

Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka

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Until the dawn of the twentieth century, Buddhist monks were passive agents in the political history of Sri Lanka. In the middle of the twentieth century, however, monastic involvement in politics took a remarkable turn. With Walpola Rahula's (1907–1997) advocacy of politics for Buddhist monks in *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu* (Rahula 1974), which was originally published in Sinhala in 1946 as *Bhīṣuvagē Urumaya*, a new political Buddhist tradition emerged in Sri Lanka encouraging and justifying political activism by Buddhist monks. Since the publication of *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu*, the degree of Bhikhu involvement in Sri Lankan politics has gradually increased, marking clear phases of radical developments.

When social and political conditions weakened the economy of the country, partly as a result of the severe disruption and destruction of two decades of ethnic turmoil (beginning from the 1983 ethnic riots), the monastic involvement in extremist, nationalist politics gave birth to radical innovations. Some aspects of these political trends in contemporary Theravāda Buddhist monkhood in relation to the Sri Lankan ethnic problem have already been documented in the recent works of Sarath Amunugama (1991), Stanley J. Tambiah (1992), H. L. Seneviratne (1999), Tessa J. Bartholomeusz (2002) and Ananda Abeysekara (2002). While these scholarly works have generated a rethinking of Buddhist political activism, the works of Tambiah (1992) and Seneviratne (1999), in particular, have subsequently created considerable debate and tension both within the Buddhist *saṅgha* and the lay Buddhist communities in Sri Lanka, resulting in the banning of Tambiah's *Buddhism Betrayed?*¹ The debate and protest against *Buddhism Betrayed?* focused mostly on the use of a provocative photograph of the popular Buddhist preacher monk, Venerable Mādoḷuvāvē Sōbhita, on the front cover of Tambiah's book. As a result of the protest in Sri Lanka, The University of Chicago Press withdrew the front cover and reprinted the paperbacks with a neutral motif. This illustrates the degree of sensitivity related to representing politically active Buddhist monks and their ethno-politics. In the media, today, the Buddhist monk, whether political or non-political in the public realm, is often intrinsically associated with the turbulent ethno-politics (Degalle 2003; 2005).² The Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), in particular,

has realized the importance of creating a balanced image of Buddhist monks involved in politics, and highlighted the necessity of an 'independent' and 'free' mass media with 'ethical principles' in its 12-point political manifesto (which will be examined in detail later).

This paper examines in detail the most recent radical development that occurred in Sri Lankan Theravāda monasticism in the year 2004: the historic event of nine Buddhist monks becoming professional politicians in the Sri Lankan Parliament. By any standard, 2004 is the watershed in the entire history of Theravāda Buddhist monastic world in South and Southeast Asia. For the first time, a newly formed Buddhist monk political party³ identified as the JHU (National Sinhala Heritage Party) fielded over 200 Buddhist monk candidates⁴ for the parliamentary election held on 2 April 2004 to elect 225 Members of Parliament.⁵ This paper analyses the political and religious events that led a section of the Sri Lankan Buddhist *saṅgha* to engage in active politics. It contextualizes the history of the development of the JHU by identifying its predecessors. And most importantly, it examines their religious rhetoric of establishing a *dharmarājya* (righteous state) in Sri Lanka.

Buddhist monks' involvement in Sri Lankan electoral politics

Sri Lankan Buddhist Monks' active involvement in politics began in the mid-twentieth century. The past five decades show a gradual increase in the degree of monastic involvement in Sri Lankan politics; in particular, with the young Buddhist monks who closely associated themselves with the left-wing Janatha Vimukti Peramuṇa (JVP) politics. Even though the young JVP monks paraded in the May Day rally, their participation in active politics was rather limited. Standing in the elections was not an option that was available to all politically active monks. The participation in active politics was not the Theravāda Buddhist norm. However, as presented in the following, there are several occasions in which individual monks decided to stand in parliamentary as well as local government elections.

The first account of a Buddhist monk standing in the elections comes from as early as 1943. Venerable Miḡeṭṭuvattē Jinānanda stood for Colombo Municipal Council but he was defeated. A decade later, in 1957, Venerable Wālletoṭa Paññādassi stood for a village council in the Mātara District and became the first elected Buddhist monk. Eventually, he was appointed chairman of the council and became a committee member of village councils in the Matara District. Following Paññādassi, several Buddhist monks became members of village councils, in other local authorities and in provincial councils. Although monks contested local elections, none dared to stand in the parliamentary elections. Venerable Pinikahanē Saddhātissa became the first Buddhist monk to contest in the parliamentary election held for Karadeniya in 1977 but he was also defeated.

Another significant turning point in monks' involvement in ethno-politics in Sri Lanka occurred in December 2001. In 1992, Venerable Baddēgama Samitha, Incumbent of Duṭugāmuṇu Vihāra, Baddēgama, stood in the village council

elections and became an elected member of the Southern Provincial Council. In the parliamentary elections held in December 2001, Venerable Samitha stood successfully in the elections held for Galle District and became the first Buddhist monk elected for the Sri Lankan Parliament.⁶ He contested the election under the People's Alliance ticket, although he had been a monk member of the Lankā Samasamāja Party, a left-wing political party. Samitha has been known as a political activist since his student days at University of Kelaniya in the late 1970s.

In comparison with other Buddhist monks who have been involved in politics, Samitha stands out because of genuine political views combined with a humanistic vision of the Buddha's teachings. In the contemporary politically and ethnically turbulent context, with regard to the peace negotiations that the Sri Lankan government undertook in the early part of 2002 with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who had been waging a dangerous and destructive war for an independent Tamil state for Tamils over two decades, Samitha took a very positive stand as a Buddhist monk and a genuine politician. Samitha's positive contribution in creating peace in Sri Lanka is noted in an editorial of the *Daily News* as follows:

The Ven. Baddegama Samitha Thera's impassioned appeal in parliament on Tuesday for undivided backing for the Government's peace effort, points to the positive role the clergy of all faiths in this country could play in realizing national reconciliation, peace and unity.⁷

The editorial of the Tamil daily newspaper, *Vīrakēsari*, stated that although Venerable Samitha was a member of the opposition party, the People's Alliance, he had spoken openly about the Ceasefire Agreement of the government while criticizing others 'who were trying to stoke communal feeling among the Sinhalese people'.⁸

In the 2004 New Year wishes, Venerable Samitha again reiterated the importance of peace for Sri Lanka and the significant contribution that religious traditions can make peace a reality:

In the year 2004, we hope for a peaceful life in a developed Sri Lanka, with no fear of suspicion among people ... [W]e have wasted enough time talking about this. The time has now come to activate all facilities to usher in such a period for the country. Goodwill, which is to be fostered among all people, should not only be at the topmost but also at the grass root levels. Those who obstruct the spreading of goodwill among grass roots are the politicians who make irresponsible statements and the priests who preach rash opinions. I am asking the preaching seats of the temples, churches, mosques and kovils not to preach what could create conflicts ... We must awaken all our people who are still in slumber. From the very night of December 31, all the ethnic communities in Sri Lanka must put behind everything which hindered our progress and look towards a better future.⁹

Samitha's election campaign for Parliament in 2001 and his success in winning the election generated a renewed debate¹⁰ on whether Samitha should go to Parliament or should give up his parliamentary seat because it is not the traditional custom in Sri Lanka that Buddhist monks become professional politicians. Although there was significant ideological opposition to him, Samitha stuck to his principles and took the oath in Parliament. Unfortunately, partly due to the ethnic sentiments raised by JVP politics in southern Sri Lanka, he lost his electorate in the April 2004 election.

These events demonstrate scattered evidence for occasional political activities of a few Buddhist monks. Within the past six decades, several Buddhist monks contested elections before the JHU fielded over 200 monk candidates for the election in February 2004.¹¹ However, the JHU's election campaign stands out from previous election campaigns since it fielded the entire party with Buddhist monk candidates and it is exclusively a monk-led political party. On this occasion, the novelty and radical development is that Buddhist monks as a large representative group have decided to enter into Parliament. This political event may have significant impact on the affairs of the *saṅgha* in future.

In the election on 2 April 2004, the JHU won nine parliamentary seats: three from Colombo District, two from Gampaha District, one from Kalutara District, one from Kandi District, and two from the national list.¹² Altogether it polled 552,724 votes, 5.97% of the total polled in the election.¹³ Its most popular candidate, Venerable Uḍuwē Dhammālōka, received 42,850 votes. At the moment of writing this paper, the JHU monks have become a symbol of Sinhala Buddhist strength within Parliament¹⁴ and, occasionally, an object of controversy and ridicule within Parliament and outside.¹⁵ Their anti-conversion bill¹⁶ to stop 'unethical conversions' among the Buddhists and Hindus has drawn the attention of international human rights groups and produced severe protests from Christian churches around the world.

The Sihala Urumaya roots of the JHU

In the wake of the general election, as a new, unregistered political party, the JHU sought the legal validation of the Sihala Urumaya (SU) as a political party registered in Sri Lanka in order to contest the April 2004 election. To that effect, the JHU signed a memorandum of understanding with the SU (Sinhala Heritage Party, f. 2000) so that only the monks of the JHU would contest the election as opposed to the lay leadership of the SU. This political connection between the two groups, less transparent to the public, created considerable debate and speculation among both the Buddhist laity and the voting public in Sri Lanka. Because of these unclear political links, it is extremely important here to understand and distinguish the foundational ideologies of both the SU and the JHU for a proper comprehension and evaluation of their religious, ethnic and cultural claims with regard to the politics and future survival of the Sri Lankan state and Buddhism.

The birth of the SU, a lay political party and the prototype of the JHU, can be contextualized in the contemporary political environment in Sri Lanka in

relation to the ethnic turmoil and the Sri Lankan Government's proposals for devolution in the late 1990s. To unify like-minded nationalists, the SU was formed on 20 April 2000. S. L. Gunasekara (Chairman), Thilak Karunaratna (Secretary) and Champika Ranawaka (National Organizer) filled the three key posts of the SU. The Sri Lankan Government recognized the SU as a political party on 17 August 2000. In its first election, the SU was able to secure one seat in Parliament (through the national list) by polling 127,863 votes (1.47%).¹⁷ This quick victory was a mixed blessing for the SU, since it led to a dispute within the party resulting in Gunasekara's resignation from the party with some key members.¹⁸ This event was a significant drawback for public perceptions of the party, and even today the party has not fully recovered from this initial setback. As a result of the initial setback and public misperception, the SU got 50,000 votes at the December 2001 election. However, in the local government election held in March 2002, the SU was able to make some progress by gaining four seats.

As a political party eager to assert its power in Sri Lanka, the limitations of the SU are clearly visible in its goals. Its objective is to seek 'political power for the Sinhalese' and to 'rebuild the unique Sinhala civilization'.¹⁹ This objective may be valuable for the Sinhalese but how does it stand in the context of ethnic and religious minorities who form an important segment of the Sri Lankan population? Because of the SU's preoccupation on the 'Sinhalese' nation and 'Sinhala civilization', the media often accuses the members of the SU of extremism and nationalism.²⁰ This negative perception of the SU as a 'racist' group created by their own political ideas and media portrayals may create significant hurdles to the Buddhist monks of the JHU who have close links with the SU.

The SU sees a threat to the very existence of the Sinhala nation posed by Tamil separatism and opportunistic Sinhala politicians. The JHU also shares this vision of potential threats and fears caused by ethnic and religious minorities who have a significant foreign financial support base. In addition, the JHU, like the SU, make severe criticisms of Sinhala politicians and allegations of corruption. The SU maintains that the politicians are 'prepared to barter the sovereignty of the nation for the sake of power'. Similar accusations are also found in the JHU election campaign posters.²¹ The criticism of contemporary politics and Sinhala politicians remains at the centre of the political rhetoric of the JHU as well as of the SU. The members of the SU and the JHU come from a cross-section of the Sinhala population who are unhappy with the present political procedures in Sri Lanka. They see that, as a majority, Sinhala people are in a disadvantageous political condition in the peace negotiations with the LTTE.

The cultural, religious and national aspirations of the SU are well expressed in one of their poems:

A Sinhala nation and a just land
Rich in flora and fauna
Free of hunger and terror²²

The following objectives make clear the nationalist aspirations that the SU holds dear.

- (i) To safeguard the independence and sovereignty of the nation, and territorial integrity of the country.
- (ii) To safeguard the unitary form of the National Constitution.
- (iii) To uphold Sinhala, the national language, as the only official language and the Sinhala culture as the national culture while respecting the other non-Sinhala cultures.
- (iv) To uphold, protect and propagate Buddhism, the official religion, and to respect the principle of religious freedom for non-Buddhists.
- (v) To protect and develop the national economy, focusing mainly on the advancement of the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan people in general.
- (vi) To protect the rich environment and bio diversity in Sri Lanka and traditional eco-friendly knowledge systems and technology.
- (vii) To uphold the sovereignty of the people and social justice by practicing a democratic system of governance.
- (viii) To establish ethnic cooperation and harmony in order to create a strong united Sri Lankan people based on human rights and the national rights of the Sinhalese.²³

To meet the cultural, social and religious needs of contemporary Sri Lanka, the SU presents itself as more than a 'political party but a national movement as well'. It maintains that while seeking political power for the Sinhalese, it also has to rebuild 'the unique Sinhala civilization' in Sri Lanka 'independent of the political process'.

The SU had identified two key ideas that it should use for its growth as a political power in Sri Lanka: (i) to build Sri Lanka by following the 10 virtuous deeds of the righteous king (*dasarājadharma*) as found in the Pāli canon,²⁴ and (ii) to celebrate the secrets of the past glory of the 'unique' Sinhala civilization that flourished in Anurādhapura from the third century BCE to the tenth century CE. The JHU also shares these two key ideas with the SU.

Repercussions of Venerable Soma's death: the emergence of the JHU

The socio-religious context that led to the new political awareness and birth of the JHU is the controversial and untimely death of the popular Buddhist preacher, Venerable Gangoḍavila Sōma (1948–2003). The *Daily News* observed that '[t]he Sri Lankan nation was left numb, if not absolutely petrified with shock and intense sorrow as the news about the untimely death ... beamed through electronic media'.²⁵ The JHU has effectively exploited Sōma's death for its own advantage by using rumours surrounding his death. The untimely death of Venerable Sōma, who has been characterized by the newspapers as 'the embodiment of Buddhist morality and paragon of virtue' and 'the champion of Sinhala-Buddhist cause',²⁶ has raised conspiracy theories and, most importantly, triggered a new awareness on the state of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, which the

JHU employed in its election campaign. Many of nationalist persuasion consider Soma’s death a sacrifice to the nation and hold the opinion that there has been a conspiracy to take his life since Sōma himself has invoked the alleged conspiracy theories over his own death in his last speech in Kandy. Announcing his entrance to politics, Sōma stated:

There is a conspiracy to murder me. If my murder can awake Sinhhalaya, I am happy to die. After my death, there will be another team of monks to contest the elections. Please help them on my behalf.²⁷

Because of this tenuous background, anti-Christian sentiments, which have grown over the years on the issue of unethical conversions, were evoked at the site of Sōma’s funeral.²⁸ The poster made in honour of Sōma under the name of ‘Rāvannakāla’, bearing the Sri Lankan flag in the background, explicitly mentions these issues as shown in Figure 1.²⁹

The poster dedicated to Venerable Sōma.



<i>Galavā saḷupiḷi adharmayē</i>	Stripping clothes of unrighteousness
<i>Galavā abharaṇa ayuktiyē</i>	Stripping ornaments of injustice
<i>Penvūyē puta</i>	Son, indeed,
<i>Numbamaya niruvata</i>	You unveiled nakedness
<i>Pālaka ghātaka jaḍayangē</i>	Of murderous ruling bastards
<i>Pāharar pūjaka gavayangē</i>	Of paltry clergy cows
<i>Raṭa dāya venuven jīvitaya pūjākala</i>	Sacrificed your life for the sake of country and nation
<i>Apē Sōma himiyani</i>	Our Venerable Soma!
<i>Nivan dakinnata pera</i>	Before attaining <i>nirvāṇa</i>
<i>Nāvata varak</i>	Once again
<i>Apa soyā vaḍinu mānavi</i>	Please come back seeking us!

Let me now introduce briefly Sōma's life in order to show how he earned public sympathy over the years. Sōma was often presented to the public as 'the most outstanding and controversial religious leader' because of his 'outspokenness and straightforwardness' in issues related to the Sinhalese and Buddhists.³⁰ Like the JHU,³¹ Sri Lankan newspapers characterize Sōma as '[quite identical] to the early twentieth-century Buddhist reformer, Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933), 'who inspired and aroused Sri Lankan Buddhists from apathy and led them towards socio-cultural awareness'.³²

Sōma was born in Gangoḍavila, a suburb of Colombo, in 1948.³³ At the adult age of 26 years, in 1974 he received novice ordination and began monastic training at the Bhikkhu Training Centre, Maharagama, under the guidance of two prominent Buddhist monks—Venerable Maḍihē Paññasīha (1913–2003) and Venerable Ampīyē Rāhula. Even before his ordination, Sōma had close links with Siri Vajiragnāṇa Dharmāyathanaya and functioned as a 'lay preacher' and student leader. In 1976, Sōma received the higher ordination. In 1986, he visited Australia for three months. In his second visit in 1989, Sōma established the Melbourne Sri Lankan Buddhist Vihāra. In 1993, he founded the Buddhist Vihāra Victoria and served as chief incumbent until his death on 12 December 2003. After seven years of *dharmadūta* activities in Australia, Sōma returned to Sri Lanka in 1996 in order to help the people of the country.

Sōma's strength lay in his preaching. As a popular preacher (Degalle 2005b),³⁴ he was able to reach a wider young audience. He was respected widely for his 'soothing and informative sermons', which reached 'the hearts and minds of not only the Buddhists but the non-Buddhists as well'.³⁵ Sōma's popular sermons and television discussions drew the attention of young and old, Buddhists and non-Buddhists, since they discussed problems faced by ordinary people in day-to-day life. Sōma had two very popular television programmes: *Anduren Eliyaṭa (From Darkness to Light)*³⁶ and *Nāna Pahana (Lamp of Wisdom)*.³⁷ In these public discussions, he expressed his ideas about the issues relating to Buddhism and culture of Sri Lanka openly and helped to get out of an impasse. His engagement in several national debates on the issues dealing with the rights of Sinhala people made him more popular among the public. Due to his heavy criticism of politicians and their 'unrighteous' activities, it is widely believed that he was shut out from certain television stations.³⁸

After Sōma's death, the JHU systematically invoked him for its own advantage.³⁹ The JHU's national campaign to win the parliamentary election for establishing a righteous state is presented as a continuation of Sōma's unfinished work:

Ven. Soma Thera will continue to remain a guiding star as long as the much-cherished Buddhist civilization in the country survives ... The aching void left by his sudden departure is unbridgeable and will continue to be felt by millions of Sri Lankans ... What his departure reminds us is the fact that time is ripe for Sri Lankan Buddhists to re-evaluate and re-think of our collective stand on national and religious issues of our motherland. You can be a part of his campaign by strongly supporting the

Jathika Hela Urumaya. This will be the greatest respect you can bestow on this outstanding monk.⁴⁰

The link between Venerable Sōma and the SU, the prototype of the JHU, was firmly established towards the end of 2002. As *The Sunday Times* reported,⁴¹ Sōma and his Jana Vijaya Foundation joined the SU to ‘unite the Sinhala nationalist movement in order to defeat the elements bent on separating the country’. This was seen by important members of the SU, like Udaya Gammanpila, assistant secretary of the SU, as a ‘positive step towards Sinhala unity’ in creating a ‘powerful force’ against ‘defeat the separatist process in the country’. We may want to keep in sight that the Jāthika Saṅgha Sammēlanaya, which is the heart of the JHU, is affiliated to the SU.⁴²

In the wake of the April 2004 election, the JHU produced the song presented in Table 1 in honour of Sōma. The song alludes to the fact that the three leading JHU election candidates—*Kolonnāvē Sumangala*, Uḍuwē Dhammālōka and Ellāvala Medhānanda—are following the footsteps of Venerable Sōma. They are requested to lead the Sinhala public in this time of crisis in order to protect Buddhism from outside threats. It aptly illustrates the frustrations of the majority Buddhists at Sōma’s death and raises religious concerns that they have in relation to potential threats to the survival Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

A recent commentator who wants to support the JHU identifies Sōma as being a part of a Buddhist social reform movement.⁴³ As a socio-cultural reformer, Sōma was explicit in his criticism levelled at corrupt politicians. He believed that national and religious issues are interwoven with body politic of the country.⁴⁴ Sōma believed it was the bound duty of the state to provide protection for Buddhism, as enshrined in the constitution. He asserted a state ruled in accordance with Buddhist principles of righteous living as the key for Sri Lanka’s development, as also insisted upon by the JHU.

A recent Internet publication in the pro-JHU website mentions several political, religious, and economic reasons, including the death of Sōma, for the sudden birth of the JHU in the context of unstable political affairs in contemporary Sri Lanka. According to the writer, the JHU emerged as ‘the end result of a long list of reasons’, which he identifies as the result of politically and democratically ‘non-representation of Sinhalese Buddhists’ in the Sri Lanka political system.⁴⁵ It goes on to state that the JHU is ‘the manifestation of this collective will’ in the political sphere. The author rebuts the explanation that some put forward with regard to the birth of the JHU as a ‘mere reactionary phenomenon’ to Sōma’s sudden death. Nevertheless, he himself acknowledges the importance of Sōma’s death as one of the immediate reasons for the birth of the JHU by stating that the two major political parties—the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)—failed to ‘initiate an investigation into the suspicious death’ and ‘overt and covert attempt by the SLFP and JVP to make use of the nationwide sympathy and sorrow over’ Sōma’s death as a means ‘to come to power’.

The long list of reasons includes economic factors related to past economic policies of Sri Lankan governments, the way politicians used the political

Table 1. The JHU song for Sōma

<i>Desu Budu baṇa*</i> hāmuruvvanē vairayak	Venerable Sir, Buddha's teaching that you preached became an animosity
<i>vunā</i>	
<i>Jīvitayak bili aragena mulu raṭama</i>	Sacrificing a life, you made the entire country cry
<i>hāndavuvā</i>	
<i>Lova utumma dharmaya ape Śrī</i>	Our Śrī Saddharma is, indeed, the most supreme teaching in the world
<i>Saddharmaya mayi</i>	
<i>Misadiṭṭu adahas matuva vānasenne</i>	Because of those teachings, in future, wrong beliefs disappear
<i>enisayi</i>	
<i>Eya viṇḍagannaṭ-a bāri ayagē</i>	The heart of those, who cannot bear it, is cruel
<i>hadavata kuriruyi</i>	
<i>Veḍi uñḍaya ellava ättē budu</i>	Indeed, the bullet is aimed at the Buddha's dhamma**
<i>dahamaṭa mayi</i>	
<i>Śrī Sumangala samiṇḍu Uḍuvē samiṇḍu</i>	Venerable Śrī Sumangala with Venerable Uḍuvē
<i>samagama</i>	
<i>Ellāvala himiyan ātuluva maha</i>	Venerable Ellāvala with the mahāsaṅgha
<i>saṅgaruvana</i>	
<i>Āvidin peraṭama bēraṅanu māna ape</i>	Come forward. May you save our sāsana!
<i>sasuna</i>	
<i>Budu himi desu dharmaya ma tamā</i>	The supreme teaching in the world is, indeed, what the Buddha preached
<i>lova utum dharmaya</i>	
<i>Pera budun vahansē vāḍa siri patula</i>	In the past, the Buddha visited and placed the footprint
<i>pihiṭa vū</i>	
<i>Apē utum danta dhātun daḷaḍā</i>	Our sacred Tooth Relic and the relic caskets
<i>karañḍū</i>	
<i>Sat piyum piyā vāḍa illamu raṭaṭa</i>	We offer seven lotuses, prostrate and beg. The country lost him
<i>ahimi vū</i>	
<i>Apē Sōma himiyanī yali ipadenna matu</i>	Our Venerable Sōma! Please be reborn here again and again
<i>matū</i>	

*The Sinhala word *baṇa* is often used with reference to the teachings of the Buddha as well as to the preaching performances held in Sri Lanka. For a historical study of its religious significance see Deegalle (1997b).

**The transliteration from Sinhala and the English translation of the JHU song for Sōma are those of the author. Some crucial Pāli words were retained in the translation to convey specific ideas embedded in the song.

process by using minority votes at the cost of Sinhala Buddhist rights, the rulers' failure to recognize the Sinhala-Buddhist cultural heritage and the use of the Buddhist *saṅgha* for political gains, the failure to establish a just and secure civil society, and the extremist activities of some Tamils and some Muslim claims in the eastern province. This collective will, according to him, aims to see 'an alternative political organization that will openly, fearlessly and proudly represent Sinhalese Buddhists'.

Monks in the JHU election platform

Establishing a Buddhist state (*Bauddha rājya*) in Sri Lanka is the main objective of the monks of the JHU. In their political agenda, the highest priority is given to the determination for a Buddhist state. Devout Sinhala Buddhists are

also keen to see this happen since they are fed up with the moral decadence and chaos that has emerged in contemporary Sri Lanka.

On the whole, five reasons can be identified as motivating factors that led the Buddhist monks of the JHU to contest the general election held in April 2004: (1) the perception of Venerable Sōma's untimely death as a systematic conspiracy to weaken Buddhist reformation and renewal, (2) increasing accusations of intensified 'unethical' Christian conversions of poor Buddhists and Hindus, (3) continuing fears of the LTTE's Eelam in the context of recent peace negotiations, (4) the unstable political situation in which the two main political parties—UNP and SLFP—are in a power-struggle in the midst of resolving the current ethnic problem, and (5) the political ambitions of some JHU monks.

Traditionally, the majority of Theravāda Buddhist monks have stayed away from politics. Monks of the JHU entering into Sri Lankan parliamentary politics is problematic both from cultural and religious perspectives. Due to the controversial nature of the issue and debates over monks' actions, the JHU monks themselves have tried to explain the current political and social circumstances that led them to take such an unconventional decision. They consider their entry into active politics as the last resort, 'a decision taken with much reluctance'.⁴⁶ Before handing over the nominations for April 2004 elections, Venerable Athuraliye Rathana, media spokesman of the JHU remarked: 'the Sangha has entered the arena of politics to ensure the protection of Buddhist heritage and values which had been undermined for centuries'.⁴⁷ Why did Buddhist monks decide to contest the parliamentary elections? Their answer lies in the following justifications.

The first justification is concerned with possible political disadvantages that the Sinhala Buddhist majority may face as a result of the current peace negotiations with the LTTE initiated by Norway facilitators. According to the JHU, popular consensus is that there is no longer a division within Sri Lankan society as pro-UNP and anti-UNP. The two prominent Sinhala-dominated parties—the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and the United People's Front—stand for the same principles. To secure power within Sri Lankan politics, both parties are ready to negotiate with the LTTE on the Interim Self-Governing Authority proposals forwarded by the LTTE through Norway. From the point of view of the JHU, these negotiations may disadvantage the Sinhala Buddhist majority.

The second justification is related to the current tense environment created by unethical conversions initiated by non-denominational, evangelical, Protestant Christian groups. Various Buddhist groups,⁴⁸ including the monks who formed the JHU, have demanded that the Sri Lankan government pass a bill in Parliament to ban unethical conversions carried out among poor Buddhists and Hindus.⁴⁹ One member of the JHU, Venerable Omalpē Sōbhita, fasted in front of the Ministry of Buddhasāsana, demanding action on this issue.⁵⁰ Although Mr W. J. M. Lokubandara, Minister of Justice and Buddhasāsana, promised to do so, he could not do anything since President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaranatunga dissolved the parliament early this year before action could be taken. In this context, the JHU believe that both major Sinhala-dominated

political ‘parties are not willing to ban unethical religious conversions’.⁵¹ This loss of hope and frustration led the JHU monks to decide to enter into the legislature.⁵² These two main factors seem to have motivated monks to enter into politics.

It is also possible to identify five key phases that mark significant mileposts in the gradual development of present political activism of Buddhist monks of the JHU by drawing support from a wide range of ideologies and a cross-section of the Sri Lankan population: (i) the founding of the Jathika Sangha Sabhava (National Sangha Council) in 1997 by drawing support from the monks of the three monastic fraternities, (ii) the birth of the SU (Sinhala Heritage) Party on 20 April 2000, (iii) the birth of the Jathika Sangha Sammelanaya (National Sangha Congress), and (v) the subsequent formation of the JHU in February 2004 as an all-monk political party to contest the April 2004 election.

All these political movements, in one way or another, embrace an idealized notion of the *dharmarājya* (righteous state) concept thought to be the underlying public policy of the ancient (Buddhist) polities of Sri Lanka. It was perceived that, in the most authentic form, the *dharmarājya* concept was present in the government policies of Emperor Aśoka in the third century BCE. The Buddhist monk politicians of the JHU capitalize on this idealized image of the *dharmarājya* concept for their own political advantage in contemporary Sri Lanka.

The *Dharmarājya* concept of the JHU

To attract an audience, the JHU has introduced more fashionable religious terms for its political rhetoric. One of them is the *pratipatti pūjāva*, which literally means ‘an offering of principles’. The Sinhala term *pūjāva* is, strictly speaking, liturgical in its connotations and exclusively used in religious contexts rather than in the political platform. However, the JHU has employed it self-consciously in the highly charged expression *pratipattipūjāva* in order to introduce its political manifesto in religious terms connoting their ambition of establishing a *dharmarājya* in Sri Lanka.

The election manifesto of the JHU is rather unique because of its interesting religious content and the way it was introduced to the Sri Lankan public by invoking religious sentiments. Unlike other political parties, the JHU offered its political manifesto (*pratipattipūjāva*) to the Tooth Relic of the Gotama Buddha in Kandy.⁵³ On 2 March 2004,⁵⁴ the JHU monks and lay supporters marched to the Tooth Relic Temple, Kandy from Kelaniya Temple⁵⁵ in the midst of thousands of Buddhist monks and lay people who shared the noble mission of restoring Buddhasāsana (message of the Buddha) and promoting Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

The JHU launched its political manifesto in the hope of restoring the weakening status of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The monks of the JHU have a clear agenda and ambition of purifying the political process of corruption and abuses. The JHU manifesto includes 12 points as principles for constructing a righteous state (*dharma rājyayak udesā vū pratipatti pūjāva*). Each item in the manifesto

includes more than one principle and the Sinhala version⁵⁶ is more comprehensive than the English rendering.

- (i) The first principle stresses that Sri Lanka should be ruled according to Buddhist principles as it was in the past, and the protection of the Buddhasāsana should be the foremost duty of any government.⁵⁷ The state is, however, identified in the manifesto as a ‘Sinhala state’.⁵⁸ The state also should safeguard the rights of other religions to practice their own religious traditions. Showing the urgency of addressing the religious concerns of the majority and achieving political ambitions of the JHU, the very first principle of the manifesto mentions the issue of unethical conversions. It asserts that ‘all unethical conversions are illegal’. This is an indication that the JHU will take legislative action on ‘unethical conversions’ once its members are elected to the parliament.
- (ii) The second article stresses that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist unitary state that cannot be divided.⁵⁹ National safety is an essential condition. At times when there are threats to national security, without political interference, the police and the three armed forces should be given powers to act according to the constitution to safeguard national interests and the country.
- (iii) Emphasizing the JHU’s stand as the National Sinhala Heritage Party, the manifesto states that national heritage of a country belongs to the ethnic group who made the country into a habitable civilization. The hereditary rights of the Sinhalese should be granted while protecting the rights of other communities who inhabit the island.
- (iv) The rulers of Sri Lanka should adopt the *dharmarājya* concept of Emperor Aśoka, which was influenced by Buddhist Philosophy and should work for the welfare of all ethnic groups. Their exemplary attitude should reflect Dharmāśoka’s idea of ‘all citizens are my children’ (*save munisā mama pajā*).
- (v) The Government should control and monitor all the activities and monetary transactions of the non-government organizations that are in operation in Sri Lanka. This is an indication of a religious concern that the JHU has raised with accusations to evangelical Christians that the majority of non-government organizations that are registered in Sri Lanka under the corporation law undertake evangelical activities of converting poor Buddhists and Hindus to Christianity in the guise of providing technical education.
- (vi) Following the *grāma rājya* concept that Sri Lanka inherited, a decentralized administration should be adopted. This is the Buddhist option that the JHU plans to adopt instead of devolution proposals that successive Sri Lankan governments plan to implement to resolve the ethnic conflict that has arisen with terrorist activities of the LTTE. The JHU sees the devolution of power as a solution to continuing ethnic problems in Sri Lanka from a negative perspective. They maintain that the notion of

devolution of power is an imported concept imposed upon them with vested interests to break Sri Lanka.⁶⁰ Their negative attitude to devolution of power is based on two factors: their fear that it will lead to the creation of a separate state for Tamils and that it will lead to the creation of fanatical religious beliefs and conflicts within Sri Lanka. Instead of the devolution of power, the JHU prefers a ‘decentralization’ within a unitary Buddhist state. They believe that effective ‘decentralization’ to village level communes will solve many of the issues related to defence, administration, education, health, trade, agriculture, water, and transport. They identify their conception of ‘decentralization’ as ‘*grāma rājya saṅkalpaya*’.

- (vii) The development should centre on the natural habitat, animals, and humanity. The development should be based on the principle that, ‘by developing the individual human being, [the] country should be developed’⁶¹—the creation of a just, national economy based upon Buddhist economic philosophy and empowering local farmers and entrepreneurs.
- (viii) An education system that fits into the Sri Lankan cultural context and that meets the needs of the modern world should be introduced. A society in which the lay–monastic, male–female, employer–employee, child–parent, teacher–student, ruler–ruled who are mutually bound by duty should be introduced. A righteous society, in which the five precepts are observed, should be built on the basis of Buddhism.
- (ix) In the past, Sri Lanka was the land of *dhamma*, which spread Buddhism around the world. Therefore, international relationships should be established with sister Buddhist countries. Friendships should be built with other countries. While maintaining close relationships with the neighbouring countries, we should consider that Sri Lanka is an independent state.
- (x) A Buddhist council should be held to reinforce Sinhala *bhikkhu* lineage, and the recommendations of 1957 and 2002 Buddhist Commission Reports⁶² should be appropriately adopted.
- (xi) Female moral rights, which are destroyed by commercialization, should be safeguarded. Nobility and dignity of motherhood should be restored.
- (xii) Independent, free and ethical principles should be adopted for mass media.

These 12 points demonstrate the guiding principles of the JHU as a Buddhist political party in Sri Lanka. In engaging in politics and in presenting this 12-point manifesto, the key visible political motive of the monks of the JHU is their desire to create a ‘Buddhist voice’ within the Sri Lankan Parliament so that Buddhist and Sinhala interests can be secured and guaranteed within the legislature. Increasingly, they perceive that power-hungry Sinhala lay-politicians have betrayed the Sinhala and Buddhist rights of the majority population of the country.

Election victory, chaos, and the JHU in Parliament

The JHU monks have so far faced several controversies within the JHU's short existence. The act of nominating over 200 monks to contest a parliamentary election was controversial in itself. The JHU's act of using monks to contest the election has been criticized both in Sri Lanka and abroad. In addition, existing major political parties have attempted to weaken them at every possible opportunity.

The election success of the JHU, however, was a shock for many who perceived their significance very lightly since none of the candidates were highly versatile politicians. In the election held on 2 April 2004, the UPFA—a combination of the SLFP and the JVP—won 105 seats out of 225. The UNP, the Sri Lankan government from 2001 to 2004, was defeated in the election and secured only 82 seats. The Tamil National Alliance, backed by the LTTE, won 22 seats. The JHU and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) had nine seats and five seats, respectively.

As the newest political party, the JHU had a significant success in the election; although its candidates were novices to parliamentary politics, they were able to convince a considerable section of the urban population in Colombo District, Gampaha District and Kalutara District of their national and religious causes. The success of both the JHU and the JVP in the 2004 election suggests that 'national unity' has become an important concern for the majority Sinhala population.

The chaos generated in selecting the speaker at the 13th Parliament session on 22 April 2004 shows the significance of the JHU monks in determining political process in Sri Lanka.⁶³ While the JHU cast the critical two votes (out of 110 against 109) in electing the former Minister of Justice, Mr W. J. M. Lokubandara of the UNP (Opposition), as the new speaker, the monks of the JHU also faced abuse within Parliament from the UPFA Government benches, and outside Parliament by unidentified persons often associated with the JVP. When the JHU Member of Parliament, Venerable Athuraliye Rathana, began to speak in Parliament congratulating the elected speaker, he was disturbed by the Government peers, particularly JVP MPs, making noises, calling names as supporters of 'separatists, terrorists and Eelamists', and throwing books at him.⁶⁴ Outside Parliament, an array of offensive posters was posted on walls and billboards criticizing the JHU monks for casting votes against people's verdict. This post-election chaos made front-page headline news in the local media.

Post-election events that occurred in relation to the acts of two members of the JHU— Venerable Aparekke Paññānanda elected from Gampaha District and Venerable Kathaluwe Rathanaseeha from Colombo District—have created unpleasant reactions in the political sphere. Even though Venerable Paññānanda withdrew his nomination before the elections, he won a seat from Gampaha District in the election. Paññānanda had publicly criticised the JHU, charging his companions with bribery and corruption. During his campaign, he maintained that the JHU monks accepted black money to finance their pre-election campaign and eventually voiced more support for the UPFA than for the JHU.

This event created chaos within the JHU; in the public eye, it made the JHU a divisive political party. The JHU wanted to nominate another candidate on behalf of the withdrawn candidacy of Paññānanda. However, Paññānanda did not want to submit to the JHU's political wish and became a rebel within the party. Another rebel MP, Venerable Kathaluwe Rathanaseeha, joined him to create further chaos within the JHU. Before Parliament met on 22 April 2004, both of them disappeared mysteriously and the UPFA⁶⁵ was accused of the abduction.⁶⁶ Everything that happened thereafter is now part of Sri Lanka's very fractured and divided political sphere. Some politicians have been accused of creating this atmosphere of chaos within the JHU.

Because of the popularity and potential political power of the JHU within Parliament and the chaotic and divisive atmosphere within the JHU, some opposition Members of Parliament used the opportunity to harass some members of the JHU. They were not even hesitant to abuse fellow parliamentarians of the JHU physically. On 8 June 2004, when Venerable Akmeemana Dayarathana was about to take the oaths, going towards the speaker's chair, 'the Government MPs engaged in a struggle to prevent' him doing so by 'grabbing his robe and holding him from his arms'.⁶⁷ In this incident two members of the JHU—Akmeemana Dayarathana and Kolonnāvē Sumaṅgala—were seriously injured due to physical assault and admitted to Śrī Jayawardhanapura General Hospital.⁶⁸

On 28 May 2004, the JHU MP Venerable Omalpē Sōbhita published in the *Gazette* a bill entitled *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act* as a Private Member's Bill.⁶⁹ The Sri Lankan Government also drafted a bill for the approval of the Cabinet. These two events are meant to fulfil a demand that Sinhala Buddhists made over the past few years with regard to 'unethical conversions' carried out by evangelical Christians in the poor Buddhist and Hindu communities. These bills on 'unethical' conversions bring another phase of religious tensions present in the ethno-religious politics in Sri Lanka. As the youngest and the first monk-led political party, the JHU has already created a significant discourse on its policies and how it will adapt its policies in implementing them in the Parliament and outside it. It has already upset the newly elected ruling party, the UPFA, and continues to be an influential factor in Sri Lankan politics.

Conclusion

I began writing this paper with reservations about the JHU's political ambitions and real intentions of entering into the Sri Lankan Parliament. Once I read their literature and reflected upon the current political crisis in Sri Lanka, I can see their importance and value in democratic politics at a crucial juncture of Sri Lankan history. On the one hand, as a minority party, the JHU can raise issues dealing with religion in Parliament to safeguard Buddhist and Sinhala interests; on the other, their activities in the legislature with vested interest on the Sinhala and Buddhist communities can be perceived by others in future as an inhibiting force for peace in Sri Lanka.

In determining the political role of the JHU as a political party of religious members, one has to pay attention to what the Buddhist public thinks of them. When I discuss the importance of the JHU in Sri Lankan politics with Buddhist monks and lay people, they are often convinced that in difficult times Buddhist monks have to take a stand. Although monks are not allowed to be involved in politics actively, considering the contemporary Sri Lankan situation, which can be seen by Buddhists as a genuine threat to the future survival of Buddhism in the island, the JHU's agenda for parliamentary politics can find justifications. Although the members of the JHU are portrayed in overseas media as nationalists and extremists, their current standing as a nationalist voice has also to be interpreted in the current volatile ethno-politics in Sri Lanka.

Notes

- 1 A critique of Tambiah's three works (1986, 1992, 1996) related to Sri Lanka can be found in Goonatilake (2001, 165–219).
- 2 A recent academic attempt to study the role of Buddhism in the Sri Lankan ethnic problem is the Bath Conference on Buddhism and Conflict in Sri Lanka (Deegalle 2003b). Further academic analysis on the relevant issues can also be found in the forthcoming volume *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka* (Deegalle 2005).
- 3 The JHU, the only political party consisting only of Buddhist monks, was formed just two months before the election held on 2 April 2004. Buddhist monks hold all the key posts in this new political party. It was formed to enable Buddhist monks to contest the election as one group.
- 4 According to *The Island*, on 19 February 2004, Venerable U. Dhammāloka, Colombo District Leader of the JHU, announced that 286 Buddhist monk candidates from the Jāthika Saṅgha Sammelanaya (National Sangha Congress) would contest in the general election of 2004. (*Spotlight on Sri Lanka*, 8(25), 20 February 2004; <http://xi.pair.com/isweb3/spot/c0825.html>).
- 5 Newspapers reported a colourful pageant of traditional drummers who fetched the Buddhist monk candidates of the JHU to Colombo District Secretariat on 21 February 2004 to hand over the nominations for the general election. More than 5000 people who gathered along the roads to see the pageant uttered the traditional Buddhist response 'Sādhu ! Sādhu' to express their solidarity and joy. (*Spotlight on Sri Lanka*, 8(25), 20 February 2004; <http://xi.pair.com/isweb3/spot/c0825.html>).
- 6 <http://www.dailymirror.lk/archives/dmr181201/index.html>.
- 7 *Daily News*, 7 March 2002 (http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/EditorialReviews/erev200203/20020307editorialreview.html).
- 8 See http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/EditorialReviews/erev200203/20020307editorialreview.html.
- 9 *Sunday Observer*, 4 January 2004 (<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2004/01/04/fea19.html>).
- 10 For example, see D. A. Weeraratne's 'Ven. Samita as Pioneer Bhikkhu MP: Whither Buddha Sasana?' (*The Island*, 29 December 2001) and later, with the case of the JHU monks, P. G. G. Palihapitiya's 'Buddhist Monks in Politics' (*The Island*, 26 February 2004) and 'JHU Monks Have Become a Laughing Stock' (*Lanka Web News*, 28 April 2004).
- 11 'Buddhist Monks at Election: Replies to Allegations', 15 March 2004 (<http://members.tripod.com/amarasara/jhu/jhu-replies1.htm>).
- 12 *Newslinka*, 8 April 2004, p. 4.
- 13 See <http://members.tripod.com/amarasara/jhu/>.

- 14 S. K. Hennayake, 'Sri Lankan Politics: 2004 Election and JHU' (<http://members.tripod.com/amarasara/jhu/jhu-slpolitics-skf.htm>)
- 15 See <http://www.dailynews.lk/2004/04/23/pol01>
- 16 Venerable O. Sobhita published the bill entitled *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion (Private Member's Bill)* (2004). There are several responses both in favour and against it. See 'Conversion Battle Reaches a Climax', *The Dhamma Times*, 1 August 2004 (http://www.dhammadai.org/e/news/m08/bnews01_2.php).
- 17 See <http://sihalaurumaya.s5.com/beginning.htm>.
- 18 The post-election dispute within the SU led Mr S. L. Gunasekara, Chairman of the SU, to step down because of accusations related to his personal religion: his unwillingness to offer flowers to the Tooth Relic in his maiden visit to Kandy was used against him (<http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items04/290604-1.html>). Gunasekera was also accused of being a 'former Catholic', an 'agnostic' and an 'atheist' (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/dec2000/sri-d04.shtml>). The JHU MP A. Rathana then told the press that 'a leader of a Sinhala party must be a Sinhala Buddhist.' Ironically, invoking Buddhist sentiments is as an accepted custom of political life in Sri Lanka. See also the following website for more details: http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca200010/20001016dispute_over_national_list.htm.
- 19 See <http://www.sihalaurumaya.org>.
- 20 The World Socialist website labels the SU as a 'fascist organisation' (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/dec2000/sri-d04.shtml>); see also Panini Wijesiriwardana and K. Ratnayake's 'New Sinhala Extremist Party Fields Buddhist Monks in Sri Lankan Elections' (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/apr2004/jhu-a01.shtml>).
- 21 See the JHU posters online: <http://www.shamika.50g.com/paramithaperahara/messages/messages.html>.
- 22 See <http://www.sihalaurumaya.org>.
- 23 See <http://www.sihalaurumaya.org>.
- 24 The *Jātaka* (III.274) enumerates the 10 royal virtues: (i) charity, (ii) morality, (iii) liberality, (iv) honesty, (v) mildness, (vi) religious practice, (vii) non-anger, (viii) non-violence, (ix) patience, and (x) non-offensiveness. Buddhists in South and Southeast Asia often allude to these 10 virtues since they are important aspects of Buddhist social and political philosophy.
- 25 *Daily News*, 20 December 2003 (<http://www.dailynews.lk/2003/12/20/fea01.html>).
- 26 *Daily News*, 20 December 2003 (<http://www.dailynews.lk/2003/12/20/fea01.html>).
- 27 'Buddhist Monks at Election: Replies to Allegations', 15 March 2004 (<http://members.tripod.com/amarasara/jhu/jhu-replies1.htm>).
- 28 For example, at Sōma's funeral, the leader of the JHU, then the President of the Jāthika Saṅgha Sammēlanaya, Venerable Ellāwala Medhānanda accused very bluntly: 'Christian fundamentalist connection to Soma Thero's untimely death in St. Petersburg, Russia was not an accident' (<http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items04/290604-1.html>).
- 29 Both the transliteration from Sinhalese and English translation are those of the author. Poster located online: <http://www.shamika.50g.com/paramithaperahara/somathero/forsomethero.html>.
- 30 *Daily News*, 20 December 2003 (<http://www.dailynews.lk/2003/12/20/fea01.html>).
- 31 See the front page of Amarasara website in which the photographs of Sōma and Dharmapāla are displayed side by side (<http://www.amarasara.net>).
- 32 *Daily News*, 20 December 2003 (<http://www.dailynews.lk/2003/12/20/fea01.html>).
- 33 For Sōma's biography, see: <http://vihara.alphalink.com.au/library/>.
- 34 For a discussion of popular Buddhist preaching and its development in contemporary Sri Lanka see Deegalle (1997a, 2003a).
- 35 Andrew Scott, 'Soma Thera—Dedicated Buddhist and Nationalist', *Daily News*, 25 December 2003 (<http://www.dailynews.lk/2003/12/25/fea02.html>).

- 36 *Sunday Observer*, 21 December 2003 (<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2003/12/21/fea07.html>).
- 37 Chamuditha Samarawickrema of TNL was the presenter of the religious programmes *Nāna Pahana* with Venerable Sōma and *Daham Suvañña* with Venerable U. Dhammālōka (*Sunday Observer*, 4 January 2004, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2004/01/04/fea19.html>).
- 38 But in one of the collection of Sōma's articles, when this issue of political interference in media is discussed, Indu Perera (Sōma 2001, 78–9) mentions that it was done under the recommendation of some Buddhist monks rather than on the basis of a decision taken by politicians.
- 39 Even before the birth of the JHU, Venerable U. Dhammālōka, the JHU MP from Colombo District, faced the camera with Sōma's weeping mother besides Sōma's dead body (*Lankādīpa*, 28 December 2003, p. 20).
- 40 Daya Hewapathirane, 'The Buddhist Social Reform Movement of Ven. Soma' (<http://shamika.50g.com/paramithaperahara/articles/27march2004.html>).
- 41 Pujitha Wijetunge, 'Soma Thera Joins SU', *The Sunday Times*, 3 December 2002 (<http://www.dailymirror.lk/2002/12/03/News/7.html>).
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 Daya Hewapathirane, 'The Buddhist Social Reform Movement of Ven. Soma', (<http://shamika.50g.com/paramithaperahara/articles/27march2004.html>).
- 44 This identification of national and religious issues is very common in the Sri Lankan Buddhist thinking. When I guided the delegation of the Buddhist Federation of Norway to the Bhikkhu Training Centre's Dahampāsāla, Venerable Hakmane Sumanasiri responded: 'As a Sri Lankan, I feel no separation between Buddhism and the Nation. For more than two millennia Sri Lanka has developed according to Buddhism and it is now difficult to separate Buddhism from the Nation'.
- 45 S. K. Hennayake, 'Sri Lanka Politics: 2004 Election and JHU' (<http://members.tripod.com/amarasara/jhu/jhu-slpolitics-sk.html>).
- 46 See <http://www.srilankanelections.com/manifestos/HJU-EngManifesto.html>.
- 47 *Daily Mirror*, 19 February 2004; and *Spotlight on Sri Lanka*, 8(25), 20 February 2004 (<http://xi.pair.com/isweb3/spot/c0825.html>).
- 48 A group named 'Jayagrahaṇaya' (Success—Sri Lanka), founded in Kandy in 1991 and approved as a charity by the Sri Lankan government in 1995, has written extensively on 'unethical' conversions carried out among poor Buddhists and Hindus by various non-denominational Christian groups that the Success identifies as 'Christian fundamentalists'. To inform the public of the threat that exists for Buddhism, the Success has also published a booklet *Āgam Māruva* (*Changing Religions*) written by Mādagama Dhammānanda (Kandy: Success, 2001, vii + 61 pp.). Venerable Dhammānanda is Project Director of the Success. According to Success, there are over 150 non-governmental organizations registered in Sri Lanka under the Company Registration Act who carry out conversions. On the contrary, however, The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty claims that the two lawyers who went to Sri Lanka on a fact-finding mission found no evidence for unethical conversions. But, the tenth anniversary souvenir of the Success (published in 2001) contains several short entries on the subject: *āgama māruva* (a report of 'Religious Amity' conference held at Institute of Fundamental Studies (IFS), Kandy, 19 August 1993), a photograph of a peaceful confrontation of a young woman who was involved in converting Buddhists to Christianity, and a poem that invokes threats of religious conversion. For more details on these issues, see also the report of the Laṅkā Bauddha Sanrakshana Sabhāwa Conference on the 'Challenges to the Buddha Sāsana' held at Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) on 30 July 2001.
- 49 Before the current bills, former Hindu Affairs Minister T. Maheswaran had in 2003 challenged the former Prime Minister Ranil Wicremasinghe that he would resign if 'the government did not bring in an act to prevent Hindus being converted

- to Christianity before the 31st of December' (http://www.spur.asn.au/News_2003_Dec_31.htm).
- 50 When two monks—Omalpē Sobhitha and Rajawattee Wappa—sat 'on a fast outside the Buddhasasana Ministry' on 30 December 2003, 'smiling minister W.J.M. Lokubandara walked up to them through the group of well-wishers and onlookers and sought their permission to sit beside them' (http://www.spur.asn.au/News_2003_Dec_31.htm).
- 51 'Buddhist Monks at Election: Replies to Allegations', 15 March 2004 (<http://members.tripod.com/amarasara/jhu/jhu-replies1.htm>).
- 52 As a result of the JHU's demands, by June 2004 there were two bills on 'unethical conversions' in the Sri Lankan Parliament for approval (<http://lankaliberty.com/bills.html>). Venerable Sōbhitha published his bill on 28 May 2004 and the Sri Lankan Government also drafted a bill. These legislative measures show how religious concerns have become important in private and public lives of the Sri Lankans.
- 53 See <http://www.srilankanelections.com/manifesto/HJU-EngManifesto.html>.
- 54 The selection of both the date (2 March) and place (Kandy) are quite significant in historic terms. March 2 symbolizes an important historic event: the day that Sri Lanka lost her independence to the British under Kandyan Convention signed on 2 March 1815. Another event that happened on that day in Kandy is still in the ears of the Sinhala nationalists: on that day in Kandy, when the British raised the union jack before signing the memorandum, the monk Kuḍāpola protested against it and he was shot dead. The JHU's unveiling of its programme at a gathering in Kandy deliberately invokes religious and national sentiments.
- 55 See <http://www.sihalaurumaya.org>. This site includes a photograph of Venerable Ellāwala Medhānandha and Venerable Kolonnāvē Sumangala at the commencement of 'Pāramithā Perahera' from Kelaniya Temple on 2 March 2004.
- 56 For the full Sinhala version of the manifesto see http://www.jayasanka.org/dharma_rajjya.jpg, and <http://www.jathikahelaurumaya.org/Index1.html>. For an abridged and incomplete English version, see <http://www.srilankanelections.com/manifestos/HJU-EngManifesto.html>.
- 57 This is a further assertion of the fact that the Sri Lankan constitution agrees that the protection of Buddhism is the foremost duty of the state.
- 58 This notion of 'Sinhala' state can become a problem in the context of modern multi-ethnic and multi-religious Sri Lanka.
- 59 The emphasis here on a 'unitary state' is a clear indication of refusal to divide the country by LTTE-initiated attempts.
- 60 See <http://members.tripod.com/amarasara/jhu/jhu-21qa.htm>.
- 61 This approach to the development of Sri Lanka is very much Buddhist in nature. Leading monks like Venerable Maḍihē Paññāsīha (1997, 62) and his outspoken pupil, Sōma, preferred a person centred approach to the development.
- 62 There are several reports with regard to the status of Buddhism (Buddhist Committee of Inquiry 1956) and Sinhala people (National Joint Committee 2001).
- 63 See <http://www.dailynews.lk/2004/04/23/pol01>.
- 64 See <http://www.dailynews.lk/2004/04/23/pol01>.
- 65 Dilrukshi Handunnetti and Mandana Ismail Abeywickrema, 'Two Ministers, Deputies Named in Monk Attack', *The Sunday Leader*, 13 June 2004 (<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/20040613/home.htm>).
- 66 Frederica Jansz, 'Case of the Missing Monks', *The Sunday Leader*, 25 April 2004 (<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/20040425/issues-1.htm>).
- 67 Ranil Wijayapala and Bharatha Mallawarachchi, 'JHU to Unite with Opposition', *Daily News*, 9 June 2004 (<http://www.dailynews.lk/2004/06/09/pol02.html>).
- 68 For evidence of physical abuse, see <http://shamika.50g.com/attacks/attack.html>, and <http://members.tripod.com/amarasara/jhu/images/jhu-20040620-01.jpg>
- 69 *Daily News*, 6 August 2004 (<http://www.dailynews.lk/2004/08/06/new13.html>).

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