaraja (1988) *The Kandyan Kingdom of Ceylon, 1707-1782* (2nd Rev. Ed.) (Colombo: Lake House): pp.83-84.

⁷⁰ See Holt (2004): *passim* and the many works by Gananath Obeyeskere for illustrations of these practices and processes.

⁷¹ *Cūlavamsa* (1953) Vol.II: p.253.

inclusions, or exclusions, depending on which way one moves across the schema.

Imagine oneself in a hypothetical village named Paranagama in the interior of Lanka which is peopled mostly by superior Govigama caste families and which has two factions A and B. When faction A assembles at one of their households in order to discuss strategies pertaining to a faction dispute, such phrases as *anek aya* (other fellows) or *pita minissu* (outside people) could connote those of faction B as distinct from *apēy minissu* (our people) representing faction A.

However, in other contexts, *apēy minissu* would distinguish all the people of Paranagama from the neighbouring villages and all outsiders, namely those *gamen bāhara* (beyond the village), *pitagankārayo* (other villagers) or *pita minissu*.⁷²

What is critical for our purposes, then, is the inside/outside plus us/them oppositions that the vocabulary sustains. In these overlapping dichotomies one sees the principle of exclusion (a principle that nevertheless operated in ways that allowed incorporation and assimilation).

Where *pita* is equivalent to “foreigner,” therefore, it would seem to mesh easily with the terms *un aya* (others) and *para*.⁷³ *Para*, too, is a word that carries multiple meanings.⁷⁴ However, the conventional sense of the word throughout the middle period and into the twentieth century has been that of “other,” “alien” or “enemy.” Though disparaging, especially in modern times, *para* was not necessarily so and could refer to “others” in a neutral sense within the classical written literature of the middle period.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the context of usage in the *Cūlavamsa* of the early middle period, where it

⁷² This pattern could interlace with, and be heightened by, caste distinctions. For a fuller clarification of this “segmentary structure,” see Roberts (2004): pp.30-34.

⁷³ My speculations on this point gained support from interviews with Charles Abeysekera (6th June 1994) and K.B.A. Edmund (5th August 1998).

⁷⁴ Letter from R. C. Somapala of the Sinhala Encyclopaedia Office, 1st April 1985 and a personal communication from P.B. Meegaskumbura.

⁷⁵ An opinion derived from conversations with Sinhala specialists who have studied that era. See fn. 1, *supra*.

refers to Māgha and his destructive activities, and in the war poems, where it refers to the Portuguese (who are referred to often as *parangi*), points to a pejorative import in such politicised expressions.

As we have seen earlier, the Portuguese are sometimes referred to in the war poems as *para rupu*. *Rupu* means “enemy/ enemies,” and *para* in this context means “foreign.” But *para* can also refer to “enemy,” so we have a suggestion here of the force of alliterative repetition, an *anuprāsa* in the terminology of Sinhala syntax. However, my interest is in the choice of the word *rupu* on occasions for this coupling rather than the standard prose word *saturu/satura*. This choice may derive from the alliterative or metric preferences of erudite verse forms. But *rupu* also introduces a cosmological touch. It would seem to have been conventional for *rupu* to be used when talking of cosmological forces such as *rupu dev* (enemy of the gods, i.e., an Asura or Titan) or as *rupu asura* (enemy of the Asura).⁷⁶ Since the war poems occasionally juxtapose the battles of the Sinhala king and his forces with tales of the Rāma-Rāvana struggle and that of the Suras against the Asuras,⁷⁷ the Portuguese as *para rupu* are thereby linked with the demonic forces of the cosmological order.

In review, then, the critical point for our interests is that, in principle, *rattu* and *pita rata aya* in the sense “foreigners” could map onto *parayo* (plural of *para*) in the same sense, while linking up with the metaphors associated with an awesome enemy. So what we have is a significant semantic pattern of expanding/contracting circles of meaning that sustains a distinction between Us/Them, that is, “Us Sinhala” opposed to alien others.

Equally significant is the fact that I discovered this semantic pattern in the course of research on the British period leading to an essay entitled ‘*Pejorative phrases: the anti-colonial response and*

⁷⁶ *Practical Sinhala Dictionary* (1984) Vol.II [Prāyogika Sinhala sabdakōshaya] (Colombo: Ministry of Cultural Affairs): p.1433.

⁷⁷ Roberts (2004): p.117; *Rajasīha Hatana* (1968): v.103,130,207 and *Parāngi Hatana* v.38-39 for Asuras; and *Rajasīha Hatana* (1968): v.130,177,195, 203 for Rāmā versus Rāvana.

*Sinhala perceptions of the self through images of the Burghers.*⁷⁸ Thus, this semantic pattern is an ingredient that is a “residual continuity” and a “thread” in Sinhala ways of being. As such, it can be treated as an abiding factor in the reproduction of Sinhaleanness in its various shades, shades determined in conjunction with other causal processes operative at any temporal moment.

Beyond 1818: Looking to the Present

Tracing the reshaping and transformation of Sinhaleanness into its nationalist form in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is beyond this brief. Clearly, one has to consider the considerable influence in the British period of (a) the administrative and communicational unification established by the colonial dispensation; (b) the capitalist transformation of the island’s political economy; (c) the intellectual currents from Europe that were taken up by the articulate elements of indigenous society, including here the concept “Ceylonese” which was an outgrowth of the island name “Ceylon;”⁷⁹ and (d) the influence of print technology and modern political associations in disseminating currents of thought.

A caution is in order. There is a danger of oversimplification through a failure to consider the complexities of circumstance and the incomplete transformations of modern times. Take one illustration: in establishing the multi-faceted machinery meant to free the factors of production and encourage profit-making, the British sought to instil the practice of “land-is-to-farm,” namely, the use of land for profit. That development

⁷⁸ Roberts, Raheem & Colin-Thomé (1989): Ch.1.

⁷⁹ It is my surmise that the English term “Ceylon” spawned the adjectival form of “Ceylonese” – which in turn led to a new ‘coin’ in Sinhala, namely, “*lānkika*” as its translation. When I consulted the Sinhala scholar, K.N.O. Dharmadasa, he said that “to my knowledge the word *lānkika* did not recur prior to the 19th century. There was no need for it” (email, 8th April 2012). Before the British took over the term *lakvāsiyan* (*lakvāsiyo*) was certainly in use to denote the Sinhalese as the ‘owners,’ so to speak, of the polity; but could not do the same service because the concept “Ceylonese” encompassed clearly differentiated categories, namely, Burgher, Sinhalese, Tamils et cetera.

certainly came into being and a Ceylonese bourgeoisie emerged through investments in trade, cash crops and graphite mining.⁸⁰ However, as my findings among the entrepreneurs of the early twentieth century and Gananath Obeyesekere's research among the local bourgeoisie in an interior district in the mid-twentieth century reveal, these very elements spent an inordinate amount of time wheeling-and-dealing in land shares and small parcels of paddy land.⁸¹ They did so because they were guided by the notion of "land-is-to-rule" – a concept clarified so pithily by Walter C. Neale.⁸² The aim was to build up a pool of clients, thereby maximising status and clout. So they were amphibians, both capitalist and lord.

Likewise, we must not let the considerable impact of print technology erase the influence of oral and performative modes of transmission among both the Sinhala and Tamil-speaking peoples.⁸³ Nor should we overestimate the influence of the decennial census enumerations begun in 1871 in sharpening ethnic consciousness simply because Bernard Cohn (1987) and the Indian subalternists have made a meal of this factor for the British Indian world.⁸⁴ Ethnic identity is nourished by

⁸⁰ M. Roberts, 'Elite Formations and Elites, 1832-1931' in M. Roberts (Ed.) (1979) *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Marga Institute): pp 153-213; Roberts (1982).

⁸¹ G. Obeyesekere (1967) *Land Tenure in Village Ceylon* (Cambridge: CUP): pp.211-47; M. Roberts, 'Land Problems and Policies, c.1832-1900' in K.M. de Silva (Ed.) (1973) *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, Vol.3 (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries Co.); M. Roberts, 'A New Marriage, An Old Dichotomy: The "Middle Class" in British Ceylon' in K. Indrapala (Ed.) (1975) *The James Thevathasan Rutnam Felicitation Volume* (Chunnakam: Thirumakal Press): pp. 32-63 at pp.45-50.

⁸² W.C. Neale, 'Land is to Rule' in R.E. Frykenburg (Ed.) (1969) *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press): pp.3-15.

⁸³ D.S. Mayadunne, 'Changing Fortunes of Sinhala Poetry' *Frontline*, 26th February 1999: pp.76-78; Winslow (1984); W.A. de Silva (1915/16); Roberts (2004): Ch.2.

⁸⁴ B.S. Cohn, 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia' in B.S. Cohn (1987) *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays* (New Delhi: OUP): pp.224-54.

a complex array of factors, with oral inter-personal exchanges serving as a critical influence within this process.⁸⁵

There is no denying the fact that the studious work of British and European Orientalists brought some of the Asian literary texts, among them the *Mahāvamsa* after it was translated by George Turnour in 1837, to world light.⁸⁶ But for any scholar to think that the Sinhala-literati of that time and substantial segments of the populace were not aware of its main lineaments is quite outlandish; and contradicted by some of the data presented within this chapter. Most Burghers and some English-educated Sinhalese in the mid-nineteenth century may have discovered this literature through Turnour's work and the schools set up by the British, but the vibrancy of Sinhala scholarship and its oral transmission during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is underestimated at peril.

Where the British administrators and travellers, many of them classicists, wrought significant influence was in the admiration they expressed once they visited the ruins and irrigation works of the Anurādhapura civilisation. This awe was compounded by the artistic work of various European painters, travellers and photographers.⁸⁷ When linked to the chronological state history available in the *Mahāvamsa*, Ceylon was seen to have something that India lacked: a continuous civilisation and unity that stretched far back.⁸⁸ In the process these European

⁸⁵ Roberts (2001a).

⁸⁶ J.D. Rogers, 'Historical Images in the British Period' in Spencer (1990); J.D. Rogers, 'Post-Orientalism and the Interpretation of Pre-modern and Modern Political Identities: The Case of Sri Lanka' (1994) *Journal of Asian Studies* 53: pp.10-23; J.D. Rogers, 'Early British Rule and Social Classification in Lanka' (2004) *Modern Asian Studies* 38: pp.625-47.

⁸⁷ J. Forbes (1840) *Eleven Years in Ceylon* (London); I. Raheem (1986) *A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings, Engravings and Drawings of Ceylon by 19th Century Artists* (Colombo: British Council); H.W. Cave (1893) *Picturesque Ceylon and Its Ruined Cities* (London: Sampson, Low & Marston); I. Raheem & P. Colin-Thomé (2000) *Images of British Ceylon* (Singapore: Times Editions): pp.52-54, 62.

⁸⁸ Thus, Partha Chatterjee argues that the claims associated with the slogan *Hindutva* were "possible only within modern forms of historiography which is necessarily constructed around the complex identity of people-nation-state": P.

men of letters spoke with some reverence about “Ceylonese civilisation” in ways that elided into “Sinhalese civilisation.”⁸⁹ This was not dissimilar to the manner in which so many Englishwomen and Englishmen of that day equated “British” with “English.”

As John D. Rogers has stressed, the early British deployed such concepts as “caste,” “race,” “nation” and “nationality” in an inconsistent and ambiguous manner. But within this backdrop it is significant that in his survey in 1818 Bertolacci referred to four “nations” in Ceylon and identified the “Cingalese” as the “Ceylonese proper.”⁹⁰ He was thereby replicating a viewpoint presented by the seventeenth-century English prisoner, Robert Knox who identified the “Chingulays” as “the natural proper People of the Island.”⁹¹ Both Knox and such nineteenth century Britons were obviously incorporating the force of majoritarian weight and political clout when they reached such conclusions. However, the latter-day British were also acknowledging the force of historical claim encoded within the *Mahāvamsa*.⁹²

The distinction between the Sinhalese and the Tamils that was drawn by the British was also deepened in the nineteenth century by the impact of Orientalist scholarship which drew a distinction between the Āryan and Dravidian languages of the Indian realms. In some minds this distinction transmuted into

Chatterjee, ‘*Claims on the Past: The Genealogy of Modern Historiography in Bengal*’ in D. Arnold & D. Hardiman (Eds.) (1994) *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha* (New Delhi: OUP): pp.1-49 at p.2.

⁸⁹ My experience during my dissertation research on nineteenth century agrarian policy, but also see Rogers (2004): pp.641-45.

⁹⁰ Rogers (2004): p.634 referring to A. Bertolacci (1817) *A View of the Agricultural, Commercial and Financial Interest of Ceylon* (London): p. 45, a perspective that must be understood alongside Bertolacci’s description of the “Vāddas as “the only indigenous nation in the island.”

⁹¹ Knox (1911): p.97. Knox distinguished the “Malabars” [namely the Tamils] from the “Chingulays” while noting that the Malabars were “free Denizons who pay duty to the King for the Land they enjoy, as the Kings’ natural Subjects do.” As the next lines make clear, in this view the Sinhalese were “the natural proper People of the Island.”

⁹² Rogers (2004): pp.641-45.

racial categories, which in Sri Lanka differentiated the Tamils and Sinhalese in racial terms.⁹³

The Āryan/Dravidian opposition in its racial connotations was certainly one of the new ingredients injected into the Lankan world by European currents of thought. Worse still, this distinction was cast in strict either/or terms, while imparting implications of superiority to those in the Āryan category. These dimensions of thought were adopted by some Sinhala nationalists (for example, Anagārika Dharmapāla) in the British era.⁹⁴ Such ideas shored up their nationalist pride in a context of colonial subordination; but also served to sharpen the boundary lines drawn between the embodied category, “Sinhalese/*Sinhala*,” and the category of The Other represented by the terms “Tamil” and “*demala*.”

As propagated in the English-speaking world these categorical distinctions carried the definitiveness hammered in by the either/or epistemology of the modern West. Where the Āryan theory was also impregnated with racial prejudices, that is, with the forms of “racism” that eventually spawned the Nazi movement, it promoted distaste for inter-racial marriages. This particular current within the Western intellectual currents entering Sri Lanka seems to have merged with the indigenous strands of thought which despised cross-caste marriages. Thus, the pronounced opposition to the mixture of blood embedded within casteism was now bolstered by Western racist thinking.

This was a powerful brew which entered Sinhala nationalist thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was embodied in the popular novels penned by Piyadāsa

⁹³ Gunawardana (1990): p.78; Rogers (1990): pp.94-97.

⁹⁴ M. Roberts, ‘*Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Sinhalese Perspectives: Barriers to Accommodation*’ (1978) *Modern Asian Studies* 12: pp.353-76; Roberts (1997). However, for anyone to use this new strand of influence to support the conclusion that “the roots of present understandings of ethnic identity [lie] in Victorian Orientalist scholarship” (Spencer (1990): p.4) is quite simply ahistorical and farcical. Rogers (2004) does not fall into this error.

Sirisēna in the early twentieth century.⁹⁵ Sirisēna (1875-1946) was the Gunadāsa Amarasēkera⁹⁶ of his time. One can argue that the strands of nationalist thought presented by such authors as Sirisēna and his contemporaries, W.A. de Silva and Charles Dias, exerted far greater influence among the Sinhala-speakers of their day than Dharmapāla. Sirisēna was also an editor and participated actively in the temperance movement and other nationalist organisations from the 1900s to the 1930s. His principal efforts were directed towards arresting the degeneration of Sinhala culture in the face of Westernisation.⁹⁷

The following equation was imprinted within his thinking: mixed bloods = unclean = fickle (*chapalayo*) = disordered.⁹⁸ Contrariwise, to be Ārya Sinhala was to be pure (*pirisidu*) and the epitome of virtue. The virtuous dispensation that was Sinhala nativism was under threat from foreign power (*paradēsingē balaya*). The Burghers were at the vanguard of this threat. Both the Burghers and those Sinhalese who adopted Westernised ways were depicted as *tuppahi* (pronounced *thuppahi*). This term was a searing pejorative in Sirisena's day and, as we have seen, bears a long history that goes back to the war poems dating from the late sixteenth century.⁹⁹ In one of his last novels, *Sucaritādarshaya*, the term *tuppahi* is even

⁹⁵ On Sirisēna, see S. Amunugama, 'Ideology and Class Interest in One of Piyadasa Sirisena's Novels: The New Image of the "Sinhala Buddhist" Nationalist' in M. Roberts (Ed.) (1997) *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, Vol.I (Colombo: Marga Institute): pp.335-53; Roberts, Raheem & Colin-Thomé (1989): pp.16-21; R. Obeyesekere (1992): pp.37-38; Roberts (2004): pp.31-32. He was born Pedrick de Silva, but changed his name in response to Anagārika Dharmapāla's campaign against Westernisation. This does not mean that his political thinking was a copy of Dharmapāla's.

⁹⁶ Amarasēkera is a dentist with bilingual capacities who has been a political activist and leading Sinhala novelist since the 1950s. He is one of the intellectuals associated with the *Jātika Chintanaya* (Nationalist Thought) movement dating from the 1980s.

⁹⁷ Roberts, Raheem & Colin-Thomé (1989): pp.16-21.

⁹⁸ See *ibid*, especially Chart II. Also note R. Obeyesekere (1979): pp.271-72.

⁹⁹ See fn.95, *supra*. When I composed *People Inbetween* in the 1980s, I was not aware that the term *tuppahi* had a long history and was wielded in similar demeaning manner in the war poems. In effect, *tuppahi* is a long-standing ingredient in the forging of Sinhalaness

associated with a long list of ethnic categories outside the Sinhala fold: *marakkala*, *hamba*, *kocci*, *demala*, *tuppahi*.¹⁰⁰

The term *tuppahi* was an instrument of denigration in the 1950s and 1960s directed against the Westernised elite by such rhetoricians as Philip Gunawardana and Professor W.S. Karunāratne. The degree to which this strand of thought contributed to the notion that only truly-indigenous Sinhala people should occupy the ruling portals is a question for social scientists addressing the situation in the mid-twentieth century; and needs to be backed up by investigations of Sinhala sentiments today in the twenty-first century.

The part-is-whole equation in the relationship between the categories “Sinhala” and “Lanka” has been one of the critical issues in the contemporary era. In the new context spawned in British colonial times, one featured by the presence of a large body of “Indian Tamils” in the central and southern parts of Sri Lanka as well as a substantial minority of “Sri Lankan Tamils” in Colombo and its environs, such a perspective is problematic. Its ramifications differ from the circumstances of the sixteenth to early nineteenth centuries when *Sīhalē* existed as a political entity and was subject to a *cakravarti* reigning over a populace imbricated with hierarchical notions.

It is my impression, from both historical soundings and personal exchanges of an anecdotal character, that over the last 150 years some Sinhalese have tended to equate the “Sinhala” part of the population with the “Sri Lankan part,” whether explicitly or implicitly; and that Burghers and non-Sinhalese have also been among those who have slipped into this ‘natural slippage’ or equation.¹⁰¹ This reading requires wider, deeper testing.

In a context, now in 2012, marked by (1) the influence of egalitarian ideas and practices, especially the democratic practice of “one adult-exercising-one vote” and (2) a strong Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism built upon a combination of

¹⁰⁰ P. Sirisena (1958) [1926] *Sucaritādarshaya* (Colombo): pp.126,130.

¹⁰¹ Roberts (1978): pp.365-66.

modern European thought bolstered by experiences of suffering and resistance, the equation of part and whole in a number of Sinhala and Lankan minds becomes one obstacle to reconciliatory accommodations¹⁰² that can rescue the existing Sri Lankan polity from its contemporary impasse.

¹⁰² For my elaborations on this point, see Roberts (1978); M. Roberts, 'History as Dynamite' (2000) *Pravāda* 6: pp.11-13, reprinted in M. Roberts (2010) *Fire and Storm: Essays in Sri Lankan Politics* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa): pp.5-12; M. Roberts, 'Some Pillars for Lanka's Future' (2009a) *Frontline*, 19th June 2009: pp.24-27; M. Roberts, 'Sinhala Mindset' (2009b) *Thuppahi*, 9th December 2009, <http://thuppahi.wordpress.com/the-sinhala-mind-set/> (last accessed, 16th October 2012).