Nations: Historical and contemporary – imagined communities and a bloody conflict.

Abstract:

Sri Lanka is the theatre of a three decade long bloody 'terrorist' conflict, where terrorist strategies and conventional battlefield tactics of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam continue to take a military and political toll on the Sri Lankan government.

The politico-military conflict waged by the Tigers in pursuit of a separate Tamil state is deeply rooted in the nationalist mindset of the Tamils and fuelled by their perception of racial oppression by a similarly nationalistic Sinhalese opponent. These nationalist mindsets have been fostered through a two millennia long lingua-cultural drift, and in the case of the Eelamist Tamils, into a separatist consciousness which has manifested into the source for a bloody conflict.

This paper attempts to outline the nature of nationalist sentiment, in an attempt to decipher the nature of the deeper consciousness which drives Sinhala and Tamil speakers to war and ultimately to death. It attempts the to better understand the role played by the so called 'Maháwansa mindset' and its counterpart the Sangam ideology in shaping contemporary nationalist sentiments within the Sri Lankan theatre of conflict.

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"The Sinhala nation continues to be entrapped in the Mahavamsa mindset, in that mythical ideology. The Sinhalese people are still caught up in the legendary fiction that the island of Sri Lanka is a divine gift to Theravada Buddhism, a holy land entitled to the Sinhala race. The Sinhala nation has not redeemed itself from this mythological idea that is buried deep and has become fossilised in their collective unconscious."

Vellupillai Prabhakaran, Heroes Day speech 2005.

"…throughout the centuries from the dawn of history the Sinhalese and Tamil *nations* have divided between them the possession of Ceylon, the Sinhalese inhabiting the interior of the country in its Southern and Western parts from the river Walawe to that of Chilaw and the Tamils possessing the Northern and Eastern districts…"

Vaddukoddai Resolution, Tamil United Liberation Front, May 14, 1976

Introduction

The State of Sri Lanka has been the theatre of a bloody nationalist debate between two 'linguistic nations' forged through a two millennia-long cultural drift. The nationalist consciousness of both the Sinhala and Tamil speaking people of Sri Lanka have been highlighted in the latter's militant bid for a separate state in the North and East of the island nation.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the contemporary vanguard of Tamil Nationalism has been accused of waging a 'terrorist' conflict in Sri Lanka. The group is allegedly responsible for the assassination of heads of state in two countries – President Ranasinghe Premadasa in Sri Lanka and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and are accused of a large number of terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka.

The Tamil Tiger claim to Eelam is based on a purported historical claim to a Tamil nation state within Sri Lanka – a claim supported by a Tamil nationalist consciousness that views the Sinhala occupants of the North and East as invaders on ancient Tamil land. Similarly the Sinhalese, fuelled by an equally potent nationalist consciousness, view the Tamil separatists as interlopers on sacred soil – yet another wave of south Indian militants attempting to annex Lanka to a greater Dravidian empire

This paper attempts to outline the nature of nationalist consciousness in an bid to decipher the deep-seated perceptions of both the Sinhala and Tamil people in Sri Lanka – which is at the heart of the three decade long bloody war.

The paper initially outlines the Benedict Anderson model of nationalism, following the argument through subsequent research that suggest a fusion of the contemporary nationalism of an Anderson model and an older and indigenous consciousness, in an attempt to better understand the historical development and contemporary manifestation of nationalist consciousness.

Nation and nationalist:

The Eelamist liberation struggle is based on the premise of Sri Lanka's Tamil speaking people belonging to what is defined as a Tamil 'nation' – a knotty notion which needs to be untangled before any valid academic analysis can resume. In this context the purported '*biological continuum*' of the social entity

deemed a 'nation' has to be understood within a wider historical framework which provides a clearer understanding of the emergence of nationalist consciousness within those communities.

In his seminal book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Benedict Anderson (1983) defines a nation as an "imagined political community", which by its very definition, he argues to be *limited* and *sovereign*. Anderson argues that inclusiveness of membership in a 'nation' is *imagined*, considering disparate individuals within a 'nation' are able to identify with each other without any interpersonal contact. "The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind" he writes (p7). Anderson also presents a somewhat euro-centric argument that suggest the nationalist concept to have emerged through the disintegration of monarchies, claiming nations are imagined to be *sovereign*, as the notion of 'nationhood' had emerged at a time when revolution and enlightenment had shattered the grip of the hierarchical dynastic realm.

Anderson concludes nationality "is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (p7).

Richard Handler (1988, pp. 6-8) argues that in principle a nation is bounded in time and space: in time through its historical origins and "by virtue of the uninterruptedness of its history; in space, by the integrity of the national territory". Thus outlining the remarkable ability for mythology and pro-nationalist historical narrative to coexist, and frequently form an indistinguishable part of the contemporary experience of a 'nation'.

Handler (1988) also highlights an important distinction between two fundamental considerations needed to understand the political dimensions of nationalism – nation and state. He argues a nation to be " a human group that may or may not control its own state,", and the state to be "a political organization that may or may not correspond to all of one, and only one, nation". He further points out "that there are many more nations or potential nations than states, …most nations aspire to statehood yet many have not and will not attain it, and that many states, federal or unitary, encompass more than one nation". While Ernest Gellner (1983) argues "the state (had) certainly emerged without the help of the nation," adding some nations had "certainly emerged without the blessings of their own state".

In this context, John Breuilly outlines the politicisation of the national consciousness, a cornerstone in the justification of nationalist political movements within the nationalist argument. He suggests nationalist argument as a political doctrine built upon three basic assertions: "there exists a nation with an explicit and peculiar character; the interests and values of this nation take priority over all other interests and values; the nation must be as independent as possible," thus the need for attaining political sovereignty (Breuilly, 1985, p.3).

Czech political theorist Miroslav Hroch (1996, pp78-97) defines a nation as a "social group integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships – economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical – and their subjective reflection in (the groups') collective consciousness. While may of these relations could be mutually substituted, Hroch argues three stand out as irreplaceable: "a *'memory'* of some common past, treated as a *'destiny'* of the group - or at least of its core constituents; a density of linguistic or cultural ties enabling a higher degree of social communication within the group than beyond it; and a conception of the equality of all members of the group organized as a civil society."

Anderson argues the prevalence of nationalist consciousness despite its philosophical barrenness, betrays its evolutionary roots, and that nationalism should be understood not by aligning it with contemporary politico-philosophical ideologies, but as a product of cultural systems that precede and predate it – *religious communities* and *dynastic realms*. In this context Anderson suggests *religious communities* to have been held together through their acceptance of a sacred classical language, understood by a geographically and even culturally disparate bilingual[i] clerisy – thus an imagined community formed through the acceptance of the sacredness of their language, a language that was the key to knowledge and ultimately the absolute truth. The privileged bilingual literati mediating between sacred and vernacular languages were therefore the medium that fused heaven and earth in a hierarchical pyramid where the apex was divine. Following Anderson's argument to its natural conclusion: a hierarchical pyramid forged not merely through the understanding of sacred texts by the clerisy – the upper echelons of the hierarchy, but also in the *belief* of the sacredness of the texts by the mono-lingual masses who populated the pyramid's base. With respect to the cultural systems defined as *dynastic realms* Andersons arguers monarchy in its purest sense, as the divine right to rule, formed political boundaries that were loosely determined through military and marital conquests, with no significant communal cohesiveness in their subjects.

The synthesis of Anderson's argument is that the decline of the sacral monarchy in the seventeenth century and the diminishing importance of the sacred language through the gradual emergence of scholarly works in the vernacular heralded the end of *religious communities* and *dynastic realms*, thus creating a void in cultural systems that was later to be filled with nationalism. However Anderson promptly suggests it would be short-sighted to assume "imagined communities of nations as simply growing out of and replacing *religious communities* and *dynastic realms*" (p22) – suggesting it was a much more complex change in human perception of narratives which significantly contributed towards the moulding of a contemporary national consciousness[ii]. In this context Anderson argues *'print capitalism'* – the ability to mechanically reproduce text, coupled with the capitalist ideology had played a crucial role in merging scattered dialects of a given language, to not only arrests radical evolution and fragmentation of language, but to create 'national print-languages' which helped form a collective consciousness of an imagined community among readers.

Contrasting the new social order with that of dynastic realms Anderson wrote "..one can sleep with anyone, but one can only read some people's word's" (p.77). He argues the advent of a national consciousness forged through print capitalism, had given rise to the notion of a print language that was common to all members of a *new* imagined community. The result was the end of military conquests and inter-marriage between monarchies determining the allegiance of subjects and creating communal concepts in line with the political alliances of their monarch – who in may instances did not even speak the language of his subjects. Instead print capitalism welded by the bourgeoisies was successful forging speakers of a common

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[i] Bilingual in that these scholars well versed in the sacred language, no doubt used a vernacular different from that of the sacred texts to converse in their day-to-day dialogues with in their home communities – different to the scholarly communities that they were part of through the common understanding of the sacred language.

[ii] In that the transition in perception of simultaneity of narrative from a model of prefiguration and fulfilment – "simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present" (p24), to one of temporal coincidence measured by clock and calendar. Thus the biblical stories, namely that of the sacrifice of Abraham's son Issac prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ, two events that are neither temporally or causally linked – thus horizontally connected, are considered to be parts of a divine plan which connects both events vertically. In contrast even the simplistic of modern narratives, the fiction novel, are represented as temporal coincidences based on a given temporal setting. This horizontal connection Anderson argues to be the foundation of nationalist consciousness, the notion of "a sociological organism moving calendarically through homogenous, empty time," (Anderson, p26).

language, where each member of the imagined community was aware of thousands other lingua-culturally homogenous individuals that were horizontally linked to form a linguistic nation.

Diverging views: print capitalism in an oral tradition.

If Anderson's theory of nationalism, and more particularly his argument of the emergence of nationalism as a socio-political consciousness are to be taken at face value, it becomes eminently clear that nationalism as a social consciousness is a relatively new concept. In this context nationalism is fundamentally 'manufactured' in an industrialised world though mechanical reproduction, and print capitalism a convenient catalyst. An ideology that is in direct contrast to the nationalist consciousness which connects an ethereal past, a hazy and a selective historical narrative with a contemporary nationalist consciousness of a horizontal imagined community.

Transplant Anderson's model of print capitalism into the Sri Lankan theatre, applied to the consciousnesses of both the Sinhala and Tamil speaking people who trace their lineage in millennia, and it becomes a socio-cultural concept which is less than a few hundred years old dating back only to the country's colonial past. This notion is rejected by anthropologist Michael Roberts. Basing his argument on the nationalist consciousness of Sinhalese speakers, Roberts suggests a nationalist consciousness had emerged long before the introduction of print-capitalism or for that matter western-style philosophical enlightenment and industrialisation which made mechanical reproduction possible.

In this context it could be argued the emphasis Anderson places on mechanical reproduction and the mass availability of text, was somewhat inconsequential considering oral dissemination of knowledge in Sri Lanka. Thus using Anderson as a navigational reference it could be argued the imagined Sinhala community may have risen through the availability of oral knowledge, before western colonisation, despite an absence of 'print capitalism'. It should also be note that the Sinhala–Buddhist experience of knowledge and access to knowledge significantly differ to that of the 'Western' Judaeo-Christian or even the Islamic experience, in that the 'absolute truth' – the core of Buddha's teaching remained in its 'original' oral form until the first century AD when it was transcribed in Sri Lanka. The dissemination of oral knowledge and mass recitals – 'sadgayana', remains a fundamental feature of contemporary Sinhala-Buddhist culture. In contrast the 'divine truths' of Judaeo-Christian and Islamic knowledge was primarily committed to written text, and was accessible only by a privileged few in any given community – the literati. With oral knowledge not merely limited to folklore and legend, but attributed to 'supramundane' and scholarly erudition, Sinhala nationalist consciousness was able to mature and the imagined Sinhala community emerge without the lingual unification of print. Thus it could be argued that even after the Buddhist chronicles were committed to text, two streams of knowledge existed – oral and textual, both equally valid in a literary sense[iii]. The prevalence of a dual medium, could also be attributed to knowledge from fundamentally textual chronicles such as the Maháwansa leaching into the analogous oral traditions, where the Maháwansa's hero Dutugammunu and prince Vijaya – the legendary forebear of the Sinhala people have become anchorages of a pre-colonial Sinhala consciousness. This cultural continuum has made it possible for the Kandyan ruling class to cultivate "a pronounced emphasis on custom and antiquity" (Roberts, 2001), a concept apparent in their communications with the British between 1796-1815, where they connect their own heritage to the legendary prince Vijaya, who is referred to as "…(he) who vanquished the most cruel devils", and "…king Wijaya [sic] born of the noble exceeding pure race of the sun…" (Vimalananda, 1973, p474; Vimalananda, 1984, p67).

[iii] Bhikku Gangodavila Soma, argues knowledge that is retained in an oral form is even more accurate than what is written, in that the process of making secondary text copied from an earlier copy – and not the original, as was the case with copied manuscripts would lead to more errors than chronicles that are memorised. In the case of Buddhist chronicles groups of monks would commit the stanzas to memory and periodically congregate to compare and contrast the stanza for any inaccuracies which may arise form memory loss (personal communications with Bhikku Soma, 1995).

However it would be naïve to assume the introduction of an Anderson style print capitalism had not played any significant role in shaping contemporary Sinhala nationalism. Thus Kemper (1991) presents Sinhala national consciousness as a "mix of indigenous and foreign influences" (p63). "..(T)he past has an uncommon presence in Sri Lankan life" Kemper continues, "people know the tradition before they know that they know it' (p82).

Obeyesekere (1979, p279) argues that being Sinhala also implied being Buddhist until the sixteenth century, thus the two identities were synonymous until the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505. This traditional link between the state and religion has enabled the Sinhala nationalist grouping – the *Sinhala Buddhist*, a seemingly natural link, supported in the numerous Sinhala chronicles such as the *Maháwansa, Culavansa* and *Dipavamsa*. The *'Sinhala Buddhis'* socio-cultural clustering made possible through the adoption of Buddhism by 'Sinhala' kings since third century BC – an implicit union glaringly obvious only in the wake of European colonisation and Christian proselytization where some Sinhala speakers became Christian. Despite political friction between Hinduism and Buddhism, the two religions coexisted, primarily through a process of religio-cultural syncretism, and had established a tacit understanding where each other's ideologies, concepts and even religious identities were borrowed, without physical conversion of the devout. In this context it should be noted that while 'Sinhala' monarchs were expected to be devout Buddhist, and Hindu rulers were considered usurpers, religio-cultural syncretism enabled the 'Buddhist' monarchs to incorporate facets of Hinduism, albeit subconsciously, with relative ease.

The 'vamsa' tradition and the Sinhala consciousness

In his argument of a pre-colonial Sinhala nationalism Roberts (2001) suggests the crucial role played by the Sinhala *vamsa* tradition in shaping an imagined community. A *vamsa* tradition is one which Tiger leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran (2005) holds central to the contemporary Sinhala consciousness when he accuses the "Sinhala nation" of continuing to " be entrapped in the Mahavamsa mindset".

There is little argument over the centrality of the Maháwamsa, in shaping contemporary Sinhala mindset, nor its role in alienating the Tamil speakers as usurpers, invaders and even squatter on 'Sinhala land'.

The *Maháwansa*, *Dipavamsa*[iv], and to a lesser degree chronicles such as the *Samantapāsādikā* – the commentary to the *vinaya* written by the legendary *Buddhaghosa* - form the backbone of Sinhala historical literature, and are frequently quoted in contemporary sources as the definitive work on the island's history. Of these the Maháwansa, is the best known and the most widely quoted as a credible account of Sinhala Buddhist history, starting from the mythical beginnings of the Sinhala race on the Indian sub continent, and the Buddha's visits to the island before the arrival of the Sinhalese. The *Maháwansa* is written in four recognisable sections, the first of which, a thirty-seven chapter section, is commonly known as the *Maháwansa*, - the great chronicle, while the remaining sections are covered in the *Culavansa* – the lesser chronicle.

According to the colophon of the *Vamsatthappakāsini* – a commentary to the *Maháwansa*, the first part of the chronicle is written by a *Dighasandasenāpati-piriven*[v] bhikku named *Mahānāma*. The latter chronicle the *Culavansa*, also suggests the author of the *Maháwansa* to be a *Dighāsana-Vihara* monk named *Mahānama* who had written the chronicle during the reign of *Moggallāna* I (491-508AD), the *Culavansa* also states a monk by the same name to be a relative of king *Dhātusena* (455-73 AD). Based on this

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[iv] The *Dipavamsa* believed to have been written by *bhikkhunis* of the *Mahāvihara* monastery in Anuradhapura in the fourth century AD, on account of the numerous references to *bhikkhunis* (Perera, L.S., 1959. The sources of Ceylon History, In History of Ceylon Vol1(1). H.C. Ray (ed). Colombo: Ceylon University Press.)

[v] *Dighasandasenāpati-pirivena* belonging to the *Mahāvihāra,* Geiger argues was built by Dighasanda, a leader of king Devānampiyatissa's army (Geiger, 1908, p.41).

evidence it is suggested the *Maháwansa* was written by *Mahānāma*, an uncle of king *Dhātusena* and resident of the Mahavihara monastery in Anuradhapura [vi] (Perera, 1959). Thus the chronicle could be interpreted as a Mahavihara *purāna* – a historical narrative of the monastery as much as a historical narrative of the Sinhala Buddhist. *Mahānāma's* connection with the Anuradhapura monarchy could also be interpreted as another possible reason for writing a chronicle of this nature which suggests Anuradhapura kings were blood relatives of the Buddha, giving them a divine right to rule the island, which in turn secures *Mahānāma's* own position both within the polity and the temple.

The *Maháwansa* and the *Culavansa* have given contemporary Sinhala nationalists 'written proof' of their heritage, a 'definitive' knowledge of the past. Wilhelm Geiger (1908) the noted translator of the *Maháwansa* writes; "there is hardly a corner of the Indian continent of whose history we know so much as we do of that of the island of Ceylon. The main sources are two chronicles in pali verse, the Dipavamsa and the Maháwamsa, the former written in the fourth, the latter towards the end of the fifth century".

As such, the so called *Maháwansa* mindset should be understood through key meta-narratives which form the bedrock of the chronicle's argument: that the land of Lanka, and its custodians the Sinhalese have been predestined to become protectors of the *'sacred dhama'* – Buddhist doctrine, the notion of 'chosen people'. In may ways it could be argued that the *Maháwansa* chronology begins from where the traditional Buddhists chronologies end – the death of Gauthama Buddha. The death marks an end of a forty-five year ministry, and the commencement of the herculean task of preserving his teaching. Return to *Mahānama*, it seems natural for a Buddhist monk of the most prestigious order in Buddhist Sri Lanka, and a blood relative of the monarchy purportedly destined to be the custodians and protectors of the 'penultimate truth' – the very doctrine that *Mahānama* holds sacred, to chronicle the history of Buddhism and the role of the Sinhala people in safe guarding it.

<div style="background:#1a2a5e;color:white;padding:4px 8px;">The Maháwansa narrative: on the threshold of fact and fiction</div>

The initial Maháwansa narrative can be distinctly divided into three separate segments of sub-narrative:

(i) The Buddha's cleansing of the Island Lanka for 'human' and more importantly Buddhist habitation, and the subsequent attempts in India to preserve the Buddhist teaching, after Gauthama Buddha's death (chapters i-v).
(ii) The genesis of the Sinhala forebears in India, their arrival in Lanka and their accent to power (chapters vi-xii).
(iii) The Arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the monarchical conversion and the 'Sinhala' monarchy's quest to preserve and protect the sacred doctrine charged to them (chapters xiii-xxxvii).

[vi] *Mahāvihāra* – the great monastery, was the first great monastery established in Anuradhapura by king *Devānampiya Tissa*, following the adoption of Buddhism as the state religion. While the principle base of the *Mahāvihāra* was situated in Anuradhapura, numerous monasteries owed ecclesiastical allegiances to the monastery. The central position of the *Mahāvihāra* was somewhat diminished with the formation the Abhayagiri vihara in the first century BC and the Jetavana in the fourth century AD. Walpola Rahula thera (1956) argues that, when *Buddhaghosa* in his pali commentaries referred to the *Mahāvihāra* in the fifth century, he meant only the great monastery in Anuradhapura, and similarly only its residents as *Mahāvihāravāsi* bikkhus. However Rahula thera argues other monasteries had once again been incorporated under the *Mahāvihāra* banner around the tenth century when the religio-political capital of Anuradhapura was nearing its end. He argues the *Tissamahāvihāra* in the Rohan had also been referred to as the *Mahāvihāra* during the reign of king *Dappula V* (923-934AD).
[Rahula, Walpola thera. (1956). History of Buddhism in Ceylon: the Anuradhapura period. Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Company.]

In the first segment of the narrative the Maháwansa suggests the Buddha had visited the Island of Lanka three times during his life – nine months, five years and eight years his after enlightenment. During his first visit, the Maháwansa records the Buddha had banished the yakka's [vii] to Giridipa, "…thus (making) the island a fit dwelling-place for men…". During his second and third visit the Buddha is said to have preached to the Naga's [viii] and traveled the length and breath of the island, thus blessing the land. The narrative then commences to outline in detail the three councils undertaken by the Arahaths, three months …..after the Buddha's death to consolidate the scattered preaching that was, in its oral form, prone to loss and corruption. The three councils, and in particular the final council purportedly patronised by Emperor Asoka is crucial to the Maháwansa narrative, in that the arrival of Buddhism in Lanka could be seen as a culmination of the third council.

The narrative is simple, it suggests the Buddha had foreseen the centrality of Lanka to the continuation of his ministry, and thus in his lifetime had cleansed the island of 'malevolent spirits', paving way for the doctrine preserved through the three councils to be brought to Lanka where it was predestined to flourish, under the custodianship of Sinhala monarchs.

Thus the Maháwansa narrative enters its second segment, the legend of prince Vijaya and the genesis of the Sinhala race. The mythical union between a Lion and *Suppadevi* [ix] – the daughter of the Vanga king [x], a union which bore twin-children *Sinhābahu* [xi] and *Sinhasivali* [xii]. The latter's return to his grandfather's kingdom, the killing of the lion thus becoming a local hero and later the king of the vangas and his subsequent marriage to his sister *Sinhasivali* and the establishment of *Sinhapura* as a seat of power in what was once the Lion's domain. The narrative 'recounts' how The union of *Sinhābahu* and *Sinhasivali* bore sixteen sets of twins, thirty two sons in all. *Vijaya* the eldest of them banished form *Sinhapura* with 700 of his followers for his "evil conduct" (Maháwansa p.53) [xiii]

Vijaya eventually arrives on Lankan soil – the commencement of the Maháwansa narrative proper. The arrival of a non-Buddhist prince, who's descendents are destined to be custodians of dhamma some three hundred years later, is anchored back to the meta-narrative of the Buddha when *Mahānama* writes "the prince named *Vijaya*, the valiant, landed in Lanka, the region called Tambapanni on the day that the *Thatāgata* lay down between the two twin like sāla-trees to pass into *nibbāna* (*Maháwansa*, pp51-54) – "a biased account" according to Gieger in his introduction to the Maháwansa [xiv].

According to the chronicle, Vijaya takes the yakkhini *Kuvannā* [xv] for his wife, and *Kuvannā* in turn helps the prince slay her kinsmen and take control of Lanka. But Vijaya abandons *Kuvannā* and their two children in favour or a "maiden of a noble house" – the daughter of the Pandu king of *maduhurā* – purportandly present day Madura, in the south of the Madras presidency in south India. Their union fails to

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[vii] Yakka literally means the demon, thus implying the banished yakka to be non human evil spirits that inhabited Lanka before human settlement.

[viii] Naga means serpent. The Maháwansa gives the impression the Naga's to have been far more sophisticated than the yakka, but non-the-less not human.

[ix] The *Dipavamsa* gives her name as *Susimâ* (p.160), while the *Maháwansa* calls her *Suppadevi*. Oldenbberg, Hermann. (1879). Dipavamsa. Berlin; (2001 –reprint) Asian Educational Service: New Delhi.

[x] ….and his consort the daughter of the Kalinga king

[xi] "The son's hands and feet were formed like a lion's and therefore she (*Suppadevi*) named him *Sinhābahu*" – *Sinhā-bahu* is readily translated as *lion-limbs*. (*Maháwansa*, p51)

[xii] *Sinhābahu* and *Sinhasivali* according to the *Maháwansa*, the *Rájávaliya* calls them *Sinhabá* and *Sinhawalli* (*Rájávaliya*, p15)

[xiii] The second son *Sumitta* subsequently ascends the throne of *Sinhapura*.

[xiv] Based on the chronology provided by the Maháwansa Buddha's death and Vijaya's arrival is believed to have taken place in the year 544BC, a supposition supported by the accepted Buddhist chronologies of Ceylon, Burma (Myanmar) and Siam (Thailand). Geiger argues, based on the year of Asoka's coronation, the Buddha had passed away nearly sixty years later somewhere around 483BC (*Maháwansa*, ppxxi-xxviii).

[xv] The name *Kuvéni* is used in the *Rájávaliya* (*Rájávaliya*, p18), while the *Maháwansa* calls her *Kuvannā*,

produce children and on Vijaya's death his nephew *Panduvãsudeva*[xvi] ascends the throne. *Panduvãsudeva's* marriage to the *sákya* princess *Bhaddakaccãnã*[xvii] of Kapilavatthu – a close relative of the Buddha. Thus *Mahãnama* is once again able to anchor the narrative of the Sinhalese back to the Buddha.

The third segment of the Maháwansa narrative commences with the arrival of Arahath Mahinda, bringing with him the Buddhist doctrine during the reign of king Devanampiyatissa[xviii]. While the Mahinda was one of many missionaries sent to distant lands by Emperor Asoka, the choosing of Mahinda, purportedly a son[xix] of the emperor is considered by the Sinhala-Buddhists as a privilege not bestowed on other imperial missions. What ever the exact details of the introduction of Buddhism to Lanka may be, its adoption by the monarchy provided it a security that would assure its dominance in the island for more than two millennia, and a sequence of events that could produce legendary heroes like the Maháwansa's central figure *Duttugamunu* – the legendary protector of Buddhism in ancient Lanka.

With every fold in the narrative *Mahãnama* solidifies the connection between the Sinhalase and in particular the monarchs of the Vijayan dynasty with the Buddha and his scared doctrine. Purging Lanka of the yakka's, the blessing of the soil, the timing of Vijaya's arrival, his heirs marriage to a blood relative of the Buddha, all serve to set the scene for the establishment of a 'Sinhala' monarchy charged with a sacred task. While simultaneously the narrative attempts the establish an almost divine birth right of the Sinhala rulers, Vijaya the grandson of the two Indian monarchs – the kings of *Vanga* and *Pandu*, the Buddha's and princes *Bhaddakaccãnã's* clan, the *sákya's* lineage traced back to that of *Mahásammata* – the legendary first king of the world, and even the royal descent of *Arahath Mahinda*, add to the legitimacy of a Buddhist rule in Lanka. A legitimacy that that continues to fuel a collective Sinhala consciousness in contemporary Sri Lankan politics.

Maháwansa heroes and contemporary warriors.

Even a cursory glance of the Maháwansa's content reveals that the chronicle documents the reign of 63 monarchs – from *Vijaya* to *Mahãsena* (274-301AD), in 37 chapters. However a disproportionate 11 of those chapters are allocated to the narrative of *Duttugamunu* (161-137BC), a 'cult hero' even among the present day Sinhalese.

According to the Maháwansa narrative *Duttugamunu* the son of *Kãkavannatissa* the king of Rohana[xx]– the southern kingdom of ancient Lanka, and his single minded pursuit to rid the northern plains of *Elãra*, According to the Maháwansa "a Damila (Tamil) of noble descent… came hither from the Cola-country (Maháwansa, pp 142-143), is depicted by near contemporary chroniclers, and subsequently by myth makers as the penultimate battle between Sinhala-Buddhists and Tamil invaders. *Duttugamunu's* purported

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[xvi] *Panduvãsudeva* is the youngest of king Sumitta's three sons. Sumitta is Vijaya's second brother who had been made king of Sinhapura after Vijaya's exile.

[xvii] All three chronicles, the *Rájávaliya, Maháwansa* and the *Dipavamsa* acknowledge *Bhaddakaccãnã* a *sákya* princes of Kapilavatthu.

[xviii] while it could be argued that Buddhism could have been practised in Lanka before Mahinda's arrival – evident form some archaeological findings, the Arahath's arrivals marks the adoption of Buddhism as a state religion by king Devanampiyatissa who was no doubt eager to please his powerful neighbour – the Maurya Emperor Asoka a recent but ardent convert to Buddhism.

[xix] Mahinda and his younger sister Sangamitta are believed to Asoka's children from his union with a maiden named Devi (Maháwansa, p.88).

[xx] The Maháwansa suggests *Kãkavannatissa* to be the ruler of a united Rohana, a suggestion that had come under server criticism. De Silva argues neither *Dutthagãmani* nor *Elãra* were the sole rulers of their respective regions of the county and claim the country was divided into a number of regions, he argues the chronicle refer to more than a thirty different campaigns in *Dutthagãmani's* quest for domination (De Silva, 2005, p16). "wh en he had thus overpowered thirty-two Damila kings *Dutthagamani* ruled over Lanka in single sovereignty.

rationale of his conquest "not for the joy of sovereignty is this toil of mine, my striving (has been) ever to establish the doctrine of the Sambuddha" (Maháwansa, p171), provides an almost virtuous undertone to his military conquest. According to the Maháwansa a destiny that had been foreseen by soothsayers even before *Duttugamunu's* birth – "the queen's son, when he has vanquished the Damilas and built up a united kingdom, will make the doctrine shine forth brightly."

Despite *Mahãnama's* elevation of *Duttugamunu* to cult status, it is arguable if the king himself had viewed his military campaign as the liberation of the north from 'Damila' grip or was focused more on extending his sovereignty across the land. In many way scholars argue the religio-ethnic landscape of *Duttugamunu's* Lanka to be significantly different to that of *Mahãnama's*. A mere century-and-a-half after the adoption of Buddhism as a state religion "not all Sinhalese were Buddhists, while on the other hand, there were many Tamil Buddhists" during the second century BC (De Silva, 2005, p16). It is also argued even if *Mahãnama's* sequence of events were accurate his suggested interpretation of the military campaign to be somewhat biased and grossly inadequate. Thus *Duttugamunu's* encapsulation of sacred relics in his spear cum royal standard, the securing of 500 bhikkus to march with his armies – purportedly as sign of blessing and protection, could be argued as an ingenious political maneuver that was designed to garner the support of reluctant Sinhala-Buddhist elite, both in the south and north (De Silva, 2005, p16). The complexity of the political situation is further demonstrated by Walpola Rahula thera (1956) who argues *Elãra* had, albeit politically, been a patron of Buddhism.

The cosmopolitan support base is also evident through a number of minor narratives, in one such account in the *Thupavamsa* and *Maháwansa* (p154), *Nandimithra's*[xxi] maternal uncle *Mithra*[xxii], who he was named after, was a *Senevi* – a 'general' in *Elãra's* army, and it is even suggested *Nandimithra* himself had worked under his uncle before joining the service of *Dutthagãmani*.

Whatever the political machinations of the *Duttugamunu-Elara* conflict the battle is seen by contemporary nationalists as a focus and an undisputable sequence of events where Sinhala-Buddhist interest triumphed over Tamil occupation. The name *Duttugamunu* has been used as an epithet in reference to potential nationalist leaders capable of leading a Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist struggle against the LTTE, in this context former President Ranasinghe Premadasa, the then Prime Minister was colloquially named 'kehelwatte[xxiii] Duttugamunu' for his anti-Indian position and the radical opposition of the controversial Indo-Lanka accord signed by the then President JR Jayawardena. The agreement between the President and Indian Prime Minister Rajive Gandhi, an alleged supporter of the Tamil insurgency, and the deployment of Indian forces in the North under the agreement was seen as yet another invasion of Lankan territorial integrity by its mammoth neighbour – the Sinhala monarchs historic and pre-colonial nemesis.

Maháwansa heroes such as *Duttugamunu* and legendary Sinhala heroes such as Gajaba, have been immortalised by the Lankan military. Despite its colonial structure, the Sri Lankan military in its consciousness forms a military continuum with the Sinhala monarchical armies. In the Army some of its largest and most welknown regiments are named after warrior kings – Gamunu Watch (*Duttugamunu 161-137BC*), Gajaba (*Gajabahu 114-36BC*) regiment, Vijayabahu (*Vijayabahu 1055-1110AD*) Infantry regiment and for good measure Sinha regiment. The naval base names are no different – in the western naval area SLNS (*Sri Lanka Naval Ship*) Parakrama (*Parakramabahu 1153-86AD*), Gamunu and Vijaya; and North Central area Pandukabaya (*Pandukabaya the first king of Anuradhapura*) and Gajaba. The Northen naval command however is an exception to a seemingly obvious pattern, where the Karainagar naval base is named SLNS Elara, however once again Madagal base in the north is named Agbo, and three other naval bases Kanchadewa, Welusumana, Gotaimbara three of *Duttugamunu's* generals[xxiv] who were instrumental in defeating Elara.

[xxi] *Nandimithra* is the most acclaimed of *Duttugamunu's* ten generals.
[xxii] Referred to as Mitta in the Maháwansa (p154).
[xxiii] A region in Central Colombo, where Premadasa spent his formative years.
[xxiv] Three of the legendary *Dasamahayodayo*

The inclusion of *Elara*, *Duttugamunu's* nemesis in a list of naval base names could be interpreted as noting but a simple political move to appease the Jaffna residents, however a number politco-culturally cognisant explanations could also be furnished in explanation. In that it could be argued the relationship between *Duttugamunu* and his opponent had made it possible to include Elara's name without adversely affecting pro-Sinhala nationalist sentiments, while placating the northern Tamils with a compromise. The political complexity of *Duttugamunu* victory over Elara, made it necessary for the latter to be accorded a royal funeral. The Maháwansa reports "on the spot where his (Elara's) body had fallen he (*Duttugamunu*) burned it with the catafalque, and there did he build a monument and ordained worship," (Maháwansa, p175) – possibly a political movement necessary to appease the pro-Elara elite of Anuradhapura. Thus it could be argued that the Maháwansa consciousness continues to play a central role in shaping Sinhala mindset.

Tamil Liberation struggle and the Chola continuum

While Prabhakaran has been scathing in his criticism of the Sinhala nationalist mindset, the Eelam struggle in general and the LTTE in particular have been based on a similar historical mindset analogues to the "Maháwansa mindset". In that, the Tamil liberation struggle draws from a perceived historical continuum with the great Chola empire of south India and a perceived lingua-philosophical association with the Sangam literature – Tamil literary master pieces which have been instrumental in forming the contemporary Tamil consciousness.

Based on an account given in *Iraiyanār Akapporu Urai*, Natesan (1959) argues Sangam literature – the earliest known works written in Tamil to have been produced through three distinct Sangams or academies established by early Pandyan kings. While the literary works of the first Sangam have now been lost, many works of the second and third sangams have survived the test of time. The *Tolkāppiyam* – a treatise on Tamil grammar attributed to the second Sangam, while the *Pattuppāttu* (ten Idylls) and *Ettuttogai* (eight anthologies) comprising of 2500 poems, and *Tirukkural* – the ethical treatise of Tiruvalluvar, attributed to the third Sangam. The twin-epics *Silappadikāram* and *Manimekalai*[xxv], widely considered to have been written some time after the third Sangam both works are included in the wider milieu of Sangam literary revival.

Guruge (1987) argues the Sangam literature to represent a Dravidianisation of south India, and argues while it was obvious the ancestors of the Dravidian people had already colonised the south their cultural identity had evolved only during the Sangam period – which according to Guruge was some time during the first few centuries of the Christian-era. Based on this assumption he argues Lanka had already been Aryanised, making it some what impervious to the blossoming Dravidian culture.

However Natesan disputes Guruge's assessment of the Sangam antiquity arguing the literary work to be much older than suggested by Guruge. Natesen argues while the *Silappadikāram* and *Manimekalai* are widely believed to have been written in the second century AD on account of *Silappadikāram* author *Ilangō Adigal* being the brother of Cera king *Senguttuvan*, a contemporary of *Gajabāhu I*, other works attributed to the Sangams proper to have been produced at an earlier time.

The *Tirukkural's* author *Thiuvalluvar* is connected with a sea-fearing chieftain named *Elera*, who is identified by some scholars as *Elāra* who invaded Lanka, thus assigning the literary work to the second century BC. Similarly *Tolkāppiyam* is considered the oldest of the Sangam literature which is believed to have been written some time after the fourth century BC – but no later than the second century BC. Natesan (1959) also argues *Tolkāppiyam* marks a period when Aryan influence was trickling into the Tamil country. While it is difficult to gain a complete history of the period form these writings, the Sangam literature provide, among others, a glimpses of the political history in Dravidian-india, including some reports of Dravidian military conquests – most probably during the latter parts of the Mauryan empire after Asoka's death – and the asseveration of the success of Tamil arms in Aryan territories.

[xxv] *Silappadikāram* provides a vivid description of the life in Tamil society while *Manimekalai* deals with the Buddhist tenets in a romantic setting (Natesan, 1959, p206).

The Dravida (Tamil) country was dominated by three kingdoms – the *Cera, Cola* and *Pãndya,* rarely united as a singular force. The Tamil land was however united under three powerful monarchs – the Cola king *Tirumã-valavan* popularly known as *Karikãlan*[xxvi], the Pãndya *Nedunjeliyan* and *Senguttuvan* of the Cera dynasty. The monarchs were also immortalised through Sangam literature where *Karikãlan* has become the hero of two poems *Pattinappãlai* and *Porunar-Arruppadai* included in the *Pattuppãttu*, two other poems in the same collection, *Maduraikkãnji* and *Nedunalvãdai* relating to *Nedunjeliyan,* while *Senguttuvan* is immortalised in the *Silappadikãram.* Based on Natesan's (1959) assessment of Sangam antiquity it is therefore suggested that a Dravidian consciousness had emerged much earlier than first anticipated by historians.

These Sangam literature have not only become the bedrock of contemporary Tamil consciousness it has also been readily adopted by the LTTE. *Karikãlan* a nom de guerre adopted by Tiger leader Prabhakaran suggest the consciousness of the politico-cultural continuum that connects the LTTE and the ancient Chola kingdom of south India. *Karikãlan* a warrior king known for his bravery and justice is central to this narrative, in that the epic poetry of the Sangam period immortalize the conquests of *Thirumavalavan* (*Karikãlan*) and his expeditions to the Himalayas and the defeat of Maghadha, Avanthi and Vajjra kingdom (Personal Communications with Sivaram 1997; and Sivaram, 1992). The narrative evokes an a dual consciousness that forms a subconscious foundation of the Sinhala-Tamil dual consciousness – the historical split in ancient Indian society epitomized by the Arya-Dravida conflict. Thus it is not surprising, Dravidian *Karikãlan's* defeat of the Arya kingdoms of Maghadha, Avanthi and Vajjra, should provide nationalist impetus in the contemporary ethnic conflict built upon the ancient fraction – where the Sinhaleese consider to de descendents of the north Indian Aryan's on account of their purportedly Aryan dialect, and the Tamils, descendents of the Dravidians on account of a lingua-cultural continuum which connects the latter to the south Indian state of Tamil-Nadu, literally the land of the Tamil.

Similarly the LTTE emblem of a roaring tiger – the ancient emblem of the Cholas also suggest the descent of the Tamil nation – biological continuum between the Tamil speaking populations of northern Sri Lankan and Tamil-Nadu in southern India with the Chola empire of ancient India. Thus the roaring tiger purportedly designed by Nadarajan a close friend of the tiger leader in 1977, believed to be based on the Chola standard used in combat, could be considered an apt reproduction for a Dravidian conquest in the twentieth century. Thus in its contemporary context the roaring tiger epitomises the Chola heritage of the Lankan Tamils. In this context the Chola – together with other south Indian empires of Dravidian descent, symbolise the resurgence of the subjugated Dravidians, over Aryan invaders of the Gangatic plains[xxvii]. Thus the fall Maurya, Gupta and even Pallava[xxviii] empires of purported Aryan descent, and the emergence of Cholas and Pãndyas is seen by Tamil nationalist as an 'indigenous' Tamil resurgence against Aryan colonization – an argument that has at times extended to the Sri Lankan theater.

Thus the roaring tiger, for the Eelamist nationalist symbolises another chapter in a liberation struggle, a quest of Dravidian people who have been subjugated by Aryan colonisers, a new generation struggle in yet another Aryan bastion – a symbol that signifies an age old heritage to the land they fight for, a land that

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[xxvi] *Karikãlan*, imprisoned in his youth later escaped to face a combined army of Cera and Pãndya armies led by eleven chieftains. Defeating them in a decisive battle of Venni, near Tanjore *Karikãlan* emerged victorious (Natesan, 1959, p211).

[xxvii] Both Aryan invasion and migration theories suggest Indo-Arya language speaking people had colonised the Gangatic plains making the period known as the *Vedic* period, from 1500BC onwards. The Arya 'colonisation' of the lands between the rivers *Yamuna* and *Ganga* is believed to have pushed the inhabitant of these lands further south – inhabitants who are believed to be descendents of the earliest civilised humans of *Moenjo-daro* and *Harappã* civilisations. Thus the belief of un-translated *Indus-valley* script being a form of proto-Dravidian. The Tamil nationalists therefore argue of a Dravidian biological continuum dating back to the earliest agricultural settlements in North India between 7000-8500BC (Bradnock, 1992, pp.73-74). Others argue these inhabitants were pre-Dravidian and possibly immigrants themselves (Dutt, 1959, p114).

[xxviii] Nilakanta Sastri (1959, p274) suggest Pallava to be a dynastic name with North Indian origin.

belong to the Tamils before the Vijayan dynasty, a land that Cholas and briefly reclaimed. But ironically the same symbol signifies a different meaning to the Sinhalese, who see the roaring tiger as yet another south Indian invasion, another in sequence of invasions the Sinhalese have resisted for more than two millennia. For the Sinhalese the Dravidians of south Indian are not the ancient people of the subcontinent, to them they are new comers on the Indian political landscape, people who have formed a Dravidian identity centuries after the great Aryan civilisations of the Gangatic plains and by association Lanka, and now persistent invaders who continue to encroach on land that is rightfully Aryan.

The Chola empire had reached its zenith during the reign of Rajaraja the great (983-1014), and an ambitious military takeover of Lanka had been completed under his son Rajendra (1014-1044), subjugating the Sinhala seat of power in 1017. The invasion had marked the end of a fifteen century long political dominance of Anuradhapura, primary due to a Chola strategic decision the capital had been moved Polonnaruwa. While Vijayabahu's defeat of the Cholas had returned the Sinhalese to the Northern plains, the new age heralded by the monarch had failed to secure the longevity of its predecessor. While the Sinhala dominance of Rajarata in the north central Lanka and finally come to an end at the hands of Magha, a Kalinga from the Orisss region, the wound exerted on the Sinhala consciousness remains dominant even today – to them the Chola's had initiated a cataclysmic sequence of events which resulted in the fall of the great Sinhala dynasties.

Conclusion: The duality of Maháwansa and Sangam consciousness – shaping of Sinhala-Tamil nationalism

Thus the competing narratives of the Sinhaleese 'vamsa' tradition and the Tamil Sangam tradition have become equally pivotal in shaping a dual consciousness between the Sinhala and Tamil speaking populations of Sri Lanka.

A two millennia long 'vamsa' narrative, reshaped and redefined by the introduction of a print capitalism, and a political and cultural awareness of the Tamil Sangam has manifested as a 'minority consciousness' among the Sinhaleese. Despite their majority status the Sinhaleese continue to view themselves as a minority in the Indian subcontinent, in particular the Dravidian south India. Within the Sinhala consciousness South Indian continues to be a menacing force which threaten Sinhala domination and sovereignty of Sri Lanka. Thus even the separatist bid of the 'indigenous' Tamils of the north is viewed by the Sinhaleese in the same context they had viewed South Indian military conquests in the past two millennia – a consciousness fashioned through their own Maháwansa narrative and the continuing Sangam allegiance of their opponents the Tamil Tigers.

Similarly the Samgam consciousness the Tamils of Northern Sri Lanka, manifest in the purported legitimacy of a Tamil nation in the north of Sri Lanka – consistent with the boundaries of an ancient Tamil kingdom in post- Mãgha Lanka. Their notion of legitimacy is ironically strengthened through historical information supported in the latter versions of the Maháwansa– the *Culavansa*. Thus the kingdom built by Mãgha's successors who had continued to rule the Jaffna region form a crucial Eelamist awareness that has become central in the legitimacy of their claim. The Jaffna kingdom initially a principality of the greater Pãndyan kingdom in south India, has subsequently gained political power over a significant segment of the 'Sinhala' kingdom.[xxix] "For a brief period of about twenty-five years in the middle of the fourteenth century, the Jaffna kingdom's territorial claims stretched to the north west coast of the island up to

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[xxix] With the fall of Pãndyan power in South India, the Jaffna kingdom and its ruling Ãryacakravarti dynasty aligned itself with the rising Vijayanagar empire, which in turn made unsuccessful attempts at securing the greater control in Lanka, that was thwarted by Parakramabahu VI. Subsequently the Ãryacakravarti monarchy of Jaffna lost its independence during the reign of Parakramabahu VI of Kotte – the principle Sinhala kingdom at the time (De Silva, 2005).

Puttalam" (De Silva, 2005, p132) – a historical boundary that is mirrored in the boundaries of the proposed Eelam state.

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