

Religious Extremism in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka, 2009-2014

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NAZIA KHAN



Centre for South Asian Studies

School Of International Studies

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

New Delhi-110067

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CENTRE FOR SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110 067, INDIA

Tel : 011-26704350
e-mail : batraamita@gmail.com

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "Religious Extremism in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka, 2009-2014" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

Nazia Khan
NAZIA KHAN

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Amita Batra
Prof. AMITA BATRA
Chairperson, CSAS

P. Sahadevan
Prof. P.SAHADEVAN
Supervisor

दक्षिण एशियाई अध्ययन केंद्र
Centre for South Asian Studies
अंतराष्ट्रीय अध्ययन केंद्र

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List of Acronyms

BBS	Bodu Bala Sena [Buddhist Power Force]
JHU	Jathika Hela Urumaya [National Sinhalese Heritage Party]
JVP	Janatha Vimukhti Peramuna [People's Liberation Front]
LLRC	Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Commission
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
SU	Sinhala Urumaya [Sinhala Heritage Party]
RB	Ravana Balaya
P-TOMS	Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure

Introduction

The end of the civil war in 2009, with the defeat of Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), should have paved the way for reconciliation and peace. But the dominant view of the Rajapaksa government was that there were no minority issues that needed to be addressed on a political level. It was expected that post-civil war Sri Lanka would embark on a new era of peace and tranquility. On the contrary, there is an upsurge in religious extremism, which emerged during the fourth eelam war, but the victory acted as a catalyst and a force to consolidate the Sinhalese Buddhist ideology. Anti-Muslim and anti-Christian campaigns had started even before the defeat of the LTTE.

There has been growth in the intensity of religious extremism in Sri Lanka and formation of new Sinhalese Buddhist organizations has also taken place. In 2011 and 2012, “two monks, Kirama Wimalajothi and Galagoda Aththe Gnanasaara broke away”¹ “from the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and started the Sinhala Ravaya (the Sinhalese Roar) and the Bodu Bala Sena (the Army of Buddhist Power), on the”² grounds that the JHU was not militant enough to protect the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. Presently, both the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) and Sinhala Ravaya (SR) are viewed as main ethno-religious forces, which are trying to disturb the religious amity. “These groups share common goals: they uphold Buddhism and seek to establish a link between the state and religion; to advocate a military solution to the Tamil question and, to oppose devolution of powers to the minorities”³. The emotional symbolic agenda of the JHU, JNP, BBS and SR “are the biggest hurdle for the government of Sri Lanka to take meaningful political initiatives”⁴ for peace.

1 Hariharan R.(2014), “Sri Lanka :Tweaking the Muslims”, [online: web] Accessed on 12 May 2015
URL:latheeffarook.com/index.php/9-sri-lana/976-sri-lanka-tweaking-the-muslims.

2 Subramaniam, Samanth (2014), “The Island of the pure”, The Caravan, 1 July 2014.

3 Imtiyaz, A.R.M. (2010), “Politicization of Buddhism and Electoral Politics in Sri Lanka”, in Ali Riaz (eds.), Religion and Politics in South Asia, London: Routledge.

4 *ibid*

The Sinhalese Buddhist extremists believe that Sri Lanka is the island of Sinhalese and it is their duty to preserve and protect Buddhism from the challenges of other religions, thereby segregating the society into insider and outsider, self and other, nation and ethnic group. They consider that the Muslim and Christian communities are posing threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist identity. The extremist groups are not only engaged in hate speech but also carrying out attacks against the minorities and their religious institutions. The Sinhalese politics, today, is rooted in the ideology of Sinhalese Buddhist superordination and minority subordination. After the military victory over the Sri Lankan Tamil separatists, now the tide has turned against the religious minorities in the island.

In Sri Lanka, “all religions are protected by the Constitution and law, but foremost place is given to Buddhism”⁵. “According to Sri Lanka’s 2011 census, Buddhists constitute 70.2 per cent of the population, Hindus 12.6 per cent, Muslims 9.7 per cent, and Christians 7.4 per cent of a total population of 20.2 million”⁶. Muslims are the second largest minority, and “Islam is the most populous faith in the districts of Ampara (43.6 percent) and Trincomalee (42.1 per cent), which together account for a Muslim population of 441,997. Two thirds of the 1,967,227 total Muslims live in the South of the country, concentrated in urban centers, while in the North and East, they also populate more rural areas”⁷. Most Muslims are from the Sunni sect, while a small minority is Shiite Muslims, including Bohras. “Sri Lanka also has a small Ahmadiya community, a sect considered to be heretical by some Muslims”⁸.

“Christianity is the majority religion in the Mannar district (57 per cent or 52,230 people) while in other districts they are a religious minority. Christians in Sri Lanka are made up of three main groups: Roman Catholics who account for about 80 per cent (1,237,038) of Christians, while the remaining 272,568 Christians are Protestant Christian groups (including Anglicans and

5 The Centre for Policy Alternative (2013), “Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka”, CPA :Colombo

6. ibid

7 ibid

8 ibid

Methodists), and non-traditional or Evangelical Christian groups that began to emerge in the 1970s. Christians are concentrated in urban and coastal areas across the country, and are largely from the Sinhalese and Tamil communities”⁹.

The Muslim and Christian communities in the island have been the most peaceful, whose members never organized themselves for armed violence. They are peaceful ethnic groups spread throughout the length and breadth of country. The Muslim community, primarily, were also affected because of the civil war, when in the 1990s the LTTE expelled them from Jaffna, leading to displacement of about one lakh Muslims in the northern province . The minorities interact with other religious and ethnic groups cordially interlinking those cultures with their own culture.

Though resurgence of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, after the victory of the LTTE, has been the most important factor behind the rise of religious extremism, social and economic factors have always played an important role in violence and riots which have taken place. The extremists group have not only attacked the religious places of worship of Muslim and Christian but also their property, and business, and raised issues of *halal food*, women’s dress code and slaughtering of animals by the minority groups.

A quick survey of the literature on the rise of religious extremism in Sri Lanka reveals that there has been rise in the extremist activities of the Sinhala-Buddhist organizations since 2009. The work on religious extremism provides with useful insights on the factors, objectives and strategies of the religious extremist organization in Sri Lanka. Arora (2014) and Hariharan (2014) point out that the resurgence of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism which began after the military victory against the Tamil Tigers in 2009, “led to contemplation on the nation’s identity, allowing the regime to promote ethno-religious nationalism to gain legitimacy”¹⁰. Imtiyaz (2010) and Degalle (2004) have analyzed four prominent Buddhist political parties. They are: the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People’s Liberation Front-JVP), Jathika Nidahas Peramuna (JNP), the Sinhalese Urumaya (Sinhalese Heritage Party), and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Arora, Vishal, “Connecting the Dot on Buddhist Fundamentalism”, The Diplomat, 30 May 2014.

National Sinhalese Heritage Party-JHU). According to Degalle, the Buddhist monks involvement in politics began in the mid-twentieth century and it was in 1957 that a monk who contested for a village council won a parliamentary seat. In 2004, for the first time, a Buddhist monk party, JHU, managed to win nine seats in the parliamentary elections and also joined the coalition government led by the SLFP.

De Silva (1998) traces the history of bhikkus' involvement in politics for the rights of the Sinhalese Buddhism from the colonial era to 1998. He explains how, since the colonial times, the Buddhist monks have consolidated themselves to fight for their rights and recognition and against the Christian missionaries and also education system. Houtart (1974) presents a sociological analysis by establishing the link between religion and politics. In the initial years of independence, the country followed secular principles under Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake. But they were rejected in the subsequent years, giving way for the rise of nationalism and ethnocentrism. Aboobacker (2012) states that Buddhist extremism seeks to advance the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideology, uphold "the Sinhalese as the official language and propagate Buddhism as the state religion". He further adds that not all Sinhalese Buddhists support the extremist ideology as propagated by the monks. The extremist forces have become dominant only under the Rajapaksa regime.

DeVotta (2007) examines how Angarika Dharmapala became the father of modern Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. He was hostile towards all things un-Sinhalese and non-Buddhist. However, Seneviratne (1999) argues that "Dharmapala's agenda comprised both economic and cultural aspects". The Vidyodaya Pirivena was more pragmatic in its approach and believed in nurturing compassion, polyethnic coexistence and tolerance. The monks associated with the Vidyalkara Pivirena emphasized anti-colonialism and revival of Sinhalese Buddhist culture. DeVotta and Stone (2008) give the details of the rise of Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), or National Heritage Party. Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka have played a pivotal role in politics. They seek to preserve the unique Sinhalese culture, and the historical culture, and the historical relationship between Buddhism and the state. They have pro-Sinhala and pro-Buddhist interest, which is reflected in their election manifesto.

Thus the study will try to explore the rise of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism and the factors which has contributed to it. Since the state has come out of three decades of civil war, rather than peace and harmony, there has been the othering of the minorities such as the Muslims and Christians. The causes and manifestation of the extremism in the Sri Lankan will be analyzed and the responses of the minorities and government will also be studied.

The rationale of the study comes from the fact that with the end of civil war after three decades, there has been attacks and violence on the religious minorities such Muslims and Christians. In Sri Lanka ethnicity and religion are intertwined. The end of the civil war provides an opportunity for inter-religious and inter-ethnic amity. But the rise of religious extremism has vitiated the atmosphere in the country. The proposed study is important as it will identify the causes of religious extremism and the impact it has made on the society and polity.

As far as the scope of the study is covered, it will cover the period 2009-2014. The civil war ended in 2009 and since then there has been several attacks and violence on the religious minorities by the Buddhist-Sinhala extremist groups. The extremists not only propagated hatred through hate speeches, but several attacks were made on religious places of minorities and their business establishments. The proposed study will look into the post-civil war political conditions and the status of minorities and their sense of insecurity. The rise of religious extremism is also closely linked to the capitalist economy as the attack is not only physical, but also aimed at weakening or undermining economic interests of minorities. The response of the state and steps taken to resolve the tension will also be examined.

The main objectives of the study are to examine the nature of post-civil war politics in Sri Lanka, explain the causes of religious extremism and how the post-civil war political situation has contributed to religious assertion of the majority Sinhalese. It also seeks to analyze the pattern and strategies of violence against the minorities; evaluate the steps taken by the government to curb religious violence; and examine the impact of religious extremism on inter-ethnic relations in the country.

The study will test the following hypothesis: (1) The resurgence of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in the wake of the government's military victory has contributed to the rise of

religious extremism; (2) The post-civil war Sri Lankan state policies have given rise to fear and insecurity among religious minorities and, at the same time, strengthened the Buddhist radical forces.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters:

The Chapter I, *Rise of Religious Extremism: A Conceptual Framework*, will define the concept of religious extremism and factors leading to its outbreak. It will identify the characteristics of religious extremism and how is it different from other forms of extremism. Besides, policies and strategies necessary for its containment will also be explored. It will also focus on the debate concerning fundamentalism and extremism, identifying the similarities and dissimilarities between the two concepts.

Chapter II, *Religious Extremist Organization in Sri Lanka*, will provide a profile on various organizations and groups involved in religious violence. Besides their origin, ideologies and organizational structure, the chapter will examine their strategies and support base.

In Chapter III, *Causes of Religious Extremism in Sri Lanka*, an in-depth examination of causes for the religious extremism in Sri Lanka will be enumerated. Indeed, it remained latent during the war period. But the military victory over the LTTE and the end of three decades long civil war, acted as a catalyst for Sinhalese Buddhist extremism. Factors identified in this context are related to politics, nationalism and economic development.

Chapter IV, *Manifestation of Religious Extremism*, demonstrate that these Sinhalese extremist groups target the minorities in the society, attacking their business and property. This chapter provides an analysis of each violent incident and the extent to which the minorities suffered both in terms of life and property.

In Chapter V, *Responses of the Government and Religious Minorities*, the government's response in terms of curbing the hatred and violence is examined. The state has mostly failed in preserving peace and harmony. Moreover, there has been no action on the part of the extremist group leaders; rather they defend their action. The questions such as why do the leaders from the

government refuse to condemn the extremism, and what are their political compulsions in maintaining silence will be answered. Further, the chapter will examine the strategies adopted by various religious minority groups and political parties to protect the minority interests.

Chapter VI, *Conclusion*, summarizes the arguments made in previous chapters and tests the hypotheses. It will assess the minority protection in post-civil war Sri Lanka.

Chapter I

Rise of Religious Extremism: A Conceptual Framework

The chapter first defines religious extremism in order to understand the concept, by not only examining the causes behind it but also the strategies used by the religious extremists. The implications of the strategies incorporated by the religious extremists and the manifestation of their acts are also analysed.

Religious extremism has become a major problem in today's world and so it has become important to define and recognize the components of the concept. It is not only important to understand the causes which have led to the rise of religious extremism in the era of modernity but also recognize the challenges which have been posed by religious extremism.

Defining Religious Extremism

Extremism is not a new phenomenon, however, it continuously confronts society on a daily basis and so it is essential to study, understand and define it. According to Oxford Dictionary, Extremism (1885) is “advocacy of extreme measures,” and fanaticism is defined as “obsessively devoted to a belief, activity etc”. Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2006) defined extremism as a situation “when you do not allow for a different point of view; when you hold your own views as being quite exclusive, when you don't allow for the possibility of difference” (quoted in Davies 2009:186). To this Davies (2009:186) adds, “and when you want to impose this view on others using violence if necessary”. For Davies (2009: 186), “extremism is not only about theological differences, but also power and control. The struggle of power is also a major factor behind the establishment of rule of God”. He further makes, “differences between forms of extremism which can be summarized as relating to five main dimensions”: first, scale: “this can be from individual to state-funded. The second is the root, which can be political, religious, or both combined. The third is expansionist, as they continually seek to draw new members. Fourth, whether they are trying to force political change and last is violence, whether it is seen as desirable or justified” (Davies 2009:186).

Anderlini and Koch (2015:3) define religious extremism as “rigid interpretations of religion that are forced upon others using social or economic coercion, laws, intolerance, or violence. It is accompanied by non-fluid definitions of culture, religion, nationalism, ethnicity or sect which move citizens into exclusionary, patriarchal and intolerant communities.” The religious leaders give the authority and legitimacy to the extremists groups to carry out acts of violence in the name of god.. The extremists, thus, are groups or individual who are inspired by range of religious, political, or other ideological beliefs. It is “an intense sense of ideological fervour accompanied by a highly focused and sustained set of activities that express the devotion of one or more persons to their particular belief system(s)” (Prus 2005: 49).

The question, which arises here, is why there is a need to resort to violent means. Whether, “it is the ‘just war’ of radical Christianity, jihad in Islam and *dharmayuddha*¹¹ in Hinduism and Sikhism, all these religion do preach and practice non-violence, but take to violence only at its extreme to restore order in society and grant justice to the suffering people” (Singh 1999:93). How can a religion which teaches about morality, non-violence, harmony, can at the same time be so aggressive and make individuals take such a step, that they overcome fear of death or ready to kill others in the name of God. The Encyclopaedia of Religion (1987) suggests that “in a religious environment, there are three steps in the ritual development of courage to act violently despite anxiety: first, acceptance by the worshipping community of members on the basis of their intrinsic, not achieved characteristics, second, achievement of solidarity among the members and third, encouragement of activities that engender and release effect in support of religious values” (quoted in Singh 1999:94).

Thus, every religion has tendency to influence in a way that religion becomes more important to them than humanity. And so they are ready to commit any act in the name of god. Though terrorism and extremism might be more common in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, which believes in monotheism, than of religion such as Hinduism which have faith in many God,

¹¹ Dharmayuddha means war according to shastras. Such a war could be started only for just reasons. Moreover, such a war be waged in accordance with certain rules and regulations.

promoting tolerance. However, we still find an aggressive and violent Hindu and Buddhist movements too. Therefore, the factor here is not the flexibility, which the religion provides, but it depends upon the attitude of the people. While some people and organization of a particular religion may adopt moderate view towards the world, while others may be inclined towards extremist elements. Therefore, in order to check the rise of religious extremism, one has to understand how the system of religious extremism works.

The various traits of religious extremism have been recognized by Wilcox (1990: 39-41) which are, “the first of which he believes is “character assassination, extremists often attack the character of an opponent rather than deal with the facts or issues raised”. Thus the extremists premise their arguments on irrelevant issues and avoid the major problems, which need to be answered. The second, is the “name-calling and labelling”, often one can see the extremists will involve in activities, “to label and condemn opponents in order to divert attention from their arguments and to discourage others from hearing them out”. Pratt (2008:5) calls this “feature of extremism as ‘condemnatory stance’ which involves the factors of negative judgmental values and pietistic tyranny which is the expression of judgmental values that hard-line fundamentalism displays its real stance towards any who would dissent from within, or oppose from without”. Therefore, there is a tendency to condemn anyone who is against the ideology of the extremists. The third, is the “irresponsible sweeping generalizations”, made on the basis of little or no evidence and an inadequate proof for assertions”, as their acts are driven more by their feelings than by a fact. They also deal in “double standards” by dealing and advocating things based on beliefs, while they view acts of others critically and demand proof for it. They also have tendency to view opponents as evil, “because they are bad people, immoral, dishonest, unscrupulous, mean-spirited, hateful, and cruel”, and thus have the worldview in terms of “absolutes of good and evil, for them or against them.” The extremists also have a tendency of framing “their arguments in such a way as to intimidate others into accepting their premises and conclusions.” They also make people believe in doing wrong for a “good cause”. They also have a tendency of “group thinking” and “conform to group norms and to preserve solidarity and

concurrence at the expense of distorting members' observation of facts", and hold the belief that system is no good unless they win.¹²

Aboobacker (2012) traits of religious extremism, which he characterizes by the following – rigidity, exclusiveness, excessive kind of spiritualism, anti-materialism, intolerant of other religion or religious orientation and anti-western in nature.¹³ Thus religious extremist are not only anti-West in their approach as the “Western policy makers have viewed extremist movements through a national security lens, as hostile and violent reactions to the West. Consequently, the responses from Western states have been militarized and security-oriented. Moreover, much of the policy-oriented research and programmes have focused on violent manifestations of extremism, while failing to realize the non-violent religious extremism is spreading into the mainstream social fabric of communities in the Middle East and other countries globally with sizeable Muslim populations. The rise of extremism, including the receptivity of regressive ideology in many countries, has not been fully analyzed from a socio-economic perspective” (ICAN 2014:3). Thus, one has to move beyond the idea of religious extremism as against the ideology of the West and has to understand its various perspectives. The social, economic and political factors that lead people to extremist tendencies have to be understood.

In understanding the different dimensions of religious extremism, Liebman (1983:76) posits three such dimensions. First is that “it deals with the expansion of religious laws, which forms the basis of any religion”. For example, in Islam, Muslim follow *Sharia* law and the demand of the Muslim extremists group is establish shariah law. And so every religion constitutes an authoritative aspect and the religious extremists try to establish the pure form of religion¹⁴. “The

12 Wilcox, Laird (1990), “Extremist Traits”, The Hoaxer Project Report [Online web] Accessed 12th Oct. 2014 URL:<http://www.lairdwilcox.com/news/hoaxerproject.html>.

13 Aboobacker, Rameez (2012), “Religious Extremism: Sri Lanka”, Colombo Telegraph, 30th April 2012.

14 Liebman, C. (1983), “Extremism as a Religious Norm”, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 22:75-86.

second dimension of religious extremism is its attitude towards those elements of society who do not accept extremism norms. The characteristic approach of extremism is one of social isolation. However, one coupled with efforts to convert or persuade other individuals, the isolation is tempered and special safeguards may be erected to mitigate the dangers which the inevitable contact with outsiders invite” (Liebman 1983:78). Religious extremist isolate themselves from the other member of the society who do not accept the norms lay down by them. This is widespread in many religions including Christianity, Islam and Judaism. For example, in Nigeria, a Christian extremist group, known as “Deeper Life” has a history of encouraging its members not to associate freely with “unbelievers”. The “unbelievers” includes other Christian denominations that reject their extreme interpretation of the Bible. Similarly, “Islamic extremist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood isolated themselves from those in the colonial Egyptian society who they accused of not following their extremist beliefs. Among the Jews, isolation from non-Jews is encouraged but distancing themselves from other Jews is a problem” (Madu2008: 45-46). “The third dimension of religious extremism is the rejection of cultural forms and values that are not perceived as indigenous to the religious traditions” (Liebman 1983: 78). In this way they are very strict, because anything outside their culture is termed as foreign and thus poses a threat of contaminating their religion.

Thus these are the traits and the dimensions of religious extremism, which defines a religious extremist.

Now, religious extremism is understood to be the extreme path followed by the religious fundamentalist. In order to understand the role of religion in perpetuating extremism, Arshi Saleem Hashmi (2009:2) explains that, “much of the literature on the role of religion in politics and religious extremism falls into three major groups. One school of thought believes that religion is always violent, such as Hent de Vries (2002) and Mark Juergensmeyer (2001)”. De Vries argues that, “there is no religion without violence of some sort and no violence without religion of some sort”. Juergensmeyer (2000) argues “that religious violence is a result of people’s tendency to see their lives as a struggle between good and evil”. And he further raises the question, as to why the religious people have to resort to violent activities, and answer that, it is because “that they are part of a cosmic struggle between the powers of good and evil”(Hashmi

2009: 2), the fact that they are good and the other are demonized, they resort to violent means. There also have been “common perceptions that there has been a rise in religious violence around the world in the last decades of the twentieth century”, but according to Juergensmeyer (2000:6), “it has been borne out by those who keep records of such things”. “In 1980 the U.S. State Department roster of international terrorism groups listed scarcely single religious organizations. In 1998 U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright listed thirty of the world’s most dangerous groups; over half were religious. They are Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist” (Juergensmeyer 2001: 6). Within the histories of religious traditions, from biblical wars to crusading ventures and great acts of martyrdom violence has lurked a shadowy presence. “But the question which needs to be asked is that why there is a re-emergence of religious violence in such a massive scale. These contemporary acts of violence are often justified by the historical precedent of religion’s violent past. Yet the forces that combine to produce religious violence are particular to each moment of history” (Juergensmeyer 2001:7).

In the contemporary world, the Islamic terror and jihad is considered to be the greatest threat by many countries. And so some scholars “like Daniel Pipes (2002), Samuel Huntington (1993), Bernard Lewis and Jessica Stern, who view only Islam and not other religion as violent. Daniel Pipes, for instance, claims that radical Islam is an ideology incompatible with secular society”. Muslims want to establish rule according to shariah. They are thus, “a radical network of terrorists,” and “terrorists in this world who can’t stand the thought of peace”(Hashmi2009:2).However, this approach seem to be particularistic, as it fails to cover the extremism propagated by other religions and thus fails to provide an understanding of the problem.

One can deduce from the various viewpoints that extremism as an ideology has always been there in society. It is not an attribute of a particular religion, but every religion suffers from elements of extremism. Nevertheless, religious extremism, per se, becomes problematic because on the one hand, religion propagates peace and harmony; while on the other it becomes the cause of violence and disharmony. This contradiction is inherent in every religion of the world and that needs to be curbed. The difference between religious extremism and religious moderation lies on

the question of “strictness versus leniency in the interpretation” of religious laws (Liebman 1983: 77). There are some who follow a more lenient path, but others take the strict and extremist path.

Religious extremism should not be confused with terrorism and tyranny. According to Prus (2005: 48), “the term terrorism is used broadly to refer to the activities of any individuals or groups of people thought to attack others or their possessions with the intention of more directly causing injury, loss, intimidation, fear, or anxiety on the part of particular targets (or those who in some way are concerned about the more immediately affected targets)”. While one can say that all terrorists are extremist, but all extremist are not terrorists. “Tyrants refer to people who, while presuming charge of some group of people, are seen to act towards these others in highly unilateral fashions and with seemingly comparatively little regard for the well-being of those over whom they have assumed positions of control. The practices and organizational features of those seen as controlling the life experiences of some community or group of others, what is envisioned as tyranny typically lends itself to imputations of injustice and violence along with related condemnations” (Prus 2005:49).

Fundamentalism¹⁵ too, is often used interchangeably with ‘extremism’, ‘radicalism’, ‘terrorism’ and ‘fanaticism’. However, the distinction is quite fuzzy, but it is important to understand the difference. Religious fundamentalism is following the pure form of the religion and its basic rules and by doing so, if an individual becomes intolerant of other people’s faith, then an individual becomes a religious extremist .So, to link religious fundamentalism to religious extremism does not arise. However, the fundamentalism can lead to extremism. An extreme and violent behaviour is not solely related to religious fundamentalism, but it can sometime be an end-result of a fundamentalist ideological trajectory. Lucy Sargisson (2007:273) considers that “fundamentalist groups seek to protect, preserve, and re-establish the core of their belief-system, which they believe to be under threat. This core is found in a pure and inerrant sacred text (usually this is a written text but sometimes it consists of a collection of stories or utterances

15 Scholar like Steve Bruce is of the view that one needs to reject the word ‘fundamentalism’ altogether as a response to the confusion which is created between the term fundamentalism and religious extremism.

by/about a sacred person or divinity. Sinhalese Buddhists, Tamil Hindus, and Sikhs in the Punjab, rely on the latter, while most Judaic, Muslim and Christian fundamentalists rely on the former.”

So, a religious fundamentalist is defined by his belief in the preaching of the holy text. As Heather explains:

a fundamentalist can be any individual or group that believes in the literal nature of the scripture, clear-cut religious practices and beliefs, and the perception that there is an urgent need to get back to basics—the fundamentals of the faith, which are being corrupted or have been lost, and to reassert religion into society and, in some cases, political life. Although its ideology is religious, fundamentalism is not just a religious movement. One can find fundamentalism in secular movements too (Heather 201:8).

Kamal (2013) gives three aspects of fundamentalism, which are based on national, ethnic and religious factors. There have been conflict between various identities instead of co-operation and that is how fundamentalism poses a threat. The fundamentalist are present in every religion, but they become a problem only if they turn violent or extremist, whether it is between two ethnic, religious or national groups.¹⁶Peter Lineham (2006) “observes that the history and identity of fundamentalism is quite complex” (Pratt 2008:1) as it is associated with variant forms of religious extremism. An extreme and violent behaviour is not solely related to religious fundamentalism, but it can be end-result of fundamentalist ideological trajectory. A religious fundamentalist will, thus be an individual or group which believes in the fundamentals of the Holy Scripture, which is their supreme authority.

The fundamentalists do believe in protecting the religion from distortions by the other community, in order to protect the changes that threaten the continuity of the tradition. Nevertheless, fundamentalists cannot be considered as extremists. Though one can say that fundamentalist ideas may lead to religious extremism, not all fundamentalists are extremists. Religious extremists resort to violence in order to react to the political, religious changes by fighting for traditional religion. Fundamentalists can be simply ascribed to those who are

¹⁶ Kamal, Sultana (2014), “The Rise of Fundamentalism in South Asia: Threat to Regional Integration: Bangladesh-India Friendship Dialogue; New Delhi 2014”, LECTURE delivered on 1st March 2014 at the India International Centre, New Delhi.

unusually religious or who claim to represent the truth and traditional faith. While those who resort to violent reaction in order to protect one's religion is termed as religious extremists.

“Religious extremists too are guided by a radical interpretation of their religion's basic tenet,” (Madu 2008), but they try to change the reality and history by propaganda and controlling the knowledge system of the country. Following strict social or religious norms and putting beliefs beyond everything else, they consider their religion to be under threat. This threat perception gives rise to ‘Other’ or ‘Enemy’, against which they act to protect the sanctity of the religion. Fundamentalism and extremism cannot be treated as same as there are liberals also who may turn extremists (Koshy 2012). So, religious fundamentalists, like religious extremists, believe in the basic tenant of scriptures and tend to guard their thinking from others but they may not resort to violent means. While “religious extremists are inclined to suppress the rights of other religions or secular forces in the society, they even organize violence against them” (Canetti-Nisim 2004: 41).

Causes of Religious Extremism

The religious extremism as an ideology has attracted people from diverse backgrounds. It is not that unemployed, uneducated people alone have been part of it, which is mostly believed to be the reason behind taking up extreme measures. In today's world we have seen well-educated individuals, coming from a good background, also resorting to extremist measures. It is believed that those who join these extremist movements they have been affected by the state's neglect and poor development policies, repressive regimes, and corruption. So, economic background also plays a major role in making an individual adopt violent means. But this cannot be applied universally because, especially if we take the example of South Asian countries, mostly the religious extremists are the ones who belong to majority community and they target the minorities from other religion in order to protect their own religion. They themselves have not witnessed or experienced any kind of subjugation, but the majority suffers from a minority complex.

The rise of religious extremism is often traced to the sacred religious text. However, in understanding religious extremism, if we divorce from the social, political, and economic contexts in which it arises then we will never be able to find the true cause of its rise. It is very important to consider the environment in which religious organizations operate. The major reasons behind religious extremism are:

Social Factor

The social factors, which can drive a person towards religious extremism, depend on the interaction that one has with society and the groups to which the one may have affiliated to. In addition, “individuals are driven by a combination of certain experiences (trauma or humiliation, fear of outside groups, alienation, frustration, and globalization) and psychological predispositions (the need for cognitive closure, respect for authority, and the need for uniqueness)” (Davies 2009: 190). According to Davies (2009:190), “for religious extremist, identity is very important. It is the threat to the identity, which also drives the religious extremist. If they find their identity, under threat from the ‘other’, they may resort to violence”. But, here it is also important to understand, whether there is actually a threat or just a perception of it.

Besides identity and adherence to the fundamentals of the religious texts, the religious extremist also fights for honour, and wanting to take revenge. It can be an in response any kind of insult or discrimination being carried out on that particular community, against which they fight back. If the identity has been under attack, or been discriminated, this can also act as a factor behind driving the religious extremist in resorting to violence. The geo-political developments of the place also play an important role in rise of religious extremism. If the political development is such that it favours the majority, while discriminating against the religious minorities, it can lead to assertion of identity in the form of violence. The religious extremism does not target or attack only in response of insult or discrimination being meted out to them in their own country. But it can also be in response of violence taking place in some other countries. As for Muslim extremists, they can have concern over violence and discrimination against the Muslims in Palestine or Afghanistan and the Buddhist in Myanmar and Sri Lanka have concern over attacks on Buddhist places of worship and monks in Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Therefore, the rise of religious extremism not only depends on the social interaction, which an individual receives from the society, but also the kind of experience that they have from such interactions. As one has a varied understanding of today's globalized world, it depends on which identity is more assertive. The assertion of religious identity in extremist sense will lead to violence and conflict

Political Factor

The advance of secularization was predicted by Marx, Freud and Weber, to take over religion and lead to its demise. On the contrary, the progression of secularization has led to the rise of religiously motivated violence. As religious organizations have perceived limited access to the political process to becoming limited, they try to increase their access. As their rhetoric intensifies more and more, they are excluded and thus resort to violence and extremism to establish their primacy. Examples include the Christian opposition to abortion in the United States, the Muslim pursuit of *Shariah* in Egypt and the religious-settler movement in Israel.

Ollapally (2008: i) argues that, “politics, inter-state and international relations often play a more important role in the rise of extremism in South Asia than identity, poverty and state repression.” And this explains why the majority community takes to violent means in these countries. It is the politics of creating fear against the “other”, and then mobilizing the community against for them reaps them political gains. Explanations based on elite manipulations explain “why conflict and extremism occurs in particular contexts and not in others and how ethnic and religious factors come to the forefront in some cases and not in others” (Ollapally 2008: 6). So, what determines the rise of religious extremism is how well the elites can manipulate and mobilize the masses to incite them against other groups or religion.

The state also seeks to take support from extremist organizations for political benefits and, in turn, provides them an opportunity to spread their influence in all the sectors of the society. The political parties provide them with a platform from where they can justify their acts. The organizations like Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) have been involved in extremist activities,

but they were allowed to take part in the elections, as they had support of the majority community. The religious extremism is the cause of violence within a nation, as well as source of tension between neighbouring countries.

The recent trend in the rise of religious extremism is its combination with radical nationalism. The intermingling of nationalism with religious extremism has created troubles, especially for the minorities in lot of places. The religious extremist, if they happen to represent the majority culture in a nation, then they tend to promote the dominant culture identity as the national identity. As is the case in Pakistan, the Islamic culture determines and defines the state identity and the extremists group tend to promote it, attacking all those who do not fit into it. “This means those specific local contexts, multiple-ethnic, tribal, regional and national-cultures and identities and other characteristics” (Madu 2008). So, it is not only the Holy Scripture that makes the extremists adopt violent means but the domestic affairs of the country may also act as a major factor. And, in the recent past, the religious extremists have become nationalist, and any one against their idea of nationalism, becomes their enemy. For example, groups like Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) promote and propagate Hindu nationalist identity.

Thus, there is interplay of religion and politics that can especially found in the South Asian countries. The religious groups in collaboration with politicians try to manipulate a particular community against the other community in the name of God.

Economic Factor

The third factor to the rise of religious extremism is the economic factor. Many theorists are of the view that it is the main driving force behind the rise of religious extremism. However, the point can be contested, as many individuals from a good educated background have also been responsible for religious extremist activities. Ted Gurr (1970: 36) posits “a ‘model of relative deprivation’ which gives men the reason to rebel. The severity of deprivation affects both the intensity of violence, i.e. in the extent of human and psychological damage incurred, and its duration”. A person less deprived has less chances of resorting to violence than the person who is deprived more. Moreover, religious fundamentalists can exploit it in order to lure people to take

extremist path in the name of God. However, this point can be contested, as “religious extremists are not the poorest of the poor, even those who are not deprived, oppressed are part of religious extremism. Religious extremism is attracting people from varied backgrounds, which is a point of concern” (Hashmi 2009:2). “Ted Gurr articulated models, suggesting that the gap between expectations and achievement would contribute to the willingness of the people to rebel. In particular, he observed, rebellion was most likely to be fuelled by movements on the basis of perceived deprivation” (Hashmi 2009:3).

“The deteriorating economic conditions, unemployment and lack of freedom of expression in society are all pertinent factors responsible for the growing number of radicals, despite the withdrawal of state patronage” (Hashmi 2009: 1). Though economy does make people resort to any kind of extremism, Hashmi (2009:4) points out the “fear” which “drives one to act aggressively”. So it is not only the poverty which makes one take aggressive stance, but also the fear to lose, which also make people turn to violent, extremist means.

The other factor, which has escalated the rise of religious extremism, is “globalization”, which has contributed to the increase of the network of violence and terror across the nations. In the globalized world along with the advance of technology, the spread of violence and conflict has become easier. The other factor related to religious violence and terror, which needs attention is that after the attacks of September 11, the term “Islamic terrorism” has become widely used, and there is a tendency to see the two terms as casually linked. Some scholars argue that decisions to use violence rest on the belief inherent to specific religious texts. This has been the dominant western perspective, which is being propagated and needs to be checked.

As stated earlier, one should not see rise in religious violence as a result of religious conservatism, orthodoxy or because of certain religious text promoting it. Religion is not the only aspect behind the rise in violence and conflict, but the other socio-cultural, political, economic factors also need to be accounted for. Religion has always been the driving force for individuals and groups, but what is problematic about religion is that the very religion which talks about peace and harmony can lead to aggressive and violent activities taking life of

innocent people. While looking into factors behind religious extremism, there is also a need to understand the geo-politics of the region. Different regions have their own history, culture and politics, which determine the rise of religious extremism.

Strategies of Religious Extremism

Religious extremism as an ideology cannot alone draw people and thus there has to be certain strategy involved in order to propagate and promote the idea. There are various organizations and groups, which conduct and organize programmes in order to first make familiar with their ideology. By participating in such organizations and groups, people start accepting the hard-line and fundamentalist viewpoints. There are various such extremist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, Bodu Bala Sena in Sri Lanka, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, and 969 Movement in Myanmar, which have been involved in extremist activism. These organizations and groups devise strategies and create domestic and international links to cultivate their ideology.

The other strategy, which they use, is to create an enemy. They make people believe that their religion is under threat and there is a need to save it. Religious extremism “develops rapidly in an atmosphere of hatred, distrust and enmity”¹⁷. One religious class or sect hating another, simply on the basis of beliefs and ideas between them, and a “prolonged hatred and distrust result in deep-rooted enmity”¹⁸. So they use the social and political situations in order to create an environment of insecurity and danger to the religion. The major religious extremist groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) or 969 Movement have always targeted the other religious groups and used it as a tool to thrive, spread and strengthen their organization.

The religious extremist groups also selectively interpret their holy book. This way they make people believe in their cause. Many people in this way have become part of such extremist organizations, so as to save the world and establish the rule of God on earth. As every religion

¹⁷ Mishra, Anant (2014), “The Issue of Religious Extremism”, Indian Defence Review [Online web] Accessed 12th Jan 2015 URL: www.indiadefencereview.com/spotlights/the-issue-of-religious-extremism.

¹⁸*ibid*

consists of moderate and extremist elements, the religious extremists chose the extremist interpretation and justify them through the selective study of the holy book. It is not easy to influence people only through the words of the Holy Scripture and so the religious extremists also use symbols to lure people.

Anderlini and Koch (2015:5) have identified three strategies employed by the religious extremists against the women, but they can be used to understand how extremism works in the mainstream. They, first point out the use of technology and media by the religious extremists. Media, both social and mainstream, has become an effective tool in propagating their ideology and reaching out to their target audience¹⁹. “The television shows, newspaper, radio channels have become a way of reaching out to the wider mass and at the same time generating sympathy and support for their cause”²⁰. Gosh (2015) also puts forward the view that “radio to satellite television broadcasting, new information and communications technologies have been effectively harnessed, often in a negative way, to propagate religious and political messages”²¹. This has served as one of the reasons “to amplify the virulence of ethnic and religious tensions” in various regions of the world.²²

19 Koch and Anderlini (2015), “Extremism in the Mainstream: Implications for and Actions by Women”, Commissioned by UN Women [Online: web] Accessed on 12th Jan 2015 URL: www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Extremism-in-the-Mainstream-Implications-for-and-Actions-by-Women-Jan2015.pdf.

20 Koch and Anderlini (2015), “Extremism in the Mainstream: Implications for and Actions by Women”, Commissioned by UN Women [Online: web] Accessed on 12th Jan 2015 URL: www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Extremism-in-the-Mainstream-Implications-for-and-Actions-by-Women-Jan2015.pdf.

21 “Religious Extremism and Governance in South Asia : Internal and External Pressures”, United States Institute of Peace [Online: web] Accessed on 11th March 2015 URL: www.usip.org/publications/religious-extremism-and-governance-in-south-asia-internal-and-external-pressures.

22 “Religious Extremism and Governance in South Asia : Internal and External Pressures”, United States Institute of Peace [Online: web] Accessed on 11th March 2015 URL: www.usip.org/publications/religious-extremism-and-governance-in-south-asia-internal-and-external-pressures.

The second strategy employed by these organizations is the alliance with the political parties. Religious institutions have a mass appeal, which is beneficial for the political parties. Then, such religious extremist organizations have been increasingly taking part in politics and providing the political movements a social legitimacy and societal trust. They support politicians and parties (or can threaten the withdrawal of their endorsement) in exchange for political support of legislation that may be regressive or tolerance of human rights abuses. Once these religious movements secure their access to the political space, they extend their influence in all sectors. One such extremist organization is Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB), which contests elections as a political party in Bangladesh.

The religious extremist institutions and groups also linked to “the rise of neoliberalism or ‘extreme’ capitalism. The neoliberal policy of limited government expenditure has destroyed the basic social safety nets provided services to poor and rural communities. Therefore, absence of state not only contributed to the growing inequality between the rich and poor, but also created a vacuum filled by non-state service providers’ typically religious institutions providing education, health and welfare services. The educational institutions and curricula have been critical means by which extremist and intolerant views and values have spread. In each instance, the service which they provide is accompanied by proselytizing and the spread of their values” (Anderlini and Koch 2015: 7). The extremists also have the tendency of interpreting history, to suite them and, in the process, tend to change it. Thus, they try to change and history by propaganda and controlling the education system.

Manifestation of Religious Extremism and its Implications

The sole purpose of religious extremism is to create an environment of hatred and negativity. Extremists do this by propagating hatred through their speeches in which they refer to the Holy Scripture and harp upon the ignorance of common people and make them believe in their cause.

Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2006) conducted a survey in 119 countries and it found out that inter-state and intra-state conflicts have increased. A crisis belt of three areas, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), South and Southeast Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), accounts for most intrastate conflicts and for more than 80 per cent of all terrorist incidents. Most affected countries are Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia and Thailand. It further stated that the reach and tenor of religious extremism has deepened, especially in South and Southeast Asia and MENA. However, political extremism in many of these countries is more prosaic than believed, and religious terrorism still accounts for a third of all militant groups worldwide.

Religious extremists are involved in violence and killings by creating the notion of “other” and “enemy” in the society. They conduct rallies and small gatherings to propagate their ideology and thus develop their base in the society and justify their act. Thus, religious extremism can be both violent and non-violent. Through rallies and meetings they do spread hatred in the society, but not everyone takes part in violence and conflict. But if it is cultivated for long, the ideology can in no time turn violent. And the religious extremists thus invest in people and achieve their goal.

The hate speeches, which they use against other communities, are used as a tool to ignite the masses and manipulate them. The religious extremists also rewrite history, which suits their purpose and helps in spreading their propaganda against other communities. The religious extremist have from time to time, devised new strategies and policies to counter modernism and secularism.

The religious extremists believe in extremist means and so they do not fear in involving in violence and conflict. The means to which they resort create threat for other communities, so that they fear them. It can be either through killings, attacking other communities’ places of worship, business or grabbing of lands, burning of houses, etc. All these help in creating an environment of fear, which provides the religious extremists with the power to control and threaten. This is also the reason why politicians also use religious extremists in polarizing votes.

Countering Religious Extremism

The way in which religious extremism is affecting a person, has made it important to counter it in every way. The Religious extremism is a major concern next to terrorism, because of its tendency to influence people and convince them to resort to violence. So, in order to counter the “religious groups which have strengthened their political base” (Hashmi 2008:1) in the society and owing to the fact that religious group now also have international funding and support, they “have become financially independent and powerful” (Hashmi 2008:2). The state need to take measures to address the problem of unemployment among the youths.

There is also a need to separate religion and politics, especially in the case of South Asian countries as religion plays an important role, not only within the society but also in politics, which need to be checked. If the religious extremists stop getting support from the political leaders, they will find it difficult to expand their base in the society. The state in order to mobilize and polarize communities has resorted to the help of religious extremists. Tariq Ali (2005) strongly posits that “there should be a ‘moratorium’ on the state sponsorship of religion”.

The media also plays an important role in propagating the extremist ideologies. The 21st century is known as the age of technology and the technology can be used as well as misused. The religious extremism sustains itself by the hate messages and speeches, which they deliver against the “other” or the “enemy”. So, the “fundamental responsibility on the part of the media and the ability of the readership to deconstruct messages. In conflict societies, however, the hate media has been a counter to democracy and peace. Hate radio played a key role in starting the genocide in Rwanda” (Gardner 2001). “Privately owned but government controlled, RTLM (Radio Mille Collines) was created in mid-1993 with shareholders that had strong ties to the ruling regime and its security forces. After securing a regular audience through pop music, it then broadcast political propaganda and death warrants, encouraging the killing of Tutsis” (Davies 2009: 197).

It is important to counter myth and hate speeches, with truth and positive news. Most of the news channels in order to increase their channels rating tends to sensationalize news and at time also deals in misinformation. According to Kaplan and Bjorgo (1998) “There is also propaganda that works in the media, which should be countered by educating ourselves about the web and cyberspace. The internet can be democratic and peace promoting, such as the Cyber Peace project which fosters dialogue between Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians through intergroup conversations. But it can also contribute to polarization and foster bigotry through hate-based and conspiracy websites and films.”

The resistance to extremism comes from, as identified by Sen (2004:73) the “use of civil laws, courage and commitment of civil dissidents, the fair mindedness of many upright members of the judiciary, the presence of a large body of social, progressive public opinion and the effectiveness of the media in drawing attention to inhumanity and violation of civil decency as issues for the attention of a ‘reflective public’.”

The Civil society can work closely with the affected community and hear the grievances of them may help its members in many ways. It can be used to counter the myths and propaganda of religious extremists. An individual or community also turns to extremism if its grievances are unheard or injustice is done to them. So, in this case civil society can come to rescue and help to develop confidence among the community in conflict. The state should also make an effort to work in collaboration with civil society in order to control religious extremism. Thus, through these measures, religious extremism can be effectively countered.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework of religious extremism provides various definitions of the term and identifies causes behind its rise. The certain religious text are said to act as a catalyst for violent and extremist activities. But if we are seeing religion to be the sole cause for religious extremism, then we will never able to discern or curb religious extremism. There is a close connection between religion and social, political and economic factors. Religious extremism is a danger to the society as it has capacity to control the reason of individuals and thus tempt them to violent activities in name of faith. It is not the education which can help religious extremism, but in order to counter it the state will have to develop inter-community activities to bridge the gap between communities.

Religious extremism manifests itself in the form of violence, riots and divisions within the society as well as tension between nations. This has become a major security concern for the societies and has led to war and tension. Lastly, the chapter has discussed the ways through which religious extremism can be countered and a peaceful and healthy environment can be created. It is possible if individuals, state and civil society act together in order to check the hatred spread by groups to develop tolerance in the society.

Chapter II

Religious Extremist Organizations in Sri Lanka

The chapter seeks to analyse the religious extremist organizations, their objectives, strategies and goals. Sri Lankan society is a multicultural society. While the foremost place is given to Buddhism it does protect other religion too. A true measure of a democracy is how they treat their minority. Though Sri Lanka has constitutional safeguards for minority, it has not been realized in the true sense. The present chapter will first, examines the Sri Lankan society and its politics and then analyse the role of Buddhist monks' role in politics. The political parties, which propagate the ideas of Buddhist nationalism, have also been analyzed and their ideologies and manifestos illustrated. And lastly, the extremist Sinhalese-Buddhist organizations, their ideologies and strategies are dealt with.

Society and Politics in Sri Lanka

“Sri Lanka (known as Ceylon until 1972) is a small island in the Indian Ocean situated at the foot of the South Asian subcontinent” (Imtiyaz and Saleem 2015: 187). Sri Lankan state has diverse religious and ethnic population. The Sinhalese-Buddhist is 75 percent of the population which make them the dominant ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. The Hindu Tamil ethnic group can be divided into Sri Lankan Tamils, who are progeny of long-settled migrants from the south-eastern India and the Indian Tamils who are descendents of the recent immigrants, brought during the British during the colonial period. Sri Lanka Tamils are the largest ethnic minority in the country constituting of 13 per cent of the population. Muslims are descendants of Arab merchants and they constitute 9.7per cent of the total population and Christians constitute 7.4 per cent of the total population of 20.2 million.²³

²³For further details see, Sri Census of Population and Housing (2011), [Online: web] Accessed on 23 March 2015 URL: www.statistics.gov.lk.

“Sri Lanka’s population has always been heterogeneous” (Winslow 2004:4) and so different languages and culture can be found here. According to Imtiyaz:

Two main languages are spoken in Sri Lanka: Sinhala, the language of the Sinhalese majority, and Tamil, which is spoken by both Muslims and Tamils. Although Sinhala and Tamil are of different origins, they share some common features and have influenced one another’s linguistic evolution. Sinhala language is believed to be derived from one of two phases of development of the Indo-Aryan group of languages: Old Indo-Aryan (c. 2000-800 B.C.E.), represented by the Sanskrit language, and Middle Indo-Aryan (c.800 B.C.E.-400C.E.), represented by Pali, the language of Buddhist scripture. Tamil belongs to the Dravidian family of languages, spoken by the natives of the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Tamil was used widely as medium of communication in trade and business along the Indian and Sri Lankan coasts. Arab traders from the Middle East also used Tamil when they traded in the region (Imtiyaz 2013: 675).

Even though there are differences in language and culture, still one find features of syncretism in Sri Lanka, as rites and rituals followed by or associated with one faith, can also be found in the other. For, example, different religions in Sri Lanka shares their places of worship and deities. There is respect among people for each other’s faith; any difference and conflict between the communities are created for polarization of the society. The religious groups also share their places of worship. Adam’s peak is visited by people out of reverence and the divinity of the place. Kataragama is home for Buddhist, Muslims and Tamils and is considered as a holy site. So, there is no sharp divide between the various communities and these should have been used to build a more cohesive society. However, the Buddhist religious extremist tends to create more difference in the society, than bringing the society together by emphasising on Sinhalese-Buddhist identity.

“The majority of Sinhalese adhere to the Theravada school of Buddhism, which was introduced in Sri Lanka during the second century B.C.E. by the Venerable Mahinda, the son the Emperor Asoka, during the reign of Sri Lankan King Devanampiyatissa” (Imtiyaz 2013:675). The Tamils in Sri Lanka follow Hinduism. Though Buddhism and Hinduism are connected to each other spiritually, there were tensions between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils. The Sinhalese see themselves as “‘sons of the soil’, and legitimize it from the mytho-history of “Mahavamsa (Great Chronicle), first written around the sixth century BC and updated during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and eighteenth centuries to explain Buddhism’s ascendance and pre- eminence in Sri Lanka”(DeVotta 2007: 5).

Sri Lanka is a democracy, but it still gives foremost place to Buddhism. According to Imtiyaz:

The “Buddhist *bhikkus*(monks)play an important role in Sri Lanka’s socio-political life and hold considerable influence over politicians and policy markers. Religious symbols and leaders dominate the country’s political agenda, and Sinhalese politicians often politicize Buddhism to win the support of Sinhalese who approach Buddhist monks for guidance. Buddhism monks argue that anyone may call Sri Lanka home, so long as the Buddhist Sinhalese enjoy cultural, religious, economic, political, and linguistic hegemony. The state remains officially neutral in religious affairs, though a provision in the country’s current constitution (instituted in 1978), grants a privileged places in national life for the Buddhist religion while protecting the rights of those minority groups that adhere to other religions to practice their faiths”(Imtiyaz 2013: 675).

The Buddhist follows a path of peace and harmony. However, recent events have changed this conception, as Buddhist monks have been involved in acts of violence and killing. Whether it is monks of Burma or Sri Lanka, they have no qualms over involving in violent activities. The Buddha’s philosophy aims at attainment of good life, free from the cycle of sorrow and pain. In order to attain this one has to follow the path laid down by Buddha. As Jayatilleke quotes “The practice of good life included living in peace and harmony with the fellow human beings, which in Pali was known as ‘*sama-cariya*’. Harmonious living generated ‘inner peace’ within the individual, which was identified as ‘*ajjhatta-santi*’ (Suttanipata v. 837). In the Buddhist tradition, harmonious living, *sama-cariya*, has been identified very closely with the notion of righteous living *dhamma-cariya*” (Jayatilleke 1983). Righteousness and harmony both together can help in attaining peace between individuals and the society at large.

Buddhist Monks in Sri Lanka

There is a perception that the Buddhist monks form an absolute class without any differences. However, there are divisions and difference within the Buddhist monks too. Also, while there are some monks who follow a path of peace while others who engage in violence and conflict. According to Reed (2002):

“The Buddhist monks are truth-seeker on an individual journey. Buddhist texts consistently urge individuals to deal with others as individuals deserving equal treatment,

not as parts of religious or social collectivises. This ideal is not always achieved. For instance, contemporary Buddhist monks are known to have looked down on ‘low-caste’ drummers.” (quoted in de Silva 2006: 203)

And so Buddhists monks are just like any other common individual within the society. Though lot of respect and reverence is attached to the monks

The monks in “Sri Lanka often see themselves as loosely organized, weak and prone to disunity”, and are organized in Nikayas²⁴. There are only 37,000 monks in Sri Lanka who organize themselves in three Nikayas (the three monastic orders): “Siyam Nikaya, Amarapura Nikaya and Ramanna Nikaya” (de Silva 2006:204). “Overall, the Siyam Nikaya is the largest” (DeVotta 2007: 20) and “has 18,000 monks or about half of the Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka and has close ties with the goyigama (farmer) caste to which the majority of Sinhallas belong. The Siyam Nikaya has 2 major units (Malvatta and Asgiriya) and 5 others that are aligned to one or the other of the major units. There are no major doctrinal divisions within the Siyam Nikaya and, on the whole; the leadership of the Mahanayakas (chief patriarchs) of Malvatta and Asgiriya is rarely challenged” (de Silva 2006:204).

Pannasiha Thera (1990) states that “the second major order, the *Amarapura Nikaya* has about 12,000 monks which were founded in 1802 by Ambagahapitiye Nanavimlatissa as an effort to open the sangha to more individuals outside the goyigama caste, the fraternity grew swiftly, but later split into many divisions due to geography, caste identity, and other disputes. The push for unity was perhaps strongest in this fraternity because in the 1940s, the Amarapura Nikaya comprised over thirty separate branches, each with its own *mahanayaka*. An effort to unite these subgroups succeeded in 1969 and today the Amarapura Nikaya has a unified leadership” (de Silva 2006: 204). According to de Silva (2006: 204), “one of the chief patriarchs of the Amarapura Nikaya, Venerable Madihe Pannasiha, was a leading figure in the movement”.

²⁴ Nikaya is a Pali word meaning “volume”. It means “collection,” “assemblage,” “class” or “group” in both Pali and Sanskrit (Davies and Stede 1921: 25).

“The smallest of the three *Nikayas* is the *Ramanna* and consists of around 7,500 monks. However, unlike the other two *Nikayas*, the *Ramanna Nikaya* is structurally unitary, with a single mahanayaka, and is organized into regional units” (DeVotta 2007: 207). “It is particularly strong in the southwest, but has expanded into other regions during the last century. While it has no specific caste affiliations, many of its prominent lay supporters are drawn from the *Karava* (fisherman) caste” (de Silva 2006: 204).

The politics and religion have always played an important role in Sri Lankan society and so bhikkus have always held an influential position within the society, with many politicians paying allegiance to them. Thus, “there is extensive support among *bhikkus* for state support of religion but one of the major concerns within the sangha is an effort to avoid division through party politics” (de Silva 2001). “The *mahanayakes* (chief priests) of the *nikayas* command enormous influence” (DeVotta 2007: 20), and even politicians tend to fulfil their demands to make them happy.

The Buddhist Monks and their Involvement in Politics

Political Buddhism, which emerged in the post-independence era, in which the Buddhist monks started taking part in politics, created the imbalance in the society. Political Buddhism has the ultimate political aim to operationalize/instrumentalize Buddhist values, concepts, rituals, texts, etc. Political Buddhism is different from Buddhist politics as it aims at introducing Buddhist values in society. Political Buddhism is different from Buddhist politics as it aims at introducing Buddhist values in the society. “The Sri Lankan public today, as represented by the media, has idealized the business monk in the monastery, the political monk in Parliament and the fighting monk in the streets who engage in the defence of the ‘motherland against the Tamil ‘terrorists’” (Schalk 1997).

Sri Lankan Buddhist Monks, participation in politics began in the middle of twentieth century. The *Janatha Vimukti Peramuna* (JVP), though a leftist organization, had the support of young Buddhist monks also. The participation in active politics was not the norm of Theravada

Buddhist. But gradually this changed and the monks not only started taking part the active politics, but also floated their own party.

According to Deegalle (2006: 234), “the first account of a Buddhist monk contesting elections comes from 1943. Venerable Migettuvatte Jinananda contested for Colombo Municipal Council but he was defeated. In 1957, Venerable Walletotha Pannadassi contested for a village council in the Matara District and became the first elected Buddhist monk” Following Pannadassi, “several Buddhist monks became members of village councils, in other local authorities and in provincial councils. Though monks took part in local elections, and not in parliamentary elections. Venerable Pinikahane Saddhatissa became the first Buddhist monk to contest in the parliamentary election held for Karadeniya in 1977 but he was also defeated” (Deegalle 2006: 235). The watershed moment in the involvement of monks in ethno-politics in Sri Lanka occurred in December 2001. “In 1992, Venerable Baddegama Samitha had contested in the village council elections and became an elected member of the Southern Provincial Council while in December 2001 Parliamentary elections; Venerable Samitha contested successfully in the elections held for Galle District and became the first Buddhist monk elected for the Sri Lankan Parliament²⁵. He contested the election under People’s Alliance (PA) ticket though he had been a monk member of the Lanka Samasamaja Party” (LSSP).

The Sinhala-Buddhist ideology held by Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka and the promotion of this ideology to subjugate other communities had given rise to the separatist movement of Tamil community. The Tamils were discriminated in educational, political and economical spheres. The monks’ involvement in politics pushed forward for the military solution to the problem. It is believed that after independence, the Sangha has developed an ideology of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in which particular identity is given prominence over the identities of the minority ethnic groups in the country. According to Seneviratne (1999):

Anagarika Dharmapala, who is termed as the founder of Buddhist modernism, defined Buddhist monks’ role as ‘a caretaker of the flock and social worker’. The new role attributed by Dharmapala to the monk had two distinct aspects, namely, economic and

²⁵ For further details see, Deegalle, Mahinda (2006), *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, New York : Routledge.

pragmatic and ideological and political. The former was the need to uplift the living standards and the quality of life of the ordinary people in the country. The latter was to revive what Dharmapala thought to be the ideal Sinhalese Buddhist culture of ancient Sri Lanka. Of these two tasks, the first was taken up by a group of monks associated with the Vidyodaya Pirivena, one of the two prominent centres of Buddhist learning established in 1873 and the other being Vidyalankara Pirivena established after two years, the members of which undertook to materialize the second aspect of Dharmapala's interpretation of the monk's role."(Seneviratne 1999)

The Vidyalankara faction of monks who followed the teachings and vision of Dharmapala were the one to establish a "hegemonic Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism". This was further widened by Walpola Rahula's vision who compiled his ideas in *The Heritage of the Bhikku* (1974). On Rahula's teaching, Seneviratne (1999) states:

is a work that has influenced the monkhood more than any other in the recent history of Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism. The main features of *The Heritage* given by Rahula were: advocating secular education for the monks; discouraging monks from participating in their traditional religious (ritualistic) functions; advocating social service, which also meant involvement in politics for monks. The monks' acceptance of the ideology of *The Heritage* gave rise to a monastic middle class who dealt with money and power. (Seneviratne 1999)

The Vidyalankara's ideology of monks' involvement in politics was revolutionary and it provided monks with an opportunity to seek profit and involve in the politics of the society. Thus Rahula's teachings gave birth to a new class of monks, which did not hesitate to take part in politics or involve in killing and violence. The confinement of monks in the pursuit of good life which involved reflecting on the inner peace was now to focus on the outwardly life and involvement in the society and with people, money and muscle power.

Thus, Dharmapala and Rahula have been key figures in the history of Sri Lankan society and the Buddhist monks have been influenced by their teachings and ideas. The Buddhist monks actively took part in politics, in order to protect the rights of Sinhalese-Buddhists. Their teachings gave a new twist to the ideology of monks and even now monks in Sri Lanka are influenced by their teachings. The two such party taking parts in elections are *Sinhala Urumaya* (SU) and *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU). Their manifestos reflect their ideology, which is to work for the rights and protection of Buddhism and Sinhalese-Buddhists in Sri Lanka. This ideology has shaped the

Sinhalese- Buddhist nationalism in which the primacy is given to Buddhism, Sinhala language, culture and traditions.

This Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism has been on the rise in the post-civil period and extremists' organizations have been carrying out violence in the name of protecting the national identity. The organizations involved are Bodu Bala Sena, Sinhala Ravaya and Ravana Balaya, of which Bodu Bala Sena is the prominent organization involved in promotion and protection of Buddhism. But before understanding the ideologies and strategies of these organizations, one has to understand the Political Buddhism of Sri Lanka. The Political Buddhism of Sri Lanka has been promoting Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism, but they are not extremist organizations. Though they are right-wing but they do not organize or coordinate violence in Sri Lanka. Their aim has been to represent the Sinhalese-Buddhist, as they consider other political parties have failed to keep promise to.

Politics of Sinhala Urumaya and Jathika Hela Urumaya

According to DeVotta (2007: 24), “the political parties which support political Buddhism and thus promote the national ideology are the Janatha Vimukhti Peramuna (People’s Liberation Front-JVP), the Sinhala Urumaya (Sinhala Heritage – SU), and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Sinhalese Heritage Party-JHU). The *Sinhalatva* defends the integrity and sovereignty of the unitary state. Its character is ethnic homogenization and political centralization. The more militant organization within the *Sinhalatva* movement is called *Sinhala Urumaya*, ‘Sinhala Heritage.’ This ‘Sinhala Heritage’ has established itself as a political party in the parliamentary elections of 2 April 2004 and gained 5.97 per cent of the votes and nine seats in Parliament under the name *Jathika Hela Urumaya*, ‘National Sinhala Heritage’.”

In order to understand the religious extremist organizations in Sri Lanka, it is also important to understand the ideologies of the right-wing Buddhist political parties. This section deals in detail with the politics of JHU and SU, their formation and manifesto. The Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), one of the extremist organizations had split from JHU, stating that it was not militant enough. So,

there is a need to understand the politics of JHU and SU and how have they contributed in making the Sinhala-Buddhist identity more prominent.

The JHU, JVP and SU are the chief parties which want to uphold Buddhism and establish a link between the state and religion, and had advocated a violent solution to the question of Tamil and opposed all form of devolution to the minorities, particularly the Tamils. The *Janatha Vimukti Peramuna* was founded in 1965, and it carried out two failed insurgency against the Sri Lanka state in 1971 and 1987-89 in which around 50,000 people were killed. It was a left-wing organization but when it entered the mainstream politics it became the promoter of Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinism to win the votes of the majority.

The right-wing party, “Jathika Hela Urumaya fielded over 200 monk candidate for the election in February 2004”²⁶. It was another watershed moment in the history of Sri Lanka when an all monk party contested an election. “The JHU won nine parliamentary seats: 3 from Colombo District, 2 from Gampaha District, 1 from Kalutara District and 2 from the national list” (Deegalle 2004:6).

The JHU, as a newly emerged party sought the “legal validation of the Sinhala Urumaya (SU) as a political party registered in Sri Lanka in order to contest in the April 2004 election. The JHU signed a memorandum of understanding with the Sinhala Urimaya (Sinhala Heritage Party), founded in 2000, so that only the monks of the JHU would contest the election as opposed to the lay leadership of the Sinhala Urumaya” (Deegalle 2004:6).

The reason behind understanding the politics of JHU and Sinhala Urumaya (SU) is that they are the parties representing the concern of the Buddhists. While Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), the extremist organization, mainly responsible for the conflict, violence and riots taking place in Sri Lanka, had split from the right-wing monks party, Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) on the grounds that the latter was not militant enough.

26 For further details see, Deegalle, Mahinda (2004), “Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka”, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 5(2): 83-103.

The Sinhala Urumaya was formed in the wake of ethnic problem in the Sri Lankan state and the demand for devolution of power. According to Deegalle:

To unify likeminded nationalists, the Sinhala Urumaya (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 Sinhala Urumaya as a political party on 17 August 2000. In its first election, the SU was able to secure one seat in the Parliament (through the national list) by polling 127, 863 votes (1.47%).(Deegalle 2004:7)

The preoccupation of the Sinhala Urumaya with the idea of ‘Sinhalese’ nation and ‘Sinhala civilization’ has resulted in portrayal of the party as extremist and nationalist by the media. The SU consider that the politicians are “prepared to barter the sovereignty of the nation for the sake of power” (Deegalle 2006: 238) and so it significant for a party to represent the grievances of the Sinhalese communtiy .The Sinhala Urumaya and the JHU was unhappy with the peace negotiations, which were taking place with the LTTE, their primary concern is to protect the Sinhala Buddhism.

The objectives of Sinhala Urumaya are as follows:

1. “To safeguard the independence and sovereignty of the nation and territorial integrity of the country.
2. To safeguard the unitary form of the national constitution.
3. To uphold Sinhalese, the national language as the only official language and the Sinhala culture as the national culture while respecting the other non-Sinhala cultures.
4. To uphold, protect and propagate Buddhism (the state religion), and to respect the principle of religious freedom of the non-Buddhists.
5. To protect and develop the National Economy focusing mainly on the upliftment of the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan people in general.
6. To protect the rich environment and bio-diversity in Sri Lanka and traditional eco-friendly knowledge systems and technology.
7. To uphold the sovereignty of people and social justice by practicing a democratic system of governance.

8. 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” (Deegalle 2004:9)

Thus, the objective of Sinhala Urumaya reflects the promotion and assertion of Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology. The focus on Buddhism, Sinhala language upholds the assertion of the majority community but focusing on unitary and a strong united Sri Lankan people threatens the existence of minorities. “The JHU shuns non-violence as a means to seek political alternatives for the Tamil national question, and has been urging young Sinhala-Buddhists to sign up for the army. As a result, as many as 30,000 Sinhalese young men have signed up for the army in the past few months” (Imtiyaz 2010: 151)).

In order to explore the socio-religious context behind the formation of JHU as a political, it is crucial to understand the sudden death of popular Buddhist preacher, Venerable Gangodavila Soma (1948-2003). The Soma’s death provided a platform to JHU to establish itself as a party for Sinhalese-Buddhists and it well exploited this opportunity “advantage by using rumours surrounding his death”. The untimely death of Venerable Soma, who has been characterized by the newspapers as ‘the embodiment of Buddhist morality and paragon of virtue’, triggered a new awareness on the state of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, which the JHU employed in its campaign. “Soma himself invoked the alleged conspiracy theories over his own death in his last speech in Kandy”. Announcing his entrance to politics, Soma stated:

There is a conspiracy to murder me. If my murder can awake Sinhalya, 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 (Deegalle 2006:239).

Due to this, and the growing issue of unethical conversions, anti-Christians rhetorics were provoked at Soma’s funeral site. At Soma’s funeral, the leader of the JHU, the then President of the *Jathika Sangha Sammelanaya*, Venerable Ellawala Medhananda, accused very bluntly: “Christian fundamentalist connection to Soma Thero’s untimely death in St. Petersburg, Russia was not an accident” (Deegalle 2006:240). Soma was a controversial leader as he was vocal

about the issues related to Sinhalese and Buddhists. Soma was considered equivalent to the reformer Dharmapala who had aroused the Sri Lankan Buddhist and inspired them and made them aware to protect their socio-cultural and be proud of it.

Soma, at the age 26 years, in 1974 had received novice ordination and began monastic training at the Bhikkhu Training Centre, Maharagama, under the guidance of two prominent Buddhist monks sVenerable Madihe Pannasiha (1913-2003) and Venerable Ampitiye Rahula. In 1976, Soma received the higher ordination. In 1989, he founded Buddhist Vihara Victoria and served as the chief incumbent until his death on 12 December 2003. After seven years of *dhammaduta* activities in Australia, Soma returned to Sri Lanka in 1996 in order to help the people of the country.

After Soma's death, the JHU often used Soma for its own advantage. He was used to build an image of lost Sinhala identity which needed to be revoked. The JHU's national campaign to win the parliamentary election for establishing a righteous state is presented as a continuation of Soma'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 left by his 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 part of his campaign by strongly supporting the Jathika Hela Urumaya. This will be the greatest respect you can bestow on this outstanding monk (Deegalle 2006:241)

A pro-JHU website mentioned several political, religious and economic reasons, including the death of Soma, for the sudden birth of the JHU. According to the website report, JHU emerged as 'the end result of a long list of reasons' which he identifies as the result political and democratic 'non-representation of Sinhalese Buddhists' in the Sri Lanka political system. Soma's death is identified as the immediate cause for the rise of JHU, while the economic reason stated was that due to past policies of Sri Lankan government, the way politicians used the political process by using minority votes at the cost of Sinhala-Buddhist rights, the failure of the rulers to recognize the Sinhala-Buddhist cultural heritage and the use of the Buddhist Sangha for

political gains, the failure to establish a just and secure civil society and the extremist activities of some Tamils and Muslim claim in the eastern province²⁷.

The main agenda of Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) is to establish a Buddhist state and this is one of the main reasons behind their coming into politics. The party believes that other parties have failed to protect Buddhism and so they ventured into politics. Deegalle (2006: 17) points out five factors, which led the Buddhist monks of the JHU to contest in the general elections held in April 2004²⁸:

1. “The perception of Venerable Soma’s untimely death as systematic conspiracy to weaken Buddhist reformation and renewal.
2. Increasing accusations of intensified ‘unethical’ Christian conversions of poor Buddhists and Hindus.
3. Continuing fear of the LTTE’s in the context of peace negotiations.
4. The unstable political situation in which the two main political parties UNP and SLFP are in power struggle in the midst of resolving the current ethnic problem and
5. The political ambitions of some JHU monks” (Deegalle 2004:93).

The monks have taken part in the politics not only to establish Sinhala Buddhist nationalism but unethical conversion has also been a major issue for them. A Buddhist group named ‘Jayagrahanaya’ in 1995 has written extensively on ‘unethical’ conversions carried out among poor Buddhists and Hindus by various non-denominational Christian groups. Venerable Madagama Dhammananda (Dhammananada Thera 2001), Project Director of the Success had published a booklet, *Agam Maruva* (Changing Religions) in which he stated that there are 150 NGOs registered in Sri Lanka under Company Registration Act which carry out conversions. And so JHU have also fought for the passing of the unethical anti-conversion Bill in parliament.

²⁷For further details, please refer to Deegalle, Mahinda (2004), “Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka”, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 5(2): 83-103.

²⁸ Deegalle, Mahinda (2004), “Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Mons: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka,” *Contemporary Buddhism*, 5(2):83-103

Various “groups including the monks who formed the JHU have demanded from the Sri Lankan government to pass a bill in the parliament to ban unethical conversions carried out among poor Buddhists and Hindus. The JHU believed that both the major Sinhala-dominated political parties are not willing to ban unethical religious conversions”²⁹. Deegalle(2004:18) also identifies “four significant milestones in the gradual development of present political activism of Buddhist monks of the JHU by drawing support from wide range of ideologies and a cross section of Sri Lankan population,” which according to Deegalle are:

1. “The founding of Jathika Sangha Sabhava (National Sangha Council) in 1997 by drawing support from monks of the three monastic fraternities.
2. The birth of SU (Sinhala Heritage) Party on 20 April 2000.
3. The birth of Jathika Sangha Sammelanaya (National Sangha Assembly) and
4. Subsequent formation of JHU in February 2004 as an all-monk political party to contest April 2004 elections” (Deegalle 2004:18)

Thus, we can see that from time to time, monks have tried to take part in elections in order to establish a *dhammadarajya*. These organizations may have not resorted to violent means, but their ideology further helps the extremist organizations to justify their actions and also gain support. As a political party JHU supports the Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology as seen earlier. This way they are violent not through their actions, but the kind of politics which they take part in.

Extremist Organizations in Sri Lanka

The Buddhist monks, instead of preaching peace and harmony, have been involved in delivering hate speeches, making the mob carry out attacks and violence on the minorities within the country. The main religious extremists group responsible for the conflicts and riots is Bodu Bala Sena, while Ravana Balaya and Sinhala Ravaya are the associate groups, which have been involved in creating an atmosphere of hatred against the minority communities. The leader of the

²⁹ Deegalle, Mahinda (2004), “Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Mons: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka,” *Contemporary Buddhism*, 5(2):83-103 pg 18

Sinhala Ravaya organization is Akmeemana Dayarathana Thero³⁰ and the general secretary of the group, Ravana Balaya is Itthakande Saddhatissa Thero³¹. The chief perpetrators of violent activities have been these three organizations, Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), Ravana Balaya (RB), and Sinhala Ravaya (SR) with major riots and attacks carried by BBS.

Bodu Bala Sena has been successful in creating terror by its name, through promoting anti-minority sentiment and rhetoric in social and traditional media, carrying out demonstrations, rallies etc. It was involved in violent activities leading to loss of life and property. According to Bodu Bala Sena, the politicians of Sri Lanka have failed in upholding the rights Buddhists and thus have not been able to protect the Sinhalese-Buddhist in Sri Lanka. As a result of which they have taken the task of making the society aware and fight for the rights of Sinhalese Buddhists.

The Bodu Bala Sena was launched on 7 May 2012. The Executive Committee of the organization consists of the “Chief Ven. Kirama Vimalajothi Thera; Secretary, Ven. Galagadathe Gnanasara Thera; and other executive committee members, Ven. Haputhalea Paaghasara Thera, Ven. Vitharandheniyea Nandha Thera and Dilantha Vithanage”³². Its headquarter is situated in Sambuddha Jayanthi Mandira in Colombo. The Buddhist Cultural Centre owns Sri Sambuddha Jayanthi Mandira, an organization founded by Kirama Wimalajothi³³. The “significant members and supporters for BBS not only hail from middle and upper class backgrounds in urban areas that have decent education and affiliated to good money-making professional jobs, but there is also a lot of support from Sri Lankan expatriates living abroad”(Imtiyaz and Saleem 2015:193).

30 For further details check, “Kuragala protest: Sinhala Ravaya members get bail”, 29th April 2015 [Online web] Accessed on 12th March 2015 URL:www.dailymirror.lk/70791/kuragala-protest-sinhala-ravaya-members-get-bail.

31 For further details see Colambage, Dinouk, “Sri Lanka monks occupy ministry building,” *Al Jazeera*, 28th May 2014 URL:www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/05/sri-lanka-monks-occupy-ministry-building-2014528103425654560.

32 [Online:web] Accessed on 12th March 2015 URL: www.asiatribune.com/node/62223.

33 This information can be found on the site of Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium (TRAC)

Disrupting a press conference by Buddhist monks and Muslim cleric in April 2014, Galagoda-Atte-Gnanasara said, “Do not use the Buddhist robes to talk about the problems of Muslim people...This Monk-Hood cannot be given to Muslims...”³⁴Such is the ideology of the organization that they cannot even tolerate a discussion and providing platform to various religious groups in Sri Lanka. The basic concerns of BBS are that “successive Sri-Lankan governments claim have failed to protect and promote Buddhism in the country; concern regarding the Sinhalese community for its failure to follow the pure form of Buddhism; concern about economy and population growths of Sinhalese community”.³⁵

The BBS “first National Convention at the BMICH on 28 July 2012” saw the participation with over 1200 bhikkus and 300 bhikkunis attending the event³⁶.The head of the Bodu Bala Sena and Director of the Buddhist Cultural Centre Nedimala, Ven. Kirama Vimalajothithera presented the five resolutions passed at the conference. The first of such resolution required the government to take serious note of the decreasing growth rate of the Sinhala Buddhist population and to put an end to the family planning surgeries and stop promotional payments made by the government to doctors and the persons undergoing such surgeries. Second, it was resolved to amend laws as the existing legal system based on Roman-Dutch and English law is insufficient “to protect and safeguard the rights and identities of local Buddhists”. Third, they called for reforms in the educational system with a view to prioritizing religious education. The fourth resolution demanded the government to implement recommendations of the Buddha Sasana Commission report of November 1959. The fifth resolution called for “a regulatory body to supervise the

34 “Buddhism, Sinhala-Buddhism And Rajapaksa-Buddhism”, Colombo Telegraph, 10 April 2014.

35 Rifai Naleemi identifies various concern of the BBS, Rifai Naleemi (2013)“Part 2: Worries of Bodu Bala Sena”, Colombo Telegraph, 16 May 2013.

36 Edirisinghe, Dasun (2012), “Buddhist clergy wants birth control operations banned”, *Island Today*, 29 July 2012. [Online web] Accessed on 5th March 2015 URL:www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-detail&code_title=58004.

content of books and other materials on Buddhism and to do away with those that had distorted the doctrine”³⁷.

Since its inception “Bodu Bala Sena has engaged in various protests against Islamic ‘extremism’ locally and globally. They protested in Badulla against the vandalism of Boddhagaya by the Mujahideen terrorist group. One of the early incidents of tensions created by BBS was in January 2013 in Buwelikada, a town near Kandy, where a group of Sinhala clashed with Muslims. Several Muslims were injured and hospitalized in this clash.”³⁸ And also they have used the media and conducted rallies, targeting Islam and Christianity and how they are threat to the society.

One of the major achievements of Bodu Bala Sena was collaborating with the Burmese 969 movement. The 969 movement is also an extremist organization which had been involved in attacking the Rohingya Muslims. U Wirathu³⁹, who is the chief of 969 Movement in Burma said in Colombo, “Buddhists are a world minority. If we don’t protect this small group, it will be the end of the Buddhist. My 969 organization will work together with Bodu Bala Sena” and the two organizations signed the Memorandum of Understanding on 30 September 2014 with the motive of creating a South Asia free of terrorism and religious fundamentalism. The memorandum states that:

The Buddhist Society of the world has awoken to the ground realities of subtle incursions taking place under the guise of secular, multicultural and other liberal notions that are

37 For further details see, Edirisinghe, Dasun (2012), “Buddhist clergy wants birth control operations banned”, Colombo Telegraph, Colombo, 29th July 2012.

38 For Further details see, Karuna, Gamini and Wasantha Rupasinghe (2013), “Sri Lanka Buddhist chauvinists prove violence against Muslims”, World Socialist Web Site, 9th January 2013. [Online web] Accessed on 4 April 2015 URL:<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/01/09/sril-j09.html>.

39 He is the chief of 969 Movement in Burma and has been involved in violence and killing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma.

directly impacting on the Buddhist ethos and space. These incursions are being funded from overseas and have made its impact globally and are subtly spreading into the local situations. Both the Bodu Bala Sena (of Sri Lanka) and 969 movement (of Burma) in realizing the impending dangers have felt that it must now come forward to devise practical and meaningful ways to address these burning issues, which cannot be left for politicians to deal with. We feel that in the light of the same incursions taking place in the Buddhist countries that remain it is now opportune a time for the Buddhists of the world to get together and devise a national and international plan to address these issues without delay⁴⁰.

The fundamental objective of this Memorandum of Understanding was to make a strong declaration asking the Buddhist world and in order to ensure that the Buddhist community does not become victims of extremism, conversions and other elements that have contributed to the decline of Buddhism over the years. The two groups together signed the memorandum in order to stop any kind of attack on Buddhism, seen in countries like Afghanistan and Bangladesh, where Buddhist temples and historical sites were attacked.

Background and Rationale

Both the BBS and 969 emerged as non-political Buddhist organizations to take up the cause of Buddhists, in their respective countries. The endeavour of this memorandum of understanding is to counter the growing incursions and challenges faced by the Buddhist society in both countries and also in the South and Southeast Asian region, and the dangers of its long term consequences to the country and heritage. Both parties decided to support each other's efforts, while reaching the joined vision, respecting the mission and the objectives of each party. At the same time, both parties sought to make efforts to strengthen each other.

⁴⁰ For further information see, "Memorandum of Understanding: Bodu Bala Sena of Sri Lanka and 969 Movement", [Online web], Accessed on 2 May 2015 URL:www.bodubalasena.co/memorandum_of_understanding.html.

The memorandum reflects organization's concern for Buddhism, for which they came on a common platform. The vision of the memorandum stated that the agreement was signed to ensure that the entire South and South Asian region devoid of all forms of fundamentalist movements, extremisms and civil wars. In order to achieve the said vision, both the BBS and 969 movement aim to work in collaboration and partnership for the protection, development, and betterment of Buddhists, Buddhist countries, Buddhist heritage and Buddhist civilization⁴¹.

Joint Objectives⁴²

Both the BBS and 969 considered this agreement as the preliminary declaration of a 'Buddhist international'. In order to achieve and perpetuate a "Buddhist international" that is devoid of all forms of fundamentalist movements, extremisms and civil wars, both considered following three areas as key aspects of collaboration:

1. "Networking and responding
 1. Raising our voice against all forms of political or religious movements that jeopardize Buddhist principles and values.
 2. Networking of Buddhist intellectuals, academics, thinkers, and activists as well as Buddhist organizations and institutions worldwide
 3. Ensuring collective actions and necessary responses when aforesaid individuals or entities are coming under the attacks from anti-Buddhist forces or movements.
 4. Intervening to protect vulnerable Buddhist heritages, archaeological sites worldwide".
5. "Building individual and organizational
 1. Creating opportunities to build working and operational relationships, experience sharing

⁴¹ "Memorandum of Understanding: Bodu Bala Sena of Sri Lanka and 969 Movement", [Online web], Accessed on 2 May 2015 URL:www.bodubalasena.co/memorandum-of-understanding.html.

⁴² "Memorandum of Understanding: Bodu Bala Sena of Sri Lanka and 969 Movement", [Online web], Accessed on 2 May 2015 URL:www.bodubalasena.co/memorandum-of-understanding.html.

Ensuring exchange of all forms of resources among the Buddhist entities and developing of both organizational and institutional capacities”.

2. “Research to stabilize Buddhism

1. To carry out research on Buddhist philosophy and subsectors such as economic, social, educational, political derivatives of Buddhist civilization and culture.
2. To formulate longer-term and comprehensive global research agenda to carry out critical and empirical research in order to examine manifestations against Buddhist identities, and illegal encroachments of Buddhist heritages”⁴³.

BBS believes that Buddhism faces danger in both Sri Lanka and the world. They criticize the government and authorities for not protecting nation, religion, and race. And owing to this fact they have ventured into politics. They often criticize Muslim extremism and Christian fundamentalism, claiming that Buddhism, on the other hand constitutes the middle path. Monks have attacked mosques, a law college accused of favouring Muslim students, probably following a rumour, and shops and houses. “The radical monks oppose halal slaughter, *burkas*, and marriage between Buddhist women and Muslims. They argue that Buddhist women are victims of forced conversion or rape at the hands of Muslims. The BBS is also anti-Christian and has opposed the conversions which they carry out”.

According to Deegalle (2006):

“The public success of organizations such as BBS is attributed to several factors. First, they were able to be successful because they launched effective campaigns across the country where the Sinhalese were not only a majority, but also in places where a small Muslim community was present capitalizing on the existing local problems. Second, the BBS was able to win support both from local and state media to their campaign as well as capitalize on social media, attracting support from outside the country”. Though the “ruling party and its members do not openly support the BBS campaign, there is recognized sympathy among the government coalition members, especially from the

⁴³ For further details see, “Full Text: Wirathu And Gnansara Sign Agreement” [Online web] Accessed on 4 May 2015 URL:<http://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/full-text-wirathu-and-gnansara-sign-agreement>.

Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) for the BBS campaign” (Imtiyaz and Saleem 2015: 194-195).

Moreover, there is also support from international groups like 969 Movement, in promoting and propagating the extremist Buddhist agenda. The BBS resembles Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India. The RSS follows the ideology of establishing a Hindu nation, while BBS wants Buddhist state in Sri Lanka. Both have been vocal against and have carried out attacks on the minorities.

BBS engagement with Political Leaders

Bodu Bala Sena as an extremist organization cannot subsist without tacit support from the political class. The support from the government and the Buddhist community often comes in the form of silent approval, to the activities of the organization. Rather, we find that BBS was often praised by many, for protecting Buddhism. In a letter to the Bodu Bala Sena, Malwatte Mahanayake Most Ven. Tibbatuwawae Sri Siddhartha Sumangala Thera sent his blessings with regard to the activities of the organization. The letter stated that the often repeated propaganda that time has come for authorities to open their eyes to reality and see the latest statistical and census reports which pointed out the drastic decrease of Sinhala population and Buddhist shrines.⁴⁴ On December 25, 2012 they had a meeting with the Defence Secretary, Gotabaya Rajapaksa⁴⁵ and a month later on January 28 2013, they met his brother, President Mahinda Rajapaksa at Temple Trees.⁴⁶ On 9 March 2013, the Defence Secretary inaugurated “Meth

44 See “Malwatte Mahanayake welcomes Bodu Bala Sena”, Forum for Peaceful Co-existence Sri Lanka, January 1, 2013. The letter further stated: The path taken by group of bhikkus under the leadership of Kirama Vimalajothi Nayaka Sthavira and Galagodaatha Gnansata was timely action to awaken the nation. The truth is that both Sinhala Buddhist clergy and laymen and the Theravada Sambuddha Sasana have been confronted with challenges from both national and international fronts. The Bodu Bala Sena has all the potential to raise the rights of the Buddhist and to expel the wrong opinions on the Bhikkus among the uninitiated minds”.

45 See Karunasena, Gamini and Wasantha Rupasinghe (2015), “Sri Lanka Buddhist chauvinists provoke violence against Muslims”, World Socialist Web Site, 9 January 2013. [Online web] Accessed on 4 April 2015 URL: <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/01/09/sril-j09.html>.

46 see “President Rajapaksa stresses need for respecting rights of all communities”, *The Island*, 28 January 2013.

Sevana, the Cultural and Training Centre of Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), in Pilana, Wanchawala in Galle, with the purpose of conducting training programmes for bhikkus and laymen”.⁴⁷Head of Meth Sevana, Ven. Embilipitiye Vijitha Thera was reported to have said that the Defence Secretary commended the service of the BBS towards the progress of the Buddha Sasana.⁴⁸ The “defence secretary’s participation at this event seemed to seal commentators’ assessment that the BBS was a tool, if not a creation of the regime” (Haniffa et al 2014:11).

The engagement of Bodu Bala Sena is important not only to understand the support which it is getting, but also to measure its influence in the society. In December of 2014 BBS was merging with the breakaway faction of JHU, and this came in the wake of decreasing influence of the organization among the people, which was visible in the poor turnout for the rallies it conducted. “In December 2014, Bodu Bala Sena merged with the ultra-nationalist breakaway group of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) led by Udaya Gammapiila after attempts were made to form a Sinhala Buddhist alliance under the leadership of Venerable Ellawala Medananda Thera, the former head of the JHU failed. The formation of a Sinhala Buddhist party as declared by Gammapiila with the support of the Bodu Bala Sena and the Ravana Balaya”.⁴⁹ However, the “Sinhala Ravaya, the radical wing of Wimal Weerawansa’s party was deprived of membership to this ultra nationalist camp”.⁵⁰

The alleged links of Bodu Bala Sena and Gotabaya Rajapaksa have been cited by many scholars. When he was invited as the chief guest at Meth Sevana in March 2013, the Buddhist Leadership Academy of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), he praised the organization for working for the nation. He justified his presence in the meeting by asserting that the monks are involved in the activities

⁴⁷ See Ananda, Siri W (2013), “Gota inaugurates BBS Meth Sevana”, *Ceylon Today*, 10 March 2013. [Online web] Accessed on 31st April 2015 URL: www.ceylontoday.lk/51-26495-news-detail-gota-inaugurates-bbs-meth-sevana.html.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*

⁴⁹ Ahamed, Hilmy (2014) “Bodu Bala Sena Handlers Unroll Plan B”, *Colombo Telegraph*, Colombo, 19 December 2014.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*

for the amelioration of the nation⁵¹. However, he completely ignored the facts which that BBS was involved in many incidences of attack and violence on the Christians and Muslims.

Conclusion

The chapter has thus explored the complex interplay of various forces that are shaping contemporary Sri Lankan society. The organization or Nikaya's of Buddhist monks and the role of monks in the politics of Sri Lanka have also been studied. Political Buddhism gives primacy to Buddhism in Sri Lanka with the motive of protecting the Sinhalese-Buddhism from the 'Other'. The extremist organizations, such as Bodu Bala Sena, Ravana Balaya and Sinhala Ravaya adhere to the ideologies of the political Buddhist organizations, but they use extreme measures against the minorities in order to establish the Buddhist state of Sri Lanka.

⁵¹For further details see, Gunasekara, Tisarane (2013), "Gotabaya Rajapaksa And His Bala Sena", *Colombo Telegraph*, Colombo, 14 March 2013

s Chapter III

Causes of Religious Extremism in Sri Lanka

Introduction

In the previous chapter, various religious extremist organizations and their principles and objectives have been analyzed. Along with it, the role of Buddhist monks in politics and how they have contributed to the rise of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism have also been discussed. The present chapter examines the causes behind the religious extremism in Sri Lanka and in order to do so, it will first seek to understand the teachings of the Theravada tradition of Buddhism in relation to conflict and peace. Sri Lanka is a land of Buddhists—a religion which preaches peace and harmony. However, a few sections of monks are preaching hatred and violence. This has inculcated a sense of distrust among various ethnic and religious groups in the society and has drawn a negative picture of Sri Lanka at the international level. The kind of hatred and violence which is being experienced in the current Sri Lankan society is not something which is new to it. If the history of the religious extremism or rather violence carried out on the other religious minorities in Sri Lanka is traced, it can be found that it was also present before and even after independence—though the frequency and impact may have varied. The earlier incidents of conflict and violence against the Muslims help to understand the recent incidents taking place against the Muslims and Christians. Thus, the chapter will deal with the various causes which have led to the rise of religious extremism in post-civil war Sri Lanka.

Teachings of the Theravada Buddhism

The Buddha believed that it was possible to rule a country by adhering to the *dharma*⁵². He believed that it was possible to rule a country without resorting to “harsh punitive measures or engaging in military conquests”. This situation, however, depends on many other factors. Buddhists would maintain that when humanity is morally, spiritually and intellectually developed, it is possible for a world ruler (*cakkavatti*) to rule a country without the use of force.

⁵² In Buddhism, *dharma* also termed as *dhamma*, is interpreted as universal truth or law—especially as proclaimed by the Buddha.

This position, however, relies heavily on the belief that the world goes in cycles of births and deaths rather than in a linear fashion.

The Sri Lankan historiography has constructed an image of a distinct Sinhala Buddhist ethnic identity. It has also assigned the historical role of protecting the Buddha *sasana* to the Sinhala communities. Over the 2,300 years of history of Sri Lanka, one can find many references to various types of war: internal battles, external conquests, coups and liberation struggles. Even though we cannot find references within the Pali canonical texts that support or justify violence. The ancient text *Mahavamsa* of Mahanama which was composed in 5th century CE contains a narrative which is quite opposed to the pacifist image of Theravada Buddhism. It becomes essential here for a careful study of the myths surrounding the battle between King Dutthagamani and King Elara for understanding the emergence of religious extremism and violence in Sri Lanka. In the *Mahavamsa* the war between King Dutthagamani and King Elara find detailed mention. The text portrayed Dutthagamani as of Sinhalese origin (a native of Sri Lanka), while Elara was referred as an invader and of Dravidian origin.

However, the Buddhist teachings state that a viable solution to any conflict is less likely to be solved through violent means. The Buddhists teaching does not state that. One cannot achieve happiness by causing pain to others and so one should always think how their actions will affect people around them. The Dhammapada verse 131 attaches one's happiness with others as one cannot experience happiness if other pleasure-loving beings are harmed. Overall these explain the usefulness of reconciliatory methods of conflict resolution over coercion within Buddhism.

Thus, according to the Buddhist point of view, reconciliatory methods of conflict resolution are more useful than coercive methods. However, Buddhist monks have been seen to be involved in hate speeches, carrying out demonstrations against other religious communities like the Muslims and Christians. They have also been involved in acts of violence, riots and conflicts involving the throwing of stones and fire bombs on the places of worship of the religious minorities and on their houses and property. But this kind of violence and conflict and targeting of the other religious minorities is not a new phenomenon, which is being experienced in post-war Sri Lanka. This perception of threat from the other persisted even before independence.

Earlier Incidents of Violence and Conflict with Muslims

The Muslims in Sri Lanka are “divided into three major groups: The Sri Lankan Moors, the Indian Muslims, and the Malays” (Fowsar 2014: 32). Historically, the Moors have been Tamil-speakers at home (while often bilingual in business). The twentieth century Tamil nationalist leaders and militants pressed the Moors to declare themselves as “Tamil Muslims” or “Muslim Tamils” (*Islamiya tamilar*), but in order to evade the ethno-nationalist co-optation and domination, the Moorish leaders nurtured a “racial” identity as a community of Arab descent (“Moor”) and, after independence, adopted the religious label “Muslim” as a non-linguistic ethnic marker” (McGilvray 2015). Though Muslims, today in Sri Lanka are the prime target, but it was the Buddhist religious and cultural awakening of 19th century which led to the growth of anti-Muslim sentiments. Interestingly, this was primarily an anti-Christian movement. It was during the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasingha in the Kandyan Kingdom that the first wave of Buddhist revivalism took place. The 19th century revivalism was different from that of the 18th century as it was also political in nature. The Buddhist monks were the key players in both the revivalist movement. Some of the leading spiritual heads of these movements were Welivita Saranka (during the first wave) and Hikkaduwa Sri Sumangala Thera and Weligama Siri Sumangala Thera (during the second wave).

In the nineteenth century Sir Robert Chalmers (British Governor of Ceylon from 1913-1916) wrote to the Secretary of State in London, “The Mohamedan traders, who come from South India and return when they have money by retail trading have always been viewed by the villagers with the feelings entertained at all times and in all lands towards transitory aliens who make money out of local peasantry by supplying their wants at “the shop” and frequently securing mortgages of the lands of thriftless debtors.” It was in this “climate of rural economic hardship and indebtedness in an open economy that a group of Sri Lankan Buddhist nationalists like David Hewawitharana Dharmapala, who was raised in a Christian environment later became an ardent Buddhist and also changed his name to Anagarika Dharmapala. He directed his attack on all foreigners in the country including Muslims” (Ali 1981). He was very much instrumental in the emergence of a Sinhalese-Buddhist consciousness and can be termed as father of the political Buddhism and with

the emergence of a Sinhalese-Buddhist consciousness. “The Muhammadan... is an alien to the Sinhalese by religion, race and language. He traces his origin to Arabia, whilst the Sinhalese traces his origin to Indian and Aryan sources... To the Sinhalese without Buddhism death is preferable”, wrote Dharmapala (1965). The anti-Muslim sentiments fanned by him and his co-agitators like Walisinghe Harischandra and Piyadasa Sirisena, was also popularized through Sirisena’s paper *Sinhala Jatiya*. They portrayed the Muslims as the ‘far other’. As a result of this, a riot broke out in 1915, in which 25 Muslims were murdered, 189 were injured, 350 houses and 17 mosques were set ablaze, and another 50 mosques suffered some sort of structural damage (Ali 1981). Even though the riots were “a reflection of economic dislocation, price rises and political ferment of the period” (Jayawardene 1986: 136), it cannot be denied that a highly politicized and popularized Buddhist consciousness helped in rallying the Buddhist masses against the Muslims.

The animosity which got built up between the Sinhalese and Tamils made the Muslims leaders to accept a polity that was dominated by the Sinhalese. They showed a reluctance to be assimilated within the larger Tamil speaking community. Even though historically they are Tamil speakers, the war between the LTTE and Sinhalese made them take a more pragmatic stand which had had its own benefits. According to Ali and O’Sullivan:

The year between 1950s and the 1970s saw the formation of alliance between Muslim-Sinhalese. It resulted in political and economic benefits for the Muslim community. During this time, Muslims were represented in, practically, every ministerial cabinet. Educationally, government Muslim schools were opened in all provinces which operated on a religiously determined school calendar different from the national school calendar. These schools were staffed by Muslim teachers most of whom were trained in exclusive Muslim teachers training colleges. These schools were supervised by Muslim inspectors and administered by a Muslim director of education. Culturally, Islamic holy days were declared public holidays; Muslims were allocated exclusive hours to broadcast Islamic programmes over Radio Ceylon; Muslim public servants were allowed to take extended lunch-breaks on Fridays to attend Jumma prayers; a Wakf Board was established to manage all the mosques in the island; and *Kazi* religious courts were created for Muslims to deal with Muslim marriage and divorce issues on the basis of *shariah* laws. Economically also, at least until a socialist government came to power in 1970, the open economy allowed Muslim businessmen to thrive without much restraint (Ali 1986; O’Sullivan 1977).

Such anti-Muslim sentiment grew among the Sinhalese in 1973 over the charges of favoured treatment of Muslims in the sphere of education. During 1974-75, sporadic Sinhalese-Muslim

clashes took place in various parts of the island -The Gampola confrontation in the last week of 1975 was very dangerous. The timely intervention of the police prevented widespread violence at Gampola. The clash that occurred in early 1975 at Puttlam, a Muslim stronghold in the north-west of the island, was, up to the time, the worst episode of communal violence in which 271 Muslim families perished, 44 shops were completely burnt and looted. The worst was when around 18 Muslims were shot dead by the police inside a mosque

Thus, these incidents show that the economic hardships and the consequent favours given to the community led to resentment and violence and a conflict followed. Similarly, when the Tamils were being discriminated against the Sinhala-Buddhists, the government took half-hearted efforts to resolve the issue between the ethnic communities. This led to the creation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), that took up arms against the state's injustice. The three decades of war came to an end with a military victory over the LTTE, but the efforts to bring about consensus between the Tamils and the government failed. The monks had also played a major role in disrupting the peace process initiated by the LTTE and led by the Norwegian peace process.

Deegalle (2006), in the context of boycott of peace process by the Buddhist monks, has tried to understand the Sinhala perspective and the frustration of the Sinhala people in relation to the status of Buddhism.

Ven. Madoluvave Sobhita, a very influential Buddhist monk and a political activist had expressed fear and frustrations of Sri Lankan Buddhists in relation to the ethnic problem. As a popular spokesperson for the Sinhala cause, and as someone who has been actively involved in various national issues within the last decade, his concerns and thoughts are useful in understanding the roots of Sinhala extremist elements in the modern period (Deegalle 2006: 138).

He has identified various direct physical attacks on Buddhist monks and destruction of Buddhist sites as the root cause of rising extremism among the Buddhist monks. This was also the reason why these groups opposed any peaceful negotiations with terrorists who could use these violent events to manipulate and mislead the Sinhala public.

Now that war has ended and there is no threat of the LTTE, the Buddhist monks have been targeting the religious minorities—Muslim and Christians. The reason why it becomes important to understand this resurgence of Sinhala-Buddhist extremism in post-civil war Sri Lanka is that

these minorities have always remained latent and have supported the government. There is hardly any news of Muslims or Christians being involved in extremism. Even during the war against the LTTE, the Muslims supported the government, and now that the war is over and they are under attack, the government has failed to take action against the Sinhala-Buddhist extremists.

Rise of Religious Extremism in the Post-Civil War (2009-2014)

With the end of the war, the Sri Lankan society entered a new phase of negotiations and confidence-building measures. The aftermath of the war has left the Tamils of Sri Lanka devastated and the pressure of justice and accountability was building on the government. But “political Buddhism and Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism have created the nationalist ideology” (de Votta 2007: 3), which was supported by the Rajapaksa government. And so, instead of bridging the differences between the communities, the Rajapaksa government started “expanding and perpetuating Sinhalese Buddhist supremacy within a unitary state; creating laws, rules, and structures that institutionalized such supremacy; and attacking like an enemy to those, who disagree with this agenda” (de Votta 2007: 3). This has become the norm in the Sri Lankan society. It could be argued here that not all Buddhists are nationalist, at the same time the Buddhist nationalist ideology appears to have been widely accepted. The nationalist ideology thus cement the majoritarian ethos which is evident with the decline of secularism, the rise in violence against the minorities, human rights violations and the culture of impunity surrounding the military (which is 98 percent Sinhalese) treatment of Tamils, attacks against various media outlets and critiques of the government. The renewed colonization efforts by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists in the Eastern Province also confirms the trend

In 2007, Neil de Votta already hinted to the following fact:

the institutionalization of the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology means that a political solution to Sri Lanka’s Tamils could coalesce with their ethnic counterparts and gain equality and self-respect, is also not in the offing, irrespective of how the conflict ends or the preferences of the international community...The analysis further suggests that other minorities (e.g., Christians and Muslims) also could come under attack as the nationalist ideology becomes further consolidated. The recent well calibrated anti-Christian violence and the intermittent Buddhist-Muslim clashes hint of the dangers ahead (de Votta 2007: ix).

Thus, as advocated by the international community the post-civil war Sri Lanka needs to foster the development of a plural society that can be home to all the religious and ethnic minorities. It should more justifiably utilize the diplomatic aid and trade mechanisms to ensure that all religious groups in Sri Lanka are dealt with equitably and with no discrimination. Adopting a balanced approach Sri Lanka can preserve its rich and impressive Buddhist heritage while granting religious freedom and security to its minorities likes Hindus, Muslims and Christians. However, before dealing in detail with the resurgence of Sinhala-Buddhist extremism in the post-civil war era, there is a need to understand the situation during the civil war. As stated earlier and pointed out by deVotta (2007), there were already small violence and conflicts taking place against the minorities during the war period itself. The extremist Buddhist organisations were also encouraging and forcing Ratnasiri Wikramanavaka a nationalist Prime Minister under the Rajapakse government to introduce the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution.⁵³ They wanted to prohibit and restrict Buddhists conversion to other religion while allowing people of other religions for conversion to Buddhism. from converting to any other religion while, it seems, allowing those from other religions to convert to Buddhism (de Votta 2007: 21).

Fowsar (2014: 33) states the

following factors are behind the growing anti-Muslim sentiments; country entered into a new era, it could be simply called a no war era, Islamic revitalization happening in the world, fear of Islam, Islamic faith- not accommodate other religious norms into Islamic faith, prosperity of Lankan Muslims, Muslims habit of expanding for the mosques, promoting Buddhist nationalist ideology and external supports from the Jews and other western counterparts.

Though the Sinhala Buddhist extremists have not been selective in targeting Muslims, the frequency of the attacks on the Muslims is definitely more than that on the Christians. The causes behind the rise of religious extremism are examined in the following paragraphs.

Politics, Regime and Leadership

The Sri Lankan state has always been an ethnically majoritarian and communal one (Uyangoda 2008: 9). That is why, according to Uyangoda (2008), Sri Lanka witnessed a deadly ethnic civil

⁵³ DeVotta (2007: 21), has explained how the extremist organizations in relation with the ruling party were involved in the Sinhalization of the Sri Lankan state.

war in the early 1980s. However,, there were also parallel political process in Sri Lanka in the direction of making the state multi-ethnic and pluralist by means of reforming the state. Though the Sri Lankan political, bureaucratic, military and media establishments have never been persuaded about the multi-ethnic and pluralistic argument.

There is a resurgence of religious extremism in post-civil war Sri Lanka. One of the reasons is the leadership and the regime which was ruling the country in the period 2009-2014. With the end of civil war, the Sri Lankan state should have moved towards ethnic reconciliation and constitutional reform in order to develop harmony and peace in the war-torn society. Instead, the Rajapaksa government moved towards a consolidation of the regime. There was an increased support, prior to the end of civil war, for all those politicians and political parties which adopted a pro-Sinhalese Buddhist approach, and supported the maintenance of the unitary state structure and favoured a military solution to the ethnic conflict. This was reflected in the fact that the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), an all-monks party, fielded 200 monks and nine of them became the members of the parliament. According to Uyangoda (2011: 134),

the dominant thinking within the regime appeared to be premised on the assumption that there were no minority issues that needed to be addressed on a politically urgent basis because the LTTE had been crushed. This premise is also built on the assumption that reconciliation and conflict management should be managed exclusively on the terms defined by the President and his government, and not by external actors.

After the war in Sri Lanka when there was a need to recognize the plurality within the society and to build the confidence across the communities, “the Rajapaksas were extremely concerned about the maintenance of not only undisputed political power, but also their position as the most fervent exponents of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism”.⁵⁴ Rajapaksa called for “early presidential elections in November 2009, that were constitutionally due in December 2011, seeking to benefit from the enormous popularity his regime enjoyed following the victory over the LTTE. The election campaign and results indicated that Rajapaksa, the winner, had most of his support base concentrated in the Sinhalese-majority District” (Uyangoda 2010: 133). Thus, the Rajapaksas would not have simply tolerated the rise of any new and fearless Sinhala-Buddhist outfits that questioned and challenged the regime’s Sinhala-Buddhist credentials and powerbase, until and

⁵⁴ Weerawardhana, Chaminda (2014), “Proud Inheritors or Petty Contractors? Understanding the BBS phenomenon in Sri Lankan politics”, *Groundviews*, 5th July 2014.

unless they were allowing it to do so. Thus, the organization which developed as a result received tacit approval of the Rajapaksa regime, to serve a clear political purpose.⁵⁵

“The growth of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka significantly increased the influence of Sinhala-Buddhist extremists and Bhikkus in the Sri Lankan polity” (Fowsar 2014: 32). Though the Buddhist political parties like the JHU have not been involved in any violence and attacks directly, they have indirectly supported and represent the ideology of the extremist groups or they have not condemned the attacks by the extremist groups. Moreover, the Defence Secretary under the Rajapaksa government, Gotabaya, also participated in a meeting of the BBS, when the rumours of its extremist activities were around. This shows that the ruling regime was indirectly supporting the organization, and even though there was evidence against it, no major action was taken. As Gravers (2015: 20) states, “the most important aspect of extremism is the relations between the activist monks and high-level political persons and parties”. Though there is no evidence to prove that violence was co-organized or induced by political persons or authorities, the evidence does prove inaction by the police authorities and the government. While the government did take measures to rehabilitate the communities after the violence and riots had broken out, if reports⁵⁶ are to be believed, there was no action taken against the extremist organization BBS against which there was evidence available. And the reason behind this is cited as the alleged links between the BBS and Gotabaya Rajapaksa. For example, Dr Nimalka Fernando, the Chairperson of the International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, made a vital reference in her submission to the 2014 UNHRC session regarding this. Even the “JVP chief Comrade Anura Dissanayake, MP, in his speech in Parliament on 17 June 2014 raised the issue of Ven. Gnanasar’s power”⁵⁷ to conduct hate-speeches and violence and abuse the politicians too openly. He also rightly pointed that—“despite the power and

⁵⁵ Weerawardhana, Chaminda (2014), “Proud Inheritors or Petty Contractors? Understanding the BBS phenomenon in Sri Lankan politics”, *Groundviews*, 5 July 2014.

⁵⁶ Haniffa et al (2014), in “Where Have All the Neighbours Gone? Aluthgama Riots and its Aftermath: A Fact Finding Mission to Aluthgama, Dharga Town, Valipanna and Beruwala”, have provided a timeline of the activities which took place before and after the violence in Aluthgama, Dambula and Beruwala.

⁵⁷ For further details check Weerawardhana, Chaminda, “Proud Inheritors or Petty Contractors? Understanding the BBS phenomenon in Sri Lankan politics”, *Groundviews*, 5th July 2014.

influence Buddhist clergy wields among the Sinhala-Buddhist community”⁵⁸, it is not possible to conduct such acts without the support of someone from the government.

“Sri Lanka’s major political parties have manipulated the monks, seeking their imprimatur to legitimize political platforms but trying to counter their influence upon winning office” (de Votta 2007: 24). Politicizing religion and sponsoring extremism are done in order to exploit the religious identity for political polarization. According to Kadirgamar (2013), “The Rajapaksa regime mobilized Sinhala Buddhist ideological forces during the last phase of the war... [and] gave central stage to Sinhala Buddhist nationalist parties such as the JHU”⁵⁹. This has led to the rise of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism within the society and any political solution to overcome the ethnic issue has been overruled. The post-war silence of the Rajapaksa government on the activities of the groups such as the BBS, Sinhala Ravaya and Ravana Balaya has increased the suspicion of the links between them. Thus, the political parties have played a major role in consolidating the Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology and the Rajapaksa government not only hardened it with the military victory over the LTTE but also tried to present a unified picture of the state.

Militarization of the society

The militarization of Sri Lanka post-civil war has made the situation within the society more complex. However, the military is not the solution to every kind of differences which emerge in the society and so the lack of political will of the leadership to build the war-torn society is adversely affecting the people. “There is a continuity and consolidation of security, instituted by the military and shaped by neo-liberal development in post-civil war Sri Lanka. This merging of security and development is neither new nor unique to Sri Lanka,”⁶⁰ and has been adopted by many neo-liberal states.

As the war was over,

⁵⁸ For further details see Ibid.

⁵⁹ Kadirgamar, Ahilan (2013), “The Question of Militarization in Post-War Sri Lanka”, *Colombo Telegraph*, 9th Feb 2013.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

one expected that the government will downsize the military, which in July 2009 had over 200,000 personnel in a relatively poor country with a GDP per capita of \$2,014 (2008), a population of 20 million, and no known external enemies. In 2007 the country had 1,065 active duty military personnel for every 100,000 in the population; the comparable ratio for India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal was 229, 569, 139, and 368 respectively, making Sri Lanka the most militarized country, is recruiting 100,000 more (Samarasinghe 2009: 437).

So, the government has made the society more militarized in the name of security and protection of the citizens. And as Samarasinghe (2009: 437) puts it, “the goal of the government says, is never again to allow the reconstitution of the LTTE or any other armed movement to challenge the state. This postwar military has important implications for Sri Lanka’s postwar ambition to build a united Sri Lanka from its multiethnic population.” Though the government does not want any organization like the LTTE to emerge again, it is difficult to understand why the extremist organizations such as the Bodu Bala Sea (BBS), Sinhala Ravaya (SR) were allowed to carry out riots and conflicts in the society. As the Sri Lankan state is the most militarized in South Asia, its failure to check and control the Aluthgama and Beruwala riots in 2014 remain unanswered.

Moreover, the organizations like BBS had, as already stated, links with the Defence Minister Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and which they had to deny after the Aluthgama riots took place. And also, there has been a “centralization of the repressive apparatus of the state under Defence Secretary, which allows the state repression, intimates dissent and continues the climate of fear.”⁶¹ According to Samarasinghe (2009: 176), “the post war military strategy has important implications for Sri Lanka’s postwar ambition to build a united Sri Lanka from its multiethnic population.” This building of a strong military reflecting the Sinhalisation of the island nation can affect damage to the ethnic relations within the country.

Resurgence of Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism

Jonathan Friedman (1994: 207) viewed the connection between religion, nationalism and violence as part of globalized identity politics: “‘The globalization of fundamentalism and powerful nationalisms is part of the same process, the violent eruption of cultural identities in the wake of declining modernist identity.’ It may well be that modernist identity is under pressure,

⁶¹ Ibid.

but the Buddhist monks rather ascribe to a hybrid (localized) identification with traditional Buddhist cosmological imaginary and a modern moral imaginary of the world order.” Thus, he hesitates to view traditionalism and modernism as polar points of identification. The nationalist Buddhist monks in Myanmar and Sri Lanka are neither anti-democratic nor anti-modern; instead, they have an ethicized perception of those for whom democracy works and whom it includes, thus, challenging the Western conceptions of democracy.

“The monks in Sri Lanka project a nationalist version of the Buddhist cosmology which carries a vision of Buddhism in danger” (Gravers 2015: 19). Gravers (2015) further states that the cosmological imaginary is applied through the promotion of democracy and individual freedoms within Buddhist ethics as well as a communitarian and xenophobic nationalist agenda. The first is, however, egalitarian; the second attacks other religions and promotes violent identity politics. He suggests four dimensions of politicized religion in order to understand why it is used to justify violence:

1. A historical dimension; a social memory of colonialism or previous conflicts
2. Cosmological imaginaries of religion in danger
3. A global imaginary of ‘cosmic war’
4. The local political context; religion as a medium for nationalist politics

“The use of cosmological imaginaries evokes the idea of a moral order, which has to be defended or restored” (Gravers 2015: 19). Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the Sinhala-Buddhist extremist groups have used the imaginaries such as myths, legends and notions to guide and legitimize the collective actions and which sometimes have been used to instigate violent riots⁶². According to Deegalle (2006: 11),

Sinhala people claim that they have a special role to protect Buddhism, as one could gauge from the posters and banners hanging in the streets claiming that ‘this [Sri Lanka] is the Buddha’s country’ (“*me budunge desayayi*”) in the areas in Colombo. Such stickers can also be found pasted in the buses and three-wheelers. The national narratives of Sri

⁶² Gravers (2015: 20), uses cosmological imaginary lies, myths, legends and notions to generally explain the reasons which guide the monks in Myanmar and Sri Lanka to manipulate and apply the above.

Lanka also hold such views. Sri Lanka is considered to be the island of *dhamma* (*dhammadipa*) and thus it becomes important to protect and preserve Buddhism.

Thus, the “fundamental belief anchoring Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism is that Sri Lanka has been preserved for Sinhalese Buddhist, and minorities live there only because of Buddhist’s sufferance” (de Votta 2007: 3). Thus, it justifies the Sinhalese Buddhists’ superordination and minority subordination. “Adherents to this national ideology insist on expanding and perpetuating Sinhalese Buddhist supremacy within unitary state; creating rules, laws, and structures that institutionalize such supremacy; and attacking those who disagree with this agenda “(de Votta 2007: 3).

However, the religious imaginary itself is not synonymous with violence. “Violence appears when the imaginary is integrated into a nationalist ideology of cultural/ ethnic (race) identity” (Gravers 2015: 20), and organizations that have been formed use it for creating an atmosphere of “self” and “other” and thus sow the seed of hatred. So, the whole imagery of the religion in danger has to be created in order to use the crowd and mobs to carry out violence against the other religious groups. In Sri Lanka too, the imaginary from the past had been drawn to prove that the Sinhala-Buddhists are the “sons of the soil” as against the Tamils—and now that the LTTE has been defeated—a new enemy is formed in terms of the Muslim and Christians. The strategies which the extremist organizations adopt are their saying that their religion is under threat either due to the conversion carried out by the Christians or by the growing population of Muslims that soon will be taking over the *dhammadipa* i.e. Sri Lanka.

Thus, there is resurgence in the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism post-civil war and the Rajapaksa government only fuelled the situation by letting the parties like Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) expand its influence. Moreover, the centralization and unification of the polity of the country under Rajapaksa led to a demise of the democracy.

Perception of Threat and Other

BBS holds a hatred for the ‘Other’. The Sinhalese hardliners would believe that it is not only some Tamils who want the Eelam but all of them do so without exception; some openly and the

others secretly.⁶³ Thus, it leads to attacks on minorities without any exception. When a majority harbours a threat from the minority community it is called a majority with a minority complex. The extremist groups not only create a perception of threat but they themselves feel threatened; as is visible from the activities of the Bodu Bala Sena. The Bodu Bala Sena has been vocal about being against the halal products, *hijab* (cover for head) or *abaya* (a material made of black cloth to cover the whole body of a female) worn by Muslim women, Shariah law of the Muslims and the conversion carried out by the Christian community. It considers Islam to be a threat to not only Sri Lanka but also to the whole world. The rise in anti-Islamic fervour in the wake of 9/11 has also contributed raising a threat from Islam, and also the attacks by Muslims on Buddhist temples in Afghanistan and Bangladesh have contributed to the perception of threat. The Christians come as a threat because the Christian missionaries are involved in conversions and time and again there have been debates on passing a law against conversion in Sri Lanka.

Economic Reason

The religious extremists draw strength from religious teachings to create an atmosphere of hatred and conflict, but underlying this there are also economic reasons. Economy plays an important part in any society and the religious extremists do not remain untouched by it. The past instances of conflicts in the Sri Lankan society have been also influenced by the economic factors.

In the open economic environment of the 1980s, which continues even now, the drive for competitive economic advantage invariably translated itself into a contest for business supremacy among the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese bourgeoisie. Of the three, it was

the ubiquitous presence of Muslim enterprises in the Sinhalese areas that became a source of envy and irritation to Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinists. Even the Janata Vimukhti Peramuna (JVP), founded by a group of Sinhalese-Buddhist youth in the 1960s as a class-conscious Marxist revolutionary movement, in spite of its initial revolutionary slogans and internationalism, later became captive to the prevailing ultra-nationalist and chauvinist Buddhist tendencies. The JVP recruited young Buddhist monks and organized economic boycott campaigns demanding the Sinhalese consumers not to patronize Muslim shops and businesses (Ali 2014).

“When the social and political condition weakened the economy of the country partly as a result of severe disruptions and destructions of the two decades of ethnic turmoil (beginning from the

63 “Making Sense Of Bodu Bala Sena-Part 2”, *Colombo Telegraph*, 3 May 2014.

1983 July ethnic riots), the monastic involvement in extremist, nationalist politics gave birth to radical innovations” (Deegalle 2006: 231) The end of the twenty-eight-year-old conflict extenuated the already fragile cracks between different ethnic groups, along faith lines, such that identity was strengthened not only by an insecurity of religious affiliation but a religious affiliation that is borne from a sense of the ‘other’ who is not only someone of a different ethnicity but someone of a different religion too. This insecurity of identity has been felt on all sides, but the Sinhala Buddhists, who form the majority of the population, exhibit the most extreme of strains and currently in the absence of conflict, are beginning to exert this religious-based ethnic identity thereby posing the greatest threat to religious freedoms in Sri Lanka. “In particular the ideological strand of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka has undergone a massive change and reinterpretation of its doctrines as a result of the conflict (Deegalle 2007), becoming more militant, violent and ultimately intolerant towards other ethnicities and religion largely led by clergy” (Noble 2013)⁶⁴.

For protecting the ‘Sinhalese’ businessmen from rising prices allegedly caused by Muslim businesses, BBS called for the ban of all halal products, since according to the organization, halal certification caused a higher cost to manufacturers which were passed on to the consumers (Colombage 2013). Imtiyaz and Saleem (2015: 195-196) surveyed in relation to the growth of the BBS among people living in the areas of Kurunegala and Puttalam districts, which form part of the North-Western Province (commonly known as Wayamba); Dambulla, located in the Matale District; Central Province of Sri Lanka; localities in Anuradhapura, located in the Anuradhapura District, North Central Province; Colombo and Kalutara districts, which are the two major districts in the Western Province of Sri Lanka .

According to Imtiyaz and Saleem (2015: 196) “large portion of the Muslims surveyed drew the link between the rise of the Sinhala-Buddhist forces and Sinhala-Buddhist traders in the areas where Sinhalese are majority, but Muslim traders pose serious trade rivalry against the Sinhalese traders”. Thus, the religious extremism also has an economic factor . For example, “Muslim

64 For further details see, “Overcoming the Challenges of Ethno-Buddhist Identity in Sri Lanka,” [Online: web] Accessed on 12 th March 2014, URL: www.academia.edu/7526858/Overcoming_the_Challenges_of_Ethno-Buddhist_Identity_in_Sri_Lanka.

businesses in Aluthgama town were torched and looted”⁶⁵ and several areas near Aluthgama experienced the same pattern of violence.

Religious Bases

In order to understand the relationship between religion and violence, the internal socio-cultural complexities, ethnic differences and political conjunctures⁶⁶ should be known. Regarding the rise of religious extremism in post-civil war Sri Lanka, the interesting fact that emerges is that the groups like Bodu Bala Sena actually serve the purpose of promoting Sinhalese-Buddhism.

The rise of religious extremism in Sri Lanka has been contributed by the

Sinhalatva ideology, which emphasizes on Sinhala-ness. Formerly, Sinhalatva was termed as *jatika-cintaya*, which means ‘national ideology’. Sinhala-ness comprises the Sinhalese language, the culture of the Sinhalese, which is Buddhism, the territory of the Sinhala speakers, which is the island, and finally the Sinhalese speakers themselves. These four are called ‘the four jewels’ (a travesty of the traditional ‘three refuges’: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha) (Schalk 2009).

For the Sinhalatva groups, religion is over everything and that is the reason they supported the war against the LTTE, and now in the post-civil war period the monks from the organizations like Bodu Bala Sena and Sinhala Ravaya have been propagating hatred and violence against the Muslims and Christians in the name of protecting Buddhism. The aim of the extremists organization is to establish a unitary state, as for them ‘Buddhism, the Sinhala language and the island of Sri Lanka belong only to the Sinhalese as a race.’

Although Buddhism is considered as one of the peaceful religions in the world, monks in Sri Lanka and Myanmar have involved in violence and conflict against other communities. One can see how “in Sri Lanka (and elsewhere) some Buddhist monks and especially Buddhist political elites have used *jathaka* tales dealing with Buddha’s reincarnated lives and Buddhist mytho-history to celebrate and justify violence. Buddhist monks, for example, conspired and

⁶⁵For a further detailed report on the Aluthgama, Dharga and Beruwla riots, see “Where have All the Neighbours Gone? Aluthgama Riots and its Aftermath”, Law and Society Trust, 2014.

⁶⁶Juergensmeyer (2001) further explains that we tend to generalize the religious violence, but fail to recognize and identify those agents who use religion in order to justify violence and their own political agenda.

assassinated Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in September 1959” (de Votta 2007: 2). The militarist posture adopted by certain *bhikkus* regarding the island’s ethnic conflict has caused even the state-owned press to note how frightening it is “to observe the insouciance with which the most revered prelates of the Maha Sangha talk of...recourse to arms” (*Sunday Observer* 2000).

Uyangoda has argued that “Sinhalese Buddhism has made no significant contribution to the evolution of a non-violent social ideology. On the contrary, the Sinhalese Buddhist historiographical tradition and ideology inherent in it support ethnic political violence” (Uyangoda 1996: 129). The ideology of

Sinhalatva rejects a multi ethnic society, and it is a political ethno-nationalist ideology with a strong base in the Sri Lankan Freedom Party, which houses a special identifiable section known as the *Simhalatva kavandaya*, the ‘*Simhalatva* body’, but *Simhalatva* is mostly spread among individuals and represented by Buddhist militant organizations for example *sinhala urumaya* and other Sinhala/Buddhist organizations (Schalk 2006).

The political alliance between the Muslims and the Sinhalese, made the LTTE consider the Muslims as betrayers of the cause of Tamil Eelam and they unleashed some of their worst attacks on the Muslims and expelled the entire Muslim population from the Jaffna and Mannar districts in 1990. The military defeat of the LTTE in 2009, however, changed the whole scenario. The past strategy of aligning with the Sinhalese governments to gain benefits at the expense of Tamils now seems to have passed its use by date (Ali 2009). However, the acrimony of the Buddhists towards the Muslims was aggravated in 1999 when Ashraff, the leader of the SLMC party, challenged and engaged in a television debate with Gangodawila Somarama Thera (who considered the Muslims a threat to Sri Lanka). In 2001 a major clash that broke out in Mawanella, a town along the Colombo-Kandy Road, spreading to its suburban villages caused considerable losses to Muslim lives and property. Between 1970s and 2002, nearly 30 violent Muslim-Sinhalese clashes have been recorded and in a number of them Buddhist monks played a leading role (Anas et al. 2008).

The political events after 2000 have marked a significant development in the influence of religious agencies in the political affairs of Sri Lanka. The formation of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Sinhala Heritage) in 2004, the Buddhist monks’ political party, marks an important phase in the development. When the Sri Lankan government was engaged in war in

the north of the island, the media questioned and challenged the religious and political positions of some Buddhist monks such as Ven. Athuraliye Rathana, then the parliamentary group leader of the JHU. In the midst of war, Nick Meo (*Herald*, Scotland, 2008) criticized Rathana's political views stating, "Like every Buddhist monk, the Venerable Athuraliye Rathana believes in peace, harmony and loving kindness. But unlike most, he believes the best way to pursue such virtues is to fight a war to death with his enemies".

Rathana, was mischievously nicknamed as "war monk" by Sri Lanka's press, speaks avidly of harmony but he believed that peace could only be established when the Tamil Tigers were all killed and their political aspirations crushed by the army. So, in order to carry out his aim he gave up a quiet life of meditation to form a political party that pressed for war, winning a parliamentary seat along with nine fellow monks in 2004. But even though the Tamil militancy has been crushed, the Sinhalese-Buddhist extremism has inflicted hatred and violence on other minorities like the Muslims and Christians. Thus, even if the LTTE has been defeated, the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism has only grown stronger and, in order to gain legitimacy within the society, it is looking for a new enemy of Buddhism.

Conclusion

Even though the Sinhalese Buddhists are in a majority in the country, they still perceive a threat towards their religion, identity and culture and in order to protect it, in the times of globalization, they have resorted to a fundamentalist and extremist stance. Also, in order to support their ideology and gain legitimacy from the Sinhalese society, the Sinhalatva has been selective in its historiography, as directed by the Sangha. Thus, "we encounter therefore a double selective process in writing of history" (Schalk 2009): in the modern period, the concepts of unitary state and of a people as a race were selected; from the nineteenth century onwards, the related concepts were selected in order to homogenize culture and to cement apartheid. The Sinhalatva approach is that of intolerance, which is contradictory to the teachings of Buddhism. Today, in the Sri Lankan society, being a non-Sinhalese-Buddhist is equivalent to being anti-Buddhist and thus one is termed as a terrorist. Sinhalatva is an ideology which is spread by many organizations, rather than being concentrated in a single, central nexus. There were around 100 civil militant organizations promoting Sinhalatva, or jatika cintanaya as it was then called. Such

organizations flourished for some time, but dissipated when their leaders fell away, and were soon replaced by new groupings.

Sri Lankan society is a democracy, which comes with constitutional safeguards for minorities, but then from time to time, the constitutional amendments in order to favour the majoritarian culture have degraded the society. The cause of the rise of religious extremism can be attributed to the rise of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism and the government, accentuated this further by a consolidation of power and in promoting a single identity for Sri Lanka.

Chapter IV

Manifestation of Religious Extremism

Introduction

The chapter analyzes in what ways the violence has unleashed itself in the Sri Lankan society. The religious extremist groups, as stated in the earlier chapters, have been organizing meetings and rallies and many incidents of violence and conflict have resulted as a result of hate speeches conducted by the monks. This has been on the rise since 2009 and the Rajapaksa government had failed to check the growing tide of hatred and violence in the society.

The incidents targeting minorities and their religious places have become increased in the post-civil war period and have become more assertive in its criticism of these communities. These incidents infringe upon the religious rights of the minority communities and violate the principle rule of law. The Buddhist monks have played a major role in the hate incidents and since the military victory over the LTTE; these extremist organizations have started considering themselves as the protector of Buddhism and the nation. And those who will compromise with the ideology of Sinhalese-Buddhism can live peacefully or else they will face the brunt of animosity. Though all religions are protected under the Constitution of Sri Lanka, but Buddhism holds a special place and state needs to protect and promote it.

In order to understand the violence taking place in the Sri Lankan society, first there is a need to understand the term violence and its various kinds. Violence, as defined by Weiner (1989), is:

the actual or threatened, knowing or intentional application of statutory impermissible physical force by one person directly against one or more other persons outside the contexts both of formal institutional or organizational structures and of civil or otherwise collective disorders and movements for the purpose of securing some end against the will or without the consent of other person or persons. Thus violence can be assumed to be motivated by hostility and the willful intent to cause harm and violence is legally, socially, or morally, a deviant human activity (quoted in Jackman 2002: 387).

Garver (1972: 39) “defines various forms of violence as (1) a matter of degree (2) can be in the form of institutional and personal (3) can be psychological as well as personal (4) has moral implications when it is social that are radically different from those that it has when it is personal (5) can be legal as well as illegal (6) needs, when it is social, to be discussed in conjunction with law and justice and (7) can in principle be excused however personally abhorrent one may find it”. Galtung and Hoivik (1971: 73) differentiate between direct and structural violence, while the third dimension, according to Galtung, is cultural violence⁶⁷.

Direct violence is evident as the means through which it works is visible to the world, such as war, torture, fighting, attacking, violence, physical abuse and vandalism. However, Indirect or Structural violence cannot be apprehended directly but it works through indirect channels and the signs of such kind of violence cannot be directly perceived. Thus “from this perspective, violence is anything avoidable that impedes human self-realization including misery or alienation”. Direct violence is usually measured in the number of deaths⁶⁸. The direct violence involves direct action taken by the person. This is the only type of violence which exists in real terms, whereas in structural violence, there is no actor, but the violence remains. The ways through which structural violence are inflicted includes segmentation, fragmentation, marginalization and exploitation. Thus structural violence works through political, social and economic structure of the society. While “cultural violence means those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence, exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics), that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (Galtung 1990: 291).

The Centre for Policy Alternative Report (2013) reported on the rise of religious violence and attacks in the post-civil war Sri Lankan society and broadly divided the attacks on religion and religious places into two groups: “firstly, direct attacks and secondly, the indirect perception of attacks.” The religious extremists carried out attacks, threatened the minority community, indulged in violence against the religious clergy, and vandalized the shops, houses and places of

⁶⁷67 Galtung, John (1990), “Cultural Violence”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 27 (3): 291-305.

⁶⁸68 Galtung, Johan and Tord Hoivik (1971), “Structural and Direct Violence: A Note on Operationalization”, *Journal of Peace Research* , 8 (1): 73-76. Pg 73.

worship. They were also abusive in their attacks on the symbols and structures of religious places of worship. The indirect or structural violence is not necessarily violent but there is a sense and perception of threat or discrimination inflicted towards a particular identity. For example, indirect way of violent activity is discriminating against the member belonging to a different ethnic or religious community.

Ethnic and religious fundamentalism needs to be understood within a context. The rise of religious fundamentalism cannot be understood as an absolute problem created by religious groups as what Zizek (2014: 36) writes, “Liberalism and fundamentalism are caught in a vicious circle. It is the aggressive attempt to export liberal permissiveness that cause fundamentalism.” So, one can see the rise of fundamentalism as a reaction to liberalism. The rise of the ‘fundamentalism’, radical nationalism and religious extremism has become more intense as a result of liberalization and have led to major conflict and violence over resources between various ethnic or religious groups. The religious extremists may use “imaginaries of endangered identities and appeal to a fundamental ontological fear and thus often carry legitimized violence” (Juergensmeyer 2008: 1). Thus, it becomes very important to analyze violence from various aspects. Tambiah “has demonstrated that ethno-nationalist and religious mob riots are generally politically organized and routinized as part of elections”. Analyzing this in the context of Sri Lanka cannot be termed as an absolute truth, but government was silent about the involvement of the religious extremists group, which means an indirect support. This however did not that government was collaborating with the rioters in targeting and displacing the minorities.

To elaborate on the political aspect of violence and in the case of Sri Lanka where the Bodu Bala Sena was actively taking part in riots, attacks and hate speeches against the minorities, it is found that it is not just politics behind this but also there is a sense of fear among the Sinhala Buddhists. As, Hashmi (2009: 4) has stated, there is a common thread which weaves the violent thread of political and religious extremism and that is ‘fear’. This fear justifies the incidents of violence taking place in Sri Lanka and Burma, where the majority is targeting the minorities. In Sri Lanka, though the Sinhalese-Buddhists are in a majority and Buddhism enjoys state patronage, still the majority perceives threat from the minorities.

This fear has led to targeting the minorities like Muslims and Christians. The issue with the Christians is that of conversions and from time to time, the Buddhist political parties like Jathika Hela Urumaya have tried to raise the issue regarding the introduction of the anti-conversion bill. But the Bodu Bala Sena has taken laws in its hands by attacking the pastors, their families and churches. With the Muslims, the issue is mainly the fundamental principles of Islam and the Shariah Law.

Though these are the factors which have been the main causes behind the attacks and violence on the minorities, and as the media is full of the hate speeches and articles full of anti-Christian and anti-Muslim sentiments in Sri Lanka, one cannot rule out other underlying factors related to politics and economies, which also play an important role.

Organizations Involved and the Methods used to Spread Hatred and Violence

The leading extremist organization involved in extremist activities is the Bodu Bala Sena, while others like Ravana Balaya and Sinhala Ravaya have engaged in smaller activities of protests and spreading hatred. The Bodu Bala Sena seems to have established itself as a moral police to free the Sri Lankan society from Muslims and Christians. The self-proclaimed protector of Sinhalese-Buddhism did not miss any opportunity to create disturbances and spread hatred among the various sections of the society. “On March 24, 2014, they held their Convention in Pandura and claimed that Sri Lanka is not a multi-racial or multi-religious country but a Sinhala Buddhist country” (Haniffa et al 2014: 12).

The ways through which the religious extremists have unleashed their hate programme against the Muslim and Christian minorities are that they were involved in are vandalism, mob violence, destruction of mosques and churches and plunder of shops. The various reports, which will be dealt in the later section of the chapter, has pointed out that many pastors, their families and the churches were attacked by the BBS. The pasting of “anti-Muslim posters and forcibly placing Buddhist flags atop Muslim households and businesses and loudspeakers with Buddhist religious preaching had been installed on a Muslim business building” (Haniffa et al. 2014: 9). The “strategies through which BBS expanded their hate campaign against the Muslims were by focusing on Muslim dress” (Imtiyaz and Saleem 2015: 195), halal products, Shariah law, etc.

These means of violence come under direct violence, and such violence involves the activity of groups or mobs. And the monks of the Bodu Bala Sena have tactically used their position for organizing rallies and igniting the crowds against the other communities. The monks are respected in the Sri Lankan society, and BBS has used it in a negative way by creating hatred and animosity among different communities. However, such organizations cannot be successful in their acts without enjoying the support of the institutions of the state. If the state apparatus would have worked to curb them, then such acts would have not taken place in the first place. The accounts and report from the affected areas show that in spite of the presence of police, the attacks and stone-pelting continued.

The other means through which violence found its way slowly and steadily in the daily lives of the people in Sri Lanka was the media, which needs a close examination. “The term social media includes platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, blogging, You Tube and other spaces and forums where individuals who may not necessarily be professional journalists can publish material” (Haniffa et al 2014: 64). Prior to the riots, the tension between the two communities was already discernible through the hate speech that was circulated on the social media. Facebook groups such as Sinhala Buddhist and the personal page of Gnanasara Thera uploaded photographs that were incredibly offensive to the Muslim community.⁶⁹ Most of the Bodu Bala Sena’s campaigns were promoted through the social media and each hateful photo got thousands of likes on Facebook. Comments on these pages were indicative of a mindset full of hatred and violence. According to Sanjana Hattotuwa, the curator of GroundViews research shows that there are over 35 groups online that propagate religious hatred.⁷⁰ It is through these channels that the Muslim community in the Aluthgama area became aware of the organization of a rally and the anti-Muslim sentiment behind it (Haniffa et al 2014: 64).⁷¹

69 “Facebook Bans ‘Bodu Bala Sena’ and Gnanasara Thera”, *Asian Mirror*, 20 June 2014.

70 He made this comment at a public forum held at the Royal College, Colombo, on 17 July 2014.

71 As observed through the interviews with both Muslim and Sinhala residents of Aluthgama and Beruwala.

Especially after Aluthgama 2014, the print media in Sinhalese-language the violence, but even a slight reference to the BBS was avoided⁷². The international groups like (*jathantara balavega*) were blamed for trying to undermine the Rajapaksa regime⁷³ and the hate speech delivered by the BBS which had triggered the incident was untouched upon. However, the English media were critical of the BBS's role in the riots and spread of extremism.

The Bodu Bala Sena website⁷⁴ states that Islamic fundamentalism teaches intolerance and is offensive to followers of other faiths and to those of no faith at all, while Buddhists are tolerant and non-aggressive as Buddhism does not believe in a creator, god or a holy scripture. To quote from the website of the Bodu Bala Sena, "The Buddha taught the importance of patience, tolerance, and non-aggression, providing a splendid idea of tolerance for who accepted his teachings but also the followers of all faiths, not only to the good but also to the wicked, not only to humans but also to animals and to all living beings". It further says that Muslims have disregard and disrespect towards the people of other religions, and they have been involved in violent activity against people of other faiths, including Buddhists. This fact is indisputable as one kind find examples in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan and also in Sri Lanka. Muslims are often concerned about their religion and their community and that is why they cannot assimilate with mainstream communities in the countries where they live.

The online links of Bodu Bala Sena elaborately deal with Islamic fundamentalism, even quoting verses from the Quran (Holy Book of the Muslims) to justify that Islam is a threat to the world. They have presented Islam to be a problem for the world and not only for Sri Lanka. However, they did not provide any instances of extremist activities in which the Muslims of Sri Lanka are involved. In fact, both Muslims and Christians of Sri Lanka have been peace loving and have not been involved in any kind of armed insurgency against the people or the state.

72 "Proud Inheritors or Petty Contractors? Understanding the BBS Phenomenon in Sri Lankan Politics", *Geoundviews*, 5 July 2014.

73 Ibid.

74 [Online web], accessed on 20th March 2014, URL:www.bodubalaseena.co/mobilization-ofbuddhists.html.

Purpose and Motives of Attacks

The organization behind the attacks is the Bodu Bala Sena which has joined forces with other organizations such as Sinhala Ravaya and Ravana Balaya. The purpose behind the attacks by these extremist organizations can be understood by the speeches, ideologies which they have propagated and spread of hatred in the society of Sri Lanka. Though these organizations have been against both Muslims and Christians, and both have been on their list of targets, mostly if the speeches of these organizations are studied, they have kept Islam and Muslims as their main target. With the Christian community, they have the problem regarding the conversions which are being carried out in the name of religion. With the Muslims, the issue is not just the way in which the Muslims dress, the Shariah law, and issuing of halal certificates in Sri Lanka, but also with Islam itself. Even the website of Bodu Bala Sena deals with the way in which Islam is a threat to the world, and the speeches which their members like Ven Gnananasara have delivered. Whether it was before the riots of Aluthgama or otherwise, they have depicted Islam to be the problem for the world and to Buddhism, and therefore the Muslims in Sri Lanka should be targeted.

The purpose and the motive behind the attacks can be summarized thus: First, “the role of Anti-Islam Movement that has engulfed the world since 9/11 has not subsided in the last decade”;⁷⁵ “Ven. Gnananasara’s and BBS’s views of Islam express contempt of Islamic practices”⁷⁶, whether it is the veil, on the ideas of procreation and debates on the construction and expansion of mosques. There is tendency of Muslims in Sri Lanka to expand the mosques and it has been on the target of the BBS. Second, the extremist organizations are not only involved in the incidences of attacking, pelting of stones and throwing fire-bombs but there have also incidences of land-grabbing and attacks on the business of Muslims. This shows that the BBS attacks have

⁷⁵ “Proud Inheritors or Petty Contractors? Understanding the BBS Phenomenon in Sri Lankan Politics”, *Groundviews*, 5 July 2014.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

an economic undertone. “In September 2011, a group of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka led a crowd that demolished a Muslim shrine in Anuradhapura city”.⁷⁷ The monk who led the group told the BBC, “he did it because the shrine was on land given to Sinhalese Buddhists 2,000 years ago”.⁷⁸ But the monk “Amatha Dhamma Thero alleged that local Muslims were trying to convert the shrine into a mosque despite new constructions being illegal on this site with its many Buddhist temples”.⁷⁹ Third, “in the wake of attacks on the Buddhists sites in Afghanistan and then Bangladesh where Muslim protestors set fire to Buddhist temples and homes”⁸⁰, the BBS has reacted and retaliated against the Muslims in Sri Lanka. Fourth, the Christian pastors have been attacked most of the time, with pelting of stones on the churches. The BBS is critical of the conversions that the Christian pastors are involved in. And so, they have attacked not only pastors but also their families, giving them warnings against any kind of conversion in the name of religion.

The following section will deal with the instances of attacks and violence on Muslims and Christians. Since 2009, there have been consistent attacks on the religious minorities and the incidences will be provided with the related data.

Incidents of Violence and Attacks on Muslims

The victory against the LTTE in 2009 has given boost to Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. The extremists’ organizations became assertive and vocal in criticizing other minorities viz. Muslims and Christians. In relation to violence against Muslims, incidences of violence can be identified. The incidences include attacking the mosque and in some cases, it had to be shifted to other places by the government authorities in the wake of protest by the monks. In one such incident as quoted in the “Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka” :

⁷⁷ “Sri Lanka Buddhist Monks Destroy Muslim Shrine”, *BBC News*, 15 September 2011.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “Sri Lanka Buddhist Monks Destroy Muslim Shrine”, *BBC News*, 15 September 2011.

⁸⁰ “Bangladesh: Muslims Attack Buddhist Temples, Homes Over Quran Facebook Photo”, *BBC News*, 30 September 2012.

On September 9, 2011 a 300 year old Muslim shrine in Anuradhapura was destroyed by a mob of over 100 people led by Buddhist monks. The destruction was reported as being spearheaded by a Buddhist monk Venerable Amatha Dhamma Thero who was quoted as saying that the shrine was destroyed because local Muslims were trying to turn the shrine into a Mosque, and that shrine was on land given to Sinhala Buddhists 2,000 years ago⁸¹.

Such incidents instilled fear among the community. On April 20, 2012,” a group of about 2,000 people led by Mahanayaka of the Rangiri Dambulla Chapter, Venerable Inamaluwe Sumangala Thero”, attacked and damaged a mosque by forcefully entering into and disrupting the Friday prayers..

Similarly, in Batticaloa and Sinha Hanuwa in the Anuradhapura district, mosques were burned down on August 12 and October 26 respectively. “The Sinhala Ravaya claimed responsibility for the attack on the shrine in Anuradhapura, as well as the attack on a mosque in Dehiwela, on their official website (www.sinhalaravaya.com)”. However, as of January 30 2013, this website no longer functions. The group distributed pamphlet and leaflets containing provocative messages which were signed by “clergy and laymen patriots”, and distributed in 2011, weeks before the attack on a Muslim shrine in Anuradhapura⁸². The rejuvenating and rekindle of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism was demanded and any mosques or churches construction on a “Buddhist heritage sites” were urged to be attacked and destroyed immediately. They also revolted against inter-caste marriages, slaughter of animals and demanded for the boycott of Muslims shops and businesses. The Muslims were warned for a possible “religious war” against them. The increasing number of attack and boycott of Muslims suggest that Sinhalese-Buddhist religious organizations consider them as threat to their culture. Muslims have also been accused of carrying out conversions, and conducting inter-religious marriages. The Muslims marry people

81 The Centre for Policy Alternative (2013), “Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka”, CPA :Colombo. pg 6-10.

82 The Centre for Policy Alternative (2013), “Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka”, CPA :Colombo pg 53.

of other faith, which is also a means of conversion and so the religious extremists organizations have protested against this.

The other ways in which the extremist groups have created trouble for the community is, holding protest against the covering of the head by Muslim women, banning of Halal food. The Report of the Commission to inquire into Unethical Conversions of Sri Lanka Buddhists states “the revival of fundamentalist Islam based on more and more Muslims adopting the orthodox attire, among other developments”⁸³. The anti-Muslim campaigns have manifested in a variety of ways, with a number of Bodu Bala Sena playing a vital public role.

The radical Sinhala-Buddhist group Bodu Bala Sena led a campaign against the boycott of the certificate issued by the government for food which is Halal. According to the monks, the issuing of this certificate is being done at the expense of all the tax payers of Sri Lanka and they should not be burdened for the sake of the Muslims. “General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena Venerable Galagodaththe Gnanasara is quoted as saying, if Muslim people want halal goods they can buy it from their mosque and had threatened an island-wide campaign to get people to reject halal products”. The anti-halal campaign gained a wide coverage on Facebook groups and pages of the extremist organization. “There have been a number of protests against halal including in places such as Kuliypitiya, Kurunegala district and in Embilipitiya, Ratnapura district on December 25, 2012”. Later, the government had to withdraw the issuing of Halal certificate. Muslims companies like Fashion Bug and No-Limit was also boycotted. “Even JHU held a protest in Embilipitiya in Sabaragamuwa Province against Halal certificates issued by the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama”⁸⁴. The boycott had impact on the Muslim-owned businesses and the spread of this economic boycott affected not only the business class but also the Sinhalese Muslim relations.

Thus by conducting these incidents Bodu Bala Sena managed to create a sense of fear among the Muslims; moreover it created a wide chasm between different communities. The attack on the

⁸³ Ibid pg 55

⁸⁴ [Online web] Accessed on 22 March 2015
URL:www.colombopage.com/archive_12B/Dec25_13569968KA.php

religious places and the religious practices of the Muslims reflected intolerance of the Sinhalese-Buddhist organizations. Through boycotts and bans the extremist organization was successful in creating trouble for the Muslims communities, which hardly retaliated in response to the attacks and incidents of violence. The little skirmishes between the communities were used as reason to start any kind of fight and violence. The conversion to Islam in the name of marriage has been a sensitive issue within the Sri Lankan society and Sinhalese Buddhist blamed Muslims for carrying out mass conversion through inter-religious marriages. The wearing of *hijab* (headscarf) and *burqa* (a loose black cloth worn by Muslim women) was not only objected but a poll was conducted by the Sinhalese newspapers, whether the wearing of these should be banned in Sri Lanka or not. There were also few individual reports of harassment of Muslim girls wearing scarves.

In some areas, physical violence and attacks on the community was accompanied by other measures in order to displace Muslims from particular areas. Such as incidents in Anuradhapura and Dambulla, the efforts were made to declare these places as sacred and Muslims were asked to leave the town as they have stayed there for long. The monks openly declared that Muslims have been living in the area for long time and so they should leave. According to the report of Attacks on Places of religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka:

The identification of these areas as sacred areas is also combined with urban development and cultural protection; hence, Muslim religious places and even residents have faced both legal and extra-legal processes to evict them from these areas. For instance in Dambulla, following the attack on the Masjidul Khairiya Mosque, people in the area were issued eviction notices from the UDA to vacate the area by the end of October 2012 on the ground that the area being sacred (CPA Report 2013).

The Muslims were asked to leave the town and there were incidents of land grabbing also. The community faced opposition even in settling in the nearby areas of the town. “ In 2011, land that was due to be given to 200 families relocated from Kurunegala Junction in Anuradhapura, was instead reportedly used for development of a Bhikku University for Buddhist nuns”. These incidents reflected there had been planned policy of displacing and evicting the Muslims and settling in their lands. The fact that the government’s servants were also part of this raised the

finger at their involvement with the extremist organization. The attacks on Muslim businesses in June 2014 in Aluthgama, Beruwala, Shargatown and Dehiwala by Bodu Bala Sena, points out the economic undertones of these attacks.

“On March 28, 2013 violence against Muslims escalated when Fashion Bug, a popular Muslim-owned garment-chain store was attacked”. Footage shows Buddhist monks leading a crowd of people and then throwing stones at the warehouse in Pepiliyana, while the police stood by and failed to stop the events from unfolding⁸⁵. Prior to the incident, BBS had circulated a text urging people to boycott Muslim shops and the Jathika Hela Urumaya had issued a statement saying: “Sinhalese Buddhists should be determined to teach such Muslim extremists a lesson that they will never forget”⁸⁶ (Haviland 2013). However BBS condemned the attack and refused to take responsibility for it.

The major attack on Muslims took place in Aluthgama in June 2014, after which the incidences of violence against the religious minorities were even condemned by the international community. The leading monk of the Bodu Bala Sena A, Gnanasara Thero was accused of hate speeches against the Muslims in Aluthgama town. In subsequent police interrogation, he blamed the Muslims and the government and claimed, “We are not the terrorists and it is the sole right of the Sinhalese Buddhists to protect Sri Lanka from all other forces” (*Al Jazeera* 2014).

The Secretariat for Muslims (SFM), from 2013 onwards, compiled incidents in which Muslims had faced a hate campaign that had resulted in violence and tension, including damages to

⁸⁵ Haniffa, Farzana (2015), “Anti-Muslim Sentiment in Sri Lanka: Hate Incidents of 2014”, [Online : web], Accessed on 3 April 2015, URL: http://www.academai.edu/10755059/Anti_Muslim_Sentiment_in_Sri_Lanka_Hate_Incidents_of_2014

⁸⁶ Haviland, Charles (2014), “Sri Lanka police ‘identify church attackers’ in Hikkaduwa”, *BBC News*, Colombo, 13 January 2014.

mosques and private properties and injuries to individuals and even deaths. This campaign was carried out through a variety of methods, including direct violence, demonstrations, speeches, social media and the mainstream media and had multiple impacts not just on the Muslim community but also the country at large, raising serious concerns relating to equality before the law, the lack of law enforcement, impunity and national identity. Above all, it questioned the commitment of the government to arrest the perpetrators of the hate campaign and deal with the underlying culture of hate (*Colombo Telegraph* 2015).

Rauf Hakeem, who was Minister of Justice (November 22, 2010-December 28, 2014) under the Rajapaksa Government had submitted a document titled, “Religious Violence in Sri Lanka” to the “United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay”⁸⁷. He, as leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), states in his report that between January and “December 2013, there were approximately 241 anti-Muslims incidents in the country”. This was in addition to 61 anti-Christian attacks. “The attacks were violent in nature and constituted either physical violence against individuals or destruction of property.”

Along with Bodu Bala Sena, even Sinhala Ravaya has been involved in building the rhetoric against Muslims. The incidents are cases of direct violence in which the religious extremist group involved in vandalism, attacks and creating an environment of fear for the Muslims. The attack was not confined to the way Muslims live in the Sri Lankan society but their economy and land was also attacked. Moreover, the incidents did not only confine to these attacks, but in cases like in Malwathuoya on January 2013, the community was asked to leave the town on the grounds that they have been staying in the area for a long time. So, analyzing these incidents one can see how the extremists group was fearless in not only propagating hate speeches, inciting the mobs to attack the communities business and houses.

Incidents of Violence and Attacks on Churches

⁸⁷ For further details see Nicholas, Gihan (2014), “Hakeem’s ‘damning report’, Ceylon Today , 16th March 2014.

The attacks on Christians also include threats and violence, destruction of places of worship and intimidating and attacking the Christian clergy and individuals. “In a majority of cases Evangelical churches were the prime target and the attacks were concentrated in the Western and Southern Provinces. These churches also face a series of legal and bureaucratic challenges for carrying out their religious practices.”⁸⁸The prime targets have been the Christian clergy and the churches because of their involvement in conversions.

In 2009, Centre for Policy Alternatives (2013) reported 14 cases of violence and attack on churches, including an attack on a 15-year-old Methodist Church in Daniela; the Assemblies of God Church was burned down twice, once in 2008 and then in 2009. “A temporary hall in which the Church held meetings was set on fire and was completely destroyed by unidentified persons. The structure was rebuilt and a police complaint was made”. On November 5, 2009, “around 200 people surrounded the Jesus Never Fails Prayer Centre, hurled stones at the building, damaged the building exterior, windows, air-conditioning units and the gate”⁸⁹. The prayer service was disturbed, pastor was threatened. There were six attacks reported in the year 2010 on the churches. Few of the incidents included an attack on the Church of the Foursquare Gospel by 150 people, “allegedly led by Buddhist monks who threw stones at the building, destroyed chairs and other furniture, and threatened the pastor”.

1. In 2011, there were four incidents, in one of which the “Prayer Tower Church premises were desecrated by human excrement by unidentified persons in the early hours of the day”.
2. There were 11 incidents of attack on churches in 2012. Two churches were attacked in Puttalam district while one in Aluthgama on July 29, when “50 people including 15 Buddhist monks were allegedly disrupted the Sunday worship services, damaged furniture and stolen books and money at the Assembly of God church”⁹⁰.

⁸⁸ For further details please check, The Centre for Policy Alternative, “Attacks on Places Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka”, CPA :Colombo.

⁸⁹ Ibid, pp 35-37.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pp 39.

3. In March 2013, the Bodu Bala Sena, including a mob of hundred, surrounded a pastor's house in Asgiriya, Kandy; set fire to tyres outside and screamed in abusive language at those inside. "On 24th March 2013 they held their Convention in Panadura and claimed that Sri Lanka is not a multi-racial or multi-religious country but a Sinhala Buddhist country. Gnanasara Thero said that the people should be prepared to rally against Christian and Muslim extremist groups operating in the country"⁹¹.
4. On January 12, 2014 "an assault on the Assembly of God and Cavalry churches in the tourist town of Hikkaduwa, 112 kilometers south of Colombo, was organized by the Bodu Bala Sena".

These incidents of violence show that church have been the main target for the extremist organizations. And the forms of violence include physical attack and also use of fire bombs, pelting of stone, shouting of slogans .The incidents of throwing of excrement at these holy structures were reported. Such incidents only prove that the religious extremist groups wanted to provoke the minority group to resort to violence. But the minority group hardly retaliated in the same way and they mostly complained about the incidents in the police. But that did not stop the incidence of violence

Sri Lanka holds the 29th position in the 2014 World Watch List, which ranks the 50 countries where Christians face the most oppression. The country did not appear in the top 50 in 2013. The Buddhist extremists' organization is against the multicultural society and through these incidents they want to assert their Sinhalese-Buddhist identity and establish their supremacy. The right place for minority was to live under the fear of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism.

The majority of the cases were of mob violence which was publicly reported but police failed to take any kind of action against them. The other kind of problem faced by the Evangelical churches was that of registration. The new organization or churches which wanted to get registered were denied. This was due to the conversion which takes place through these organizations. The Buddhist political party has been vocal against the organizations working for

⁹¹ Rutnam, Easwaran (2014), "BBS insists Lanka not Multiracial", *Colombo Gazette*, 24th March 2013.

conversions and so they want unethical conversion bill to be passed in the parliament, which will stop conversions by bribing the poor's.

“Tamil Christians are treated as second-class citizens but Sinhalese Christians are also looked at with suspicion and frequently slandered and attacked”⁹². A very small group of expatriate Christians are found in Sri Lanka who is situated in Colombo. The churches are protestant and catholic. Non-traditional Protestant churches as well as converts from the Buddhist background face maximum persecution. While there are plenty of churches in Colombo, the picture completely changes in the rural areas. Most Christians meet in house churches and are forced to keep a low profile. As one pastor in the central highlands said, “If I had put a cross on the building, they would have killed me.”

Buddhists have carried out a campaign against the Evangelicals and churches in Sri Lanka warning them to cease their religious activities in the Buddhist-majority villages. Ravana Balaya, a radical Sinhalese Buddhist organization, visited more than 20 Evangelical prayer services from July 15 to 19 in 2014 in Polonnaruwa and told pastors to stop holding services and cease trying to convert Buddhists and Hindus, According to the Venerable Ittekande Saddhatissa Thero, General Secretary of the Ravana Balaya. “We have gotten hundreds of complaints from Buddhists and Hindus that evangelical pastors covert Buddhists to their religion and offer gifts and money to them,” he said. “If the evangelical churches fail to stop their mission, we will take legal action against their prayer centers.” According to the National Christian Evangelical Alliance (NCCA), “Many pastors have been beaten and threatened to halt their prayer meetings,” said Godfrey Yogarajah, General Secretary of NCCA. “People have logged complaints in police stations but it is very rare that culprits are identified,” he said. “Many of the mobs that have attacked prayer gatherings have been led by Buddhist monks,” said Yogarajah, adding that monks have faced no legal repercussions for these acts of violence.

In two other incidents, Christians were taken to the hospital after sustaining injuries by a violent mob. A pastor was knocked unconscious in a raid on his home on May 12, 2014. His family and

92 [Online:web] Accessed on 20 May 2015

URL:www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/sri_lanka.php

four other Christians were also attacked. In a meeting with the police, he informed about an incident when they were threatened for holding a prayer meeting in their home. While waiting for the police, about 150 people surrounded the house and began shouting at them. Forty people broke through the security fence around the property; attacked the pastor's van, forced their way into the house attacking those inside. The police arrived ten minutes after the mob had dispersed and it took the Christians to the police station and held them for seven hours. No attempt was made to apprehend the offenders. The Christians filed a case against their attackers, and a magistrate subsequently reprimanded the police and ordered them to arrest the perpetrators. In a separate incident, five monks and 20 youth stormed a prayer gathering at the home of a Christian family in Waththegama, Kandy district, on May 15. Two strangers arrived and requested for prayers, but it was later found that the mob had sent the pair as a set-up. While the Christians were praying for them, the assailants burst in and attacked the Christians. They dragged a Christian girl to the Buddhist temple and drenched her with water subjecting her to verbal and physical assault. One attacker choked her, threatening to kill her and warning her not to return to the village. A case was filed against her for unethical conversions.

The government launched a Special Police Unit in April 2014 to address the rising religious tensions between the Christians, Muslims and the Buddhist majority. Pastor O.S. Fernando, President of the Pastors Fellowship Group in Polonnaruwa, denied allegations that Evangelical groups had offered money or gifts to potential converts. "We never convert by force [or] put up new houses to attract the faithful. It's their own decision," he said. At least some of the tension has resulted from misunderstandings. "While a pastor was putting up a new house, Buddhists monks had misunderstood that it was a new prayer centre and so they lodged a complaint," he said. "Over 150 people came with Buddhist monks to stop construction of the new building." "Now the pastor has been given police security," he said, and added that "many pastors fear to work in the area now."

The Sri Lankan government was asked by the United Nations to take necessary steps towards stop the frequent racial and faith-based hatred and violence against the Muslim and Christian communities by the hardline Buddhist groups. UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Heiner Bielefeld said "Impunity and inadequate response from the police and judicial

authorities aimed at protecting the lives, physical security, the property and places of worship of these communities may encourage further attacks and a risk of spiraling violence.” Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Rita Izsk said, “The Government must end the violence and put in place urgent protective measures to ensure the personal security of all individuals belonging to religious minority communities living in the country.”⁹³ The “Special Rapporteur on Extra Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Christof Heyns, called on authorities to take urgent and firm measures to bring the perpetrators of the killing to justice, and to ensure the immediate adoption of robust protective measures.”⁹⁴

Conclusion

Sri Lanka was grappling with an ethnic problem till 2009 and in the post-civil war period it was assumed that the country would enter a new phase of peace and harmony. The rise of religious extremism has further maligned the impression of the country since the end of the civil war. The Muslims and Christian groups, organizations and leaders have been vocal in protesting against the violence and attacks on their places of worship, businesses, lives and property. Various reports have cited and confirmed the rise in the attacks carried out by the Sinhala-Buddhist extremist organization, Bodu Bala Sena. The Rajapaksa government’s response was half-hearted. The international pressure made the government to first condemn the attacks and violence, but it did not take steps to check the extremist organizations like Sinhala Ravaya and Bodu Bala Sena. They delivered hate speeches, resulting in violence and riots and maintained numerous websites propagating hatred in the society. There were allegations that the Bodu Bala Sena was enjoying support of the former Defence Secretary, Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

93 “Stop the promotion of hatred and faith-based violence”-UN rights experts urge Sri Lanka, [Online: web] Accessed on 12 May 2015

URL:www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14812&.

94 ibid

Chapter V

Responses of the Government and Religious Minorities

Introduction

The last chapter dealt with violence against the religious minorities perpetrated by various extremist groups. The present chapter examines the responses of the government and the religious minorities. The responses from the government include political, judicial and the police measures. With the end of the war there was consolidation of power under the regime of Rajapaksa government. The militarization and securitization of the country took place in the name of securing the citizen. But the state institutions like police and judiciary failed to deliver when the incidents of attacks and violence were taking place against the minorities. The affected minorities found it hard to get justice. The perpetrators were not punished, and the victims themselves were treated badly when they complained to the police. The government did work for the rehabilitation of the community in the places where riots took place, but its silence on the involvement of the religious extremists groups like BBS and Sinhala Ravaya did not stop the attacks and vandalism.

The Response from the Government

Political

The Rajapaksa government did not want to disappoint the extremist Sinhala-Buddhist forces, that are believed to be responsible for the attacks on the religious centers of the minorities and that call for boycott of *halal* products, as it did not want to risk alienating its majority supporter, Sinhala Buddhist community. President Mahinda Rajapaksa had a meeting in January 2013 with the Buddhist extremist organization Bodu Bala Sena to talk about latter's onslaught against the Muslims, which was a great achievement. The meeting presented as an initiative of the President to address the problem of hate campaigns against the Muslims, even though the President did not

press the Bodu Bala Sena to desist from attacking Muslims. Ironically, the President, instead, asked Muslims to restrain themselves. During a meeting with Muslims clerics, the President told them to speak responsibly during the Jumma prayers, and not to ask the community to defend themselves. The government's approach in dealing with the extremist organization was one of somehow permitting its activities. The government did not condemn the Bodu Bala Sena's activity. Moreover, Gotabaya Rajapaksa denied any links with the group post-Aluthgama riots in June 2014. But again he failed to recognize any involvement of the group in the riots.

The Bodu Bala Sena was becoming increasingly powerful, in the absence of any measures being taken against the group. Following the meeting with the President, they also tried to shirk responsibility for the crimes of their members by claiming that such crimes are perpetrated by other groups using the name of Bodu Bala Sena. Ironically, these denials were accompanied by, announcements of new targets like the Kurugal Site, where, they say. A mosque was built on an archaeological site⁹⁵.

In April 2012, a fire bomb was directed against a mosque in the city of Dambulla following which 2,000 Buddhist monks stormed the mosque demanding its demolition claiming that it was built illegally.⁹⁶ While the Prime Minister ordered the relocation of the mosque, Muslims in the Eastern Province called a strike to protest against the attack.⁹⁷ On January 27, 2013, Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) had a meeting with President Rajapaksa at the Temple Trees which lasted for two long hours. In the meeting, President Rajapaksa asserted that every citizen of Sri Lanka, irrespective of ethnicity or religion have the right to live in peace and security. He warned that violence will be met with sternly. ⁹⁸. Even after that the Bodu Bala Sena conducted violent attacks on Christians in Kandy in March 2013, and they were also behind the Aluthgama riots in

⁹⁵ "Mosque to be demolished after protests", [Online web] Accessed on 20 March 2015, URL:www.tamilguradian.com/article.asp?articleid=14576.

⁹⁶ "Sri Lankan Muslims Strike over Dambulla Mosque", *BBC*, 26 April 2012 [Online web] Accessed on 25th April 2015. URL:www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-17852900.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Edirisinghe, Dasun (2013) "President Rajapaksa Stresses Need for Respecting Rights of All Communities", *The Island*, 28 January 2013.

June 2014, which broke after the Bodu Bala Sena held a rally in Aluthgama. Moreover, on March 9, 2013, the Defence Secretary inaugurated ‘Meth Sevana,’ the Cultural and Training Center of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), in Pilana, Wanchawla in Galle, with the purpose of conducting training programmes for bhikkus and laymen. The Head of the Meth Sevana, Ven. Embilipitiye Vijitha Thera, was reported to have said that the Defence Secretary commended the service of the BBS towards the progress of the Buddha Sasana⁹⁹.

In April 2013, the then Minister of National Languages and Social Integration, Vasudeva Nanayakkara, had rejected claims that a Cabinet paper seeking a ban on the extremist groups was being prepared. He was also quoted as stating, “This is a democratic country and organizations have their rights to express ideas”¹⁰⁰. The Jathika Hela Urumaya has taken the position that they would strongly oppose any such Cabinet paper.¹⁰¹ However, they failed to differentiate between propagation of ideas and delivering of hate speeches and involvement in riots and conflict. The group’s rallies and the online website are full of speeches of incitement of hatred towards the minority section of the society, which the government failed to notice.

The members of the government did not take any steps against the extremist organization, and especially the lack of any arrests in the instances where the Buddhist monks were openly breaking the law was indicative of the regime’s tacit acceptance of and sympathy for the ideologies and strategies of the BBS.¹⁰² In spite of the fact that videos of most of the attacks were in circulation in e-mails, Facebook, Twitter and even in the mainstream media, the

⁹⁹ Ananda S.W (2013), “Gota Inaugurates BBS Meth Sevana”, *Ceylon Today*, 10 March 2013.

¹⁰⁰ “Sri Lankan Minister Denies Cabinet Paper Aimed at Banning Extremist Organizations”, *Colombo Page*, April 2013 [Online web], Accessed on 24 April 2015
URL:www.colombopage.com/archive_13A/Apr07_1365318278CH.php.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Haniffa et al (2014), “Where have All the Neighbours Gone? Aluthgama Riots and Its Aftermath”, Colombo: Law and Society Trust (LST).

government failed to persecute the perpetrators¹⁰³. This not only boasted the spirit of the organization but also reflected some kind of link between them.

In June 2014, when the Aluthgama riots took place and other violent incidents at Dharga and Beruwala occurred, President Rajapaksa government tried to hide its political responsibility for the attack incited by the BBS.¹⁰⁴ Even though a curfew was imposed in Aluthgama just before the riots took place, the armed military units and the Special Task Force (STF) looked on when the mob ransacked the towns of Mathugama and Welipenna, several kilometres from Aluthgama.¹⁰⁵

A report, titled 'Religious Violence in Sri Lanka', which was submitted by the Minister of Justice under the Rajapaksa government, was condemned by President himself as well as many political parties, including the National Freedom Front (NFF), Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and the BBS. However, the report had pointed out that violence and lawlessness cannot be without the support of the government leaders. In fact, the media report states that the Defence Secretary is highly influenced by the activities of the BBS. The persistence of attacks and violence on Muslims and Christians brought Sri Lanka under the scrutiny of the United Nations, and three United Nations experts on freedom of religion, minority issues and summary executions on July 2, 2014 urged the government to adopt urgent measures to stop the promotion of racial and faith-based hatred, violence against Muslim and Christian communities and to bring the perpetrators of such violence to justice.

According to Izzath Hussein,

There has been a protracted hate campaign against the Muslims, with nineteen websites going at it, and without the Government taking the slightest notice of it. There have been attacks on mosques and Muslim business establishments, with the police playing the role

¹⁰³ Farook, Latheef (2014), "Religious Police: Another Ploy to Hoodwink Muslims and the Country", *Colombo Telegraph*, Colombo, 30 April 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Rupasinghe, Wasantha (2014), "Sri Lankan Government Tries to Whitewash Anti-Muslim Attacks", *World Socialist Website*, 19 June 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

of passive spectators or taking not much more than perfunctory action. There have been videos showing monks breaking the law and the police placidly looking on, but the Government has refused to take any action in such cases. It is true that around the time of the National Day on February 4 there were Governmental statements, including one by the President himself, acknowledging and deploring racism among the Sinhalese. That certainly was a significant step forward, but the requisite counter-action did not follow. Instead the Halal problem was allowed to become critical (Hussain 2013).

The limited progress in implementing the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC)¹⁰⁶ has made it difficult to take steps to promote tolerance and peace in the Sri Lankan society. The Commission recommended the creation of an inter-faith group for promoting harmony and understanding between people belonging to different religions.. Such groups, it was hoped that, will also act as an early warning system on religious tension. However, these proposals were not included in the proposed Action Plan. The Action Plan, instead, proposes the strengthening of the Civil Defence Committees (CDC) and community policing¹⁰⁷. However, These CDs are, more of a tool of the Government for monitoring anti-government dissent than for preventing communal flare ups. The Government, therefore it seems, is not interested in creating effective mechanism for preventing communal violence.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Navi Pillay's report of 2013 criticized President Mahinda Rajapaksa for authoritarian rule since the defeat of the LTTE in 2009. The Government's response to this grave issue of religious violence has been setting up committees and Commissions, instead of taking firm action. Even when committees or commissions are set up and the latter make recommendations, the Government fails to adhere to

¹⁰⁶ Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) was appointed by the Mahinda Rajapaksa government in 2010 for investigation of allegations of grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by both the government forces and the fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the final stages of the war. The report was released on 16 December 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Centre for Policy Alternative (2013), "Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka", CFA Colombo

these recommendations. 108. During the intensification of the violent campaign against Muslims in early 2013, there were proposals for some mechanisms to deal with the problem but the status of these mechanisms was not clear.

There is also the issue of politicization of the different institutions of the state like the judiciary which adds to the problem. Although laws in force in Sri Lanka do not discriminate between the people belonging to different religions, they are implemented with bias with the minorities facing stricter implementation of the laws than the Buddhists. Religious minorities are often denied permission for building places of worship. Rajapaksa's statement regarding the hatred and violence in Sri Lanka propagated by the extremist group Bodu Bala Sena was "directing the police to act against any individual or group fomenting ethnic or religious hatred"¹⁰⁹. He never named or recognized the BBS for carrying out such acts of violence in spite of the fact that there was evidence against them. Moreover, the Sri Lanka Government's first formal statement on the events was delivered at the 26th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council- four days after the riots¹¹⁰.

Though Rajapaksa was not vocal about the BBS being involved in the riots against the Muslims and Christians, the political leaders, both treasury bench and in the opposition, have termed the BBS as an extremist group responsible for violence against Muslims and Christians. Even some ministers in the Sri Lanka Government held BBS responsible for the violence. ¹¹¹ Rauff Hakeem, who was Minister of Justice in Rajapaksa government, even submitted a report to UN titled, "Religious Violence in Sri Lanka" in 2014, listing down the incidents of violence and attacks on Muslims and Christians in Sri Lanka.

108 [Online web] Accessed on 20 March 2015

URL:www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13673.

109 Deen, Thalif (2015), "U.N. Chief Urges Sri Lanka to Protect Muslims under Attack", *Inter Press Service*, 16 July 2015.

110 Faaiz, A.M. (2014), "Stop Blaming the Victims", *Groundviews*, Colombo, 6 July 2014.

111 Peiris, Harris (2014), "The BBS and a Catalyst for a Buddhist Muslim Conflict", *Groundviews*, Colombo, 16 July 2014.

However, President Rajapaksa, although have appealed for harmony, did not condemn the the groups like BBS which are responsible for violence. (Ahmad and Girard 2014: 132). This reluctance of Rajapaksa to condemn the BBS encourages the authorities to treat the BBS with kid globe (Centre for Policy Alternatives 2013: 5).

Judiciary

Article 10 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka states, “Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice”. Article 14(1) (e) states: “(1) every citizen is entitled to: (e) the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching” (Deegalle 2013:48). There has been a clear indication of the polarization of society and a campaign of persecution against certain sections of the society. The lack of interest shown on the part of the Mahinda Rajapaksa government to address the issue, in the post-war society of Sri Lanka, has not only increased the insecurity among the minorities within the country but also tarnished the image of the country at the international level. Though there were appeals by the Government and the President for tolerance, it stopped short of condemning the hate campaigns. At his victory speech in May 2009, the President remarked “We have removed the word minorities from our vocabulary three years ago. No longer are Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and any other minorities” (Wikramasinghe 2009:1046) without clarifying as to how the majority’s position would be transformed. Demands for collective rights are termed as divisive and hence it was discouraged by the government. In President Rajapaksa’s words, “When the people live together in unity there are no racial or religious differences. Therefore, it is not practical for this country to be divided based on ethnicity. The solution is to live together in this country with equal rights for all communities.112”

Hate speeches, including those posted in social networks, have exacerbated the problem by creating a tense atmosphere of mistrust. The government is reluctant to take legal measures

112 Roberts, Michael (2013), “Mixed Messages and Bland oversimplification in President Rajapaksa’s Independence Day Speech”, Groundviews, 2 Nov. 2013.

against these hate speeches although it is bound by its international commitments to do so. . Although there have been proposals to enact anti hate speech legislation, no action has been taken till date on such proposals. (Ahmad and Girard 2014: 132). On the other hand, there are instances when the government detained people, even prominent personalities under stringent anti-terror laws for their criticism of extremist groups (Ahmad and Girard 2014: 132). Four Buddhists monks along with two laymen, accused of insulting the Quran, were summoned to the court on May 5, 2014. The Police accused the monks, from the BBS, of gate crashing into a meeting of Muslim clerics and abusing the Quran. After the riots in Aluthgama and its nearby areas, it was the private lawyers who came to the rescue of the people affected by the riots. The Bar Association of Sri Lanka had warned the government and the Attorney General's Department against its failure to maintain religious disharmony disturbed by the Bodu Bala Sena. They also sought to provide legal services for those who desperately needed legal advice after their property and security were violated during the Aluthgama riots on the 15th and 16th of June 2014 (Haniffa et al 2014: 66).

Two inquests were initiated where Upul Jayasuriya, the President and Ajith Pathirana, the Secretary of the BASL (Sri Lanka Bar Association) appeared. The first case was filed in the Magistrate's Court, Kalutara, under case number B.R. 1501/14 pertaining to the deaths of two Muslims resulting from the Sinhala-Muslim riots. This mainly attempted to clarify the inconsistencies in the JMO (Judicial Medical Officer) report with regard to deaths, where it was recorded that the death was caused by cut injuries but that gunshot wounds were also found. The police had stated that this was an interim JMO report when it was becoming evident that the matter was being investigated further.¹¹³

The second application pertained to damages. There had not been a single instance where the government analyst had inspected the scene.¹¹⁴ The court had ordered the police to stop

¹¹³ This is based on a lawyer's opinion on case number B.R. 1501/14 and its implications; check the further details in the report .

¹¹⁴ This is based on the information given by a lawyer. The witness reports by victims of the Aluthgama and Beruwala areas did not provide any account which were contrary to this. For further details check Haniffa et al (2014), "Where have all the Neighbours Gone? Aluthgama Riots and its Aftermath", Colombo: Law and Society Trust.

cleaning until the government analyst had investigated the area. The Legal Aid Commission and the Attorney General's Department failed to step in and assist those who have required legal advice. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, however, had paid a visit to Aluthgama and had requested those whose fundamental rights were violated due to the riots to file affidavits (Haniffa et al 2014: 67). These incidents show the inconsistency in the report of the police.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, called on Sri Lanka to implement the findings of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). Through her meetings with the President, other senior members of government and human rights defenders, the High Commissioner noted, "despite the opportunity provided by the end of the war to construct a new vibrant, all embracing state, [the country] is showing signs of heading in an increasingly authoritarian direction". Pillai called for prevention of violence against the minorities and criticised the government for failing to take effective steps in this direction (Haniffa et al 2014).

Police

The growing number of incidents against the minorities, made Rajapaksa set up a Special Police Unit¹¹⁵ to deal with complaints relating to religious matters¹¹⁶ under the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs in 2014. The Special Police comprised of 500 officers, majority of whom were Buddhists. This raised concerns among the minority community regarding the issue of discrimination in reporting of the cases.

The cases in which there were attacks on churches and mosques , police did file complain on disrupting the peace and harmony.

In June 2014, anti-Muslim violence erupted in southern Sri Lanka in the towns of Aluthgama, Dharga Town, Valipanna and Beruwala (Haniffa et al 2015 :1).The violence against Muslims erupted

¹¹⁶"Disband Special Police Unit-Make Police Independent: Lawyers Collective Demand", *Colombo Telegraph*, 30 April 2014.

in Aluthgama in the evening of June 15, 2014, after a curfew had been imposed on the area, which continued for over two days. During this time not only were the houses and businesses of Muslims (and some Sinhalese in Pathirajagodas, Adhikarigoda, Mihiripanna and Welipanna) looted, burnt and destroyed but also the relationship between the local Sinhalese and Muslims communities was severely impaired (Haniffa et al 2015: 1).

On June 10, 2014, shortly before the incidents of Aluthgama and Beruwala, the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL)¹¹⁷ had requested the Attorney General, Palitha Fernando, to take steps against the actions of the BBS¹¹⁸. But no action was taken on the part of Attorney General's Department and the Aluthgama and Beruwala riots happened later. Even though after the riots, few individuals had dared to complain against those who had been identified as perpetrators, the Muslims recounted instances where the complainants had been arrested by the police (Haniffa et al 2014: 73).

Response from the Religious Minorities

A survey carried out by the Asian Foundation (2011) shows that the majority of Sri Lankans see their society as becoming more religious today than five years ago, with higher adherence to religion. However, there are differences among communities in the degree of religiosity with more religiosity among the Buddhists and Muslims as compared to Hindus and Christians. However, in the changed situation after the end of the Sri Lankan civil war, Muslims and Christians are finding themselves at the receiving end of the hostilities of the Buddhist majoritarianism.

There have been reports of discrimination in government-run schools against the Muslim and Christian communities. There have been cases of harassment against the non-Buddhist students including the incident like making the Muslim girls who cover their head to leave the class¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁷ BBS even challenged the BASL for a debate on the contents of the letter.

¹¹⁸ See "Video: BBS Challenges BASL to Debate on Letter Sent to AG", *Daily Mirror*, 10 June 2014.

¹¹⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (2015), Sri Lanka: USCIRF Annual Report 2015.

There are also instances of violence on school students belonging to religious minorities by the Buddhist teachers for the latter's ignorance on Buddhism. What is more worrying is the indifference of the authorities on such incidences. (International Religious Freedom Report 2012).

On July 29, 2012 in Rajagiriya in the Colombo district, a group of people tried to forcefully enter the Jamiyathul Darul Iman mosque during the religious prayers in the month of Ramadan. Due to a fear of further attacks, prayer services at this centre were stopped later. Some Muslim groups also said that these extremists' organizations had got backing from Sri Lanka Government's Ministry of Buddha Sasana¹²⁰.

The Aluthgama incident which started from a quarrel between a Muslim boy and a Buddhist monk further aggravated the situation. However, the silver lining is that there are cases of moderate Sinhalese trying to protect the beleaguered minority. The President of the Muslim Council of Sri Lanka, N.M. Ameen, for example, mentioned about an incident where a section of Sinhalese-Buddhist have protected the shops of minorities from Sinhala extremists. ¹²¹ Muslim civil society organizations have adopted a strategy of engaging with the state representatives, mainly the Defence Secretary, in seeking solutions to the problems the Muslims are faced with. During a crisis situation, such as the Halal certificate issue and the attack against Fashion Bug, the Defence Secretary reached out to Muslims in looking for settlement.¹²² Muslim organizations also prepared and compiled documents citing hate incidents in order to highlight the incidents and gain international attention. Azath Salley, the leader of the Muslim Tamil National Alliance and a prominent political voice critical of the BBS, was arrested under the

¹²⁰ For further reference see, The Centre for Policy Alternative (2013), "Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka", CPA :Colombo pg 53

¹²¹ See "Muslim Concerned Over Aluthgama Incident", *The Sunday Leader*, [Online web] Accessed on 20 April 2015 URL: www.thesundayleader.lk/2014/06/15/muslims-concerned-over-aluthgama-incident/

¹²² For further details see, "Haniffa et al (2014), "Where have All the Neighbours Gone? Aluthgama Riots and Its Aftermath", Colombo: Law and Society Trust (LST).

Prevention of Terrorism Act No. 48 of 1979.¹²³ These incidents sent a strong message against those who were vocal against the BBS.

In May 2014, the Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiudeen¹²⁴ had filed a lawsuit against the BBS claiming 500 Million rupees (US\$ 3.82 Mn) in compensation for defamatory statements made by the BBS in the Colombo District courts¹²⁵. The lawsuit was filed at the Colombo District Court against certain remarks of Ven. Galagodaate Gnanasara in which he made certain calumny against the minister.

Religious groups in Sri Lanka must be incorporated either under the Societies Ordinance, the Trust Ordinance, or by an act of Parliament under the Companies Act. Before the 1960s, most of the churches in Sri Lanka were either Catholic or Anglican, and were incorporated by acts of Parliament. Religion is a compulsory subject in the public school curriculum of Sri Lanka. Parents may decide for their children whether to study Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism or Christianity.

In the 1970s, as new Christian groups began to emerge in the country, it became commonplace to register churches under the Companies Act. Responding to allegation that these are doing “unethical conversions”, the Rajapaksa government began to show reluctance to register new religious groups as companies. Registration under the Societies or Trust Ordinances, on the other hand curtails the ability of these groups to carry out financial transactions.

Some Christian groups have also reported the difficulty in permission from local authorities to construct church buildings. Some Evangelical Christian groups reported incidences of governmental discrimination in the provision of services. There are also incidents when

¹²³ See, “Sri Lanka: The Arrest and Detention of Azath Salley”, Asian Human Rights Commission, 6 May 2013.

¹²⁴ Rishad Bathiudeen was Minister of Industry and commerce under the Mahinda Rajapaksa government and also now under Maithripal Sirisena, he holds the same ministry.

¹²⁵ See “Minister Bathiudeen Files Lawsuit against Bodu Bala Sena”, *Colombo Telegraph*, [Online web], Accessed on 30 April 2015, URL:<http://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/minister-baithudeen-files-lwasuit-against-bodu-bala-sena/>

government schools refused to enroll Christians children because of their religion. The National Christian Council, which is an umbrella organization representing “traditional” Protestant churches, coordinated often with the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), which represented the newer denomination churches. The government reportedly used membership in the NCC as an administrative obstacle to newer denominations. The main response of both the communities was that of helplessness, and it was the support of the civil society which helped the victims a lot. The police, judiciary and the government took half-hearted measures, and if they would have been vigilant then the riots could have been avoided and life and property saved. But the government was not even ready to recognize the role of Bodu Bala Sena in perpetrating violence.

Conclusion

Thus, if the responses from the government and the minorities are analyzed, it is found that the Rajapaksa government did not take strict measures to curb violence and conflict against the minorities. In fact, the government was reluctant in accepting Sinhala-Buddhist extremism and few of the Ministers specially from the political Buddhist party JHU, termed the problem to be a conspiracy of the foreigners. This is the major problem of the Sri Lankan society which does not accept the reality; similarly, it used to deny any ethnic problem with the Tamils. If the government would have recognized the problems and taken measures to check the attack on the minorities, by taking action against the BBS, then lot of problems of the society in the post-civil war-torn society would have been solved. However, the minority’s response of helplessness in the wake of inaction on the part of the police to take timely action against the perpetrators was understandable. The civil society and the leaders representing the minority communities have done a commendable job in collecting the data and making the issue an international concern.

Conclusion

Post-civil war Sri Lanka has ushered in a new phase of peace. Though there were concerns over human rights issue during the last phase of the civil war, ending of the war with the LTTE has signified the end of violence. However, the last phase of war saw the consolidation of Sinhalese Buddhist identity. The Rajapaksa government contributed to this rise by supporting the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. The Rajapaksa regime reflected the greediness for power. The study first analyzed the concept of religious extremism, its traits and characteristics and then examined the causes behind its rise and the factors which contribute to its spread. The rise of religious extremism can be attributed to various factors, of which religion remains the prominent one. The other factors contributing to its rise are the politics, leadership and economy. Religious extremists resort to violence when they either want to threaten the other community or avenge or it is out of fear or threat to their own existence. Religious extremism, along with radical nationalism, poses a serious threat to the minorities within a nation. Sri Lanka has also not remained unaffected by the rise of religious extremism in the post-civil war period and since then it had tried to create a dominant majority culture by silencing the minorities in the country.

The leadership of the country was also favouring this, for the electoral benefits and legitimacy among the majority community. Mahinda Rajapaksa after winning the war, had addressed the nation, and in his speech he declared that there were, no longer any minorities in Sri Lanka. “There are only two people in the country, one which love the country in which they live and the other who have no love for it”,¹²⁶ he said so the multicultural society of Sri Lanka ceased to be multicultural with the defeat of the LTTE. This reflected a new kind of patriotism in which the only identity which mattered was the Sinhalese-Buddhist identity. The defeat of the LTTE have been followed by the constitutional reforms and reconciliation with the affected minority, which is Sri Lankan Tamils, but on the contrary, incidents of violence alienated other minorities. The Muslims and Christians who have been the peaceful communities of the Sri Lankan society

¹²⁶ For further details see, Wikramasinghe, Nira (2009), “After the War: A New Patriotism in Sri Lanka?”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 68(4):1045-1054.

became the target of the rising extremist Sinhalese-Buddhist groups the like Bodu Bala Sena, the Sinhala Ravaya and the Ravana Balaya.

However, the Buddhists monks are the revered and respected community in Sri Lanka. But they should not be seen as single group. There are various groups and organizations of monks, with different ideologies and purposes. Though a section of the monks who do not belong to the extremist fringe of the society, they did not protest against the rise of violence against the minority communities, and their silence was treated as their approval of the act. The fact that monks were involved in such activities should have been the matter of concern for the clerics. The teachings of Dharmapala and Rahula have also influenced the extremist section of the society. The adoption of Sinhalese-Buddhist myth as the dominant historical narrative has disregarded the contribution of other section of the society. The extremist organization uses this myth and history to revoke and unleash violence on other communities.

The extremist groups' were involved in attacking, rioting, vandalism and spreading of hate speeches against the minorities. The groups considered themselves to be the prime protector of Buddhism and were also applauded for their work by the former Defence Secretary, Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The former Defence Secretary later denied any links with the organization when the allegations of rioting and violence were laid on them. These extremist organization's activities became a cause for concern for not only the Sri Lankan society but also the international community. The vandalism of the Christian and Muslim places of worship, attacks on the clergy and destruction of business and property of these communities became. The leading organization responsible for these attacks was Bodu Bala Sena.

The organization spread its hate agenda by conducting rallies, holding meetings, and it had extensive presence on the social media. One can find various online videos of these organizations making in hate speeches against the minorities. The online site of this organization is itself full of hatred against the Muslims and Christians. The prime target of this organization, however, has been Muslims. Islam, for BBS, is not only a threat for Sri Lanka but also for the whole. Hence in the name of protecting Buddhism, it was involved in rioting and attacking these communities. The allegation against the Christian community was related to conversion.

The religious extremists belong to the majority Sinhalese Buddhist community and thus they also promote dominant Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism. Buddhism enjoys the state protection. Hence, the reason behind the rise of religious extremism was not due to any kind of discrimination, subjugation or deprivation. The fundamental factor was the fear of the Sinhalese Buddhist organizations. These perceptions of fear from other religious groups have made them more assertive and resort to violent means. However, the fear remains imaginary as the Muslim and Christian groups have not involved in any kind of extremist activity with Sri Lanka.

The regime was also responsible for the rise of Sinhalese Buddhist extremism. Instead of bringing about peace and harmony among the different communities in the post-war society, the leadership was involved in consolidating power and in doing so they promoted the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. The militarization of the society has made the situation worse, as any kind of solution to the problem has become difficult. Moreover, the legacy of historical myths and the teachings of Anagarika Dharmapala and Walpola Rahula have only legitimized the monks' role in violence and conflict. Instead of resolving the issues through dialogue with the minority communities, the extremists organization have slaw in their hand.

The respect which monks holds in the Sri Lankan society has been exploited by the organizations like BBS and Sinhala Ravaya by involving in hate speeches against the Muslims and Christians and inciting the mobs against them. The riots of Aluthgama and Beruwala in 2014 was the result of the hate speech delivered by the organization, which followed by the attack by the mob. The Christian and Muslim places of worship have been attacked, and in some cases, they were even shifted. For example, the Dambulla mosque was vandalized and President Rajapaksa then had to give in the demand of the BBS to shift the mosque outside, as it was disrupting the prayers of the Buddhists. In many instances, the Christian clergy and his family were attacked. The businesses of the Muslims were also targeted and houses destroyed.

The Rajapaksa government did not even recognize the BBS as the promoter of hatred. The response of the government to the Aluthgama riots of 2014, which came after the international community had already criticized it, was that of conducting an enquiry into the matter. When the reports and the videos available clearly hinted at the involvement of the BBS, the government

failed to take any serious action against the group. Even at few of the rallies and meetings conducted by the extremist organization in which police was already present, it failed to stop violence and attack on the religious minorities.

The English media and civil society were very active in publicizing the attacks and violence against the minorities. Few of the leaders within the government like Rauff Hakim and Bathiudeen were not only vocal about the attacks, but the former also prepared the list of attacks taken from January to December 2013 against Muslims and Christians. This report was submitted to the UNHRC chief, Navi Pillay. The minorities did try to report the case of violence and attacks but the police did not take much action. Rather, in many instances, the minority community was harassed. There were also instances of land grabbing, for which the few private firms took initiative to give the legal advice to the affected people.

Religious violence broke out in the wake of military victory of the Sri Lankan government against the LTTE and the Muslims and Christians became the target due to various reason. As the Tamils were already silenced by the defeat of the LTTE, the Muslims and Christians became the prime target. The frequency of attacks and violence on the minorities increased with the formation of the organization such as the Bodu Bala Sena, the Sinhala Ravaya and the Ravana Balaya. The reason behind the rise of break violence was the assertion of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. Even the government supported and consolidated the Sinhalese-Buddhist identity. The propagation of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, militarization of the state and the governments support escalated this rise in religious extremism.

The attack on the Muslims was on the issue of the way women in the community dressed, related to hijab and burqa. The problem was also with the issuing of Halal certificate against which these organizations protested and the government had to withdraw the certificate. The reason behind violence and riots was mainly related to mosques and their construction. The Muslim community in Sri Lanka has the tendency to expand the area of mosque and both the Bodu Bala Sena and Sinhala Ravaya protested against that. They organized many rallies and meetings on these issues and also intimidated and threatened the community to leave the town. Even businesses and property of the community was also targeted. This shows violence was linked to the economy, as

there were instances of land grabbing and also displacing the communities from their houses by rioting and violence.

The Christian community was considered to be a threat to the extremist groups as the Evangelical church was allegedly involved in conversion. There were not only incidents of vandalism and attack on the churches but even the clergy and their family members were attacked. The Sinhalese Buddhist parties have expressed their concerns over the unethical conversions taking place and proposed for a law against it. As a result, registration of new Christian organizations has become difficult in Sri Lanka.

The fundamental objective of extremist organization is to protect Buddhism and to raise voice against any group or organization which threatens the community. The Muslims and Christians were considered a threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist domination. The attacks on Muslims should also be understood in the backdrop of 9/11. With the rise of Jihad and Muslim terrorist and extremist groups becoming a threat to international security, the Sri Lankan Muslims are viewed with suspicion. The Bodu Bala Sena cited the attacks on Buddhist places in other countries, and to stop such activities from taking place in Sri Lanka, the Buddhist extremists sought to become hard on the Muslim groups.

The Rajapaksa government's consistent denial in recognizing the violent activities of the extremists groups escalated the problem. Its refusal to accept the rise of religious extremism in Sri Lanka led to internationalization of the issue. Even after the Aluthgama riots, the government did not recognize the Bodu Bala Sena's involvement in it and there was just condemnation of attack and promise of enquiry. Even the Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Commission report pointed the rise of attacks on religious minorities and suggested the need for setting up a committees to resolve the problems between the communities.

Though the government was hesitant in recognizing the role of extremists group, it did not work for rehabilitation of the religious minorities in the affected areas. However, if the state institutions were vigilant enough, it would have been possible to stop these attacks. There were clear evidences of the involvement of the extremists group in carrying out attacks and vandalism,

but only a few rioters were arrested. there were only arrest made. Later, the monks were released on bail. The inaction on the part of the police was glaring.

The study establishes the fact that resurgence of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism after the end of the civil war has been the major reason behind the rise of religious extremism. This ideology was there within the Sinhala community earlier too, but the military victory of the Rajapaksa government contributed to development of extremist tendencies. The extremist section of the Sinhalese community started considering themselves as the protector of Buddhism and Sinhalese identity in Sri Lanka. As stated earlier, the government leaders were reluctant to recognize the extremist elements in the Sinhalese society and mostly made statements saying that every religion and faith should be allowed to be practiced freely and without fear. But they did not take measures to curb the activities of the organization infringing freedom action of these minorities.

There were allegations of link between the extremist organizations and the Rajapaksa government. The government thought that this was the way they can win the votes of the Sinhala Buddhist community. However, this strategy of the government failed as Rajapaksa held early elections for the third term in January 2015, in which he was defeated. The winning of Maithripala Sirisena has ended violence against the minorities and also strengthened the faith in democracy.

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