

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Role of Buddhist Monks in the Post-Conflict Reconciliation Process: The Case of Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

This study concerned the role of Buddhist Monks in the post-conflict reconciliation process in Sri Lanka. The study observed a number of perceptions among the Buddhist Monks in Sri Lanka which differed slightly, while the monks that leaned towards traditional leftist parties adopted more moderate positions with regard to the ethnic problem and the issue of reconciliation. Many of the responding monks perceived reconciliation as an attempt by parties to win that which they were unable to win through war. They felt that there was no need for reconciliation based on power sharing as the resolution of the ethnic problem was pre-condition on recognising the unitary character of the state and Sinhalese and Buddhist character of the state. The study concluded that History Making following *Mahāvamsa* tradition needed to be discouraged and that a modern discipline of historiography should be introduced to the monastic educational system.

**Key words:** *Buddhist monks, ethnic conflict, Mahāvamsa, reconciliation, Theravāda Buddhism*

## 5.1 Introduction

This study was about the role of Buddhist Monks in the post-conflict reconciliation process in relation to Sri Lanka. Religion is one of the oldest human institutions (Giddens, Duneier & Appelbaum, 2007, p.536). Cave drawings suggest that religious beliefs and practices existed more than 40,000 years ago (Giddens et al., 2007, p.536). According to anthropologists, there have probably been approximately 100,000 religions throughout human history. Max Weber commented that the world has five religions; Christianity, Confucian, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam (Kornblum & Wadsworth, 2003, p.521). Although there are thousands of religions throughout the world, three of them- Christianity, Islam and Hinduism- are followed by nearly three quarters of the world's population (Kornblum & Wadsworth, 2003, p.521).

Sociologists that study the present religions of the world often refer to the 'Islamic world' of the Middle East, the 'Roman Catholic world' of Latin America and Southern Europe, the 'Hindu world' of the Indian Subcontinent, and the 'Buddhist world' of the Far East including the South Asian Country of Sri Lanka. The United States, Northern Europe and Australia are among the societies in which Protestantism is strongest. There are, of course, the nations of Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union where there was Communism as a civil religion and it was the only the legitimate belief system officially recognised, though the communist rulers have been reluctant to accept its political doctrine as a religion (Almond, Powell, Strom & Dalton, 2005, p.54-55). Sri Lanka is regarded as one of the countries where the Traditional Buddhist *Theravāda* or *Hinayāna* system remains very strong. The *Theravāda* Tradition of Sri Lanka evolved in a specific way where Buddhist Monks occupied centre stage in the private

and public affairs of its followers (Gombrich, 2006, p.30-31). The history of such involvement ranged from the interference by Buddhist Monks in the selecting of the king in ancient historical times to interference in governmental affairs in deciding the public policy content in Sri Lanka's post-independent politics and they themselves becoming part of the legislatures under the electoral or representative democracy. Their involvement has been questioned by many in recent past (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988; Kemper, 1991; Tambiah, 1992; Abeysekera, 2002). The main objective of the present study was to explore the post ethnic war period in Sri Lankan politics, in other words after 2009, in relation to the reconciliation process. In this context, other studies in relation to State and Sangha interaction became pertinent.

## **5.2 Literature review**

Those who studied the nature and content of State-Sangha relations revealed the ritual expression of an alienable contact among the State and Buddhism drawing on a ritualistic and traditional act of appointment of the Chief Prelate of the Sangha where political leaders become key figures in such ceremonies on a regular basis in Sri Lanka. As a norm, it was either the President or Prime Minister of the country who offered the credential to the newly appointed Chief Prelates of the various sects among the Sangha (Frydenlund, 2005, p.10-11). Many politicians after taking on responsibilities in the governing process of the country paid a courtesy visit to powerful individuals in the Sangha. Moreover, other members of the political elite took part in such acts without fail. The close relationship between Buddhism and political power is most clearly expressed in the tradition that all members of a newly elected government (and Members of

Parliament in general) sought the blessings of the chief monks in Kandy. They also seek the blessing of the Buddha's Tooth Relic, which is the paramount symbol of the Sinhala Buddhist state (Frydenlund, 2005, p.5).

The *Mahāvamsa* of the Sri Lanka recorded the nature and content of the relation that the State had maintained with Buddhist Clergy and their involvement in governing the affairs of the country. It had charted out the conflict and cordial relationship the Sangha had with individual kings and dynasties (Seneviratne, 2001, p.33-44). It sheds lights on the powerful position the Sangha has enjoyed from the very beginning upto the colonial period in Sri Lanka (Seneviratne, 2001, p.33-44). Some anthropologists have pointed out the instrumental use of the above chronicle in building the Buddhist nationalist ideology with the coming of the modern political institution called the state (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988; Kemper, 1991; Amunugama, 1991). Some other scholars have focused on the division among the Sangha and their political and social impacts (Wickremeratne, 1995; Abeysekara, 2002). The Sangha in Sri Lanka has been divided into three main bodies, of which the largest is *Siyam Nikāya* which has over 18,000 monks, approximately half of the Buddhist Monks in Sri Lanka. It is the oldest of the three main bodies and often regarded as the main establishment (De Silva, 2006, p.204). It is caste-exclusive, only accepting candidates from the upper caste, the 'goyigama' (farmer) (De Silva, 2006, p.204). The *Siyam Nikāya* has two main branches, the Malwatta and the Asgiriya chapters, that have their main bases in Kandy. These are well known in Sri Lanka, because they share custody of the most important Buddhist relic on the island, namely the Sri Dalada Maligawa or the Temple of Tooth Relic.

The second largest fraternity is the *Amarapura Nikāya*, which has more than 12,000 monks (De Silva, 2006, p.204). The *Amarapura Nikāya* was formed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the southern part of the country in an effort to facilitate the ordination of non-goyigama persons within the rank of the Sangha (Tambiah, 1992, p.93). Its main sphere of influence is the South and South East of Sri Lanka, including Colombo. After its formation, *Amarapura* soon spilt into many subgroups, each with its own *mahānāyaka* (chief patriarchs). This fragmentation into nearly 40 different groups was partly due to caste solidarities and partly to the decisive consequences of lay support to different temples (Tambiah, 1992, p.93). An effort to unite these sub-groups succeeded in 1969 and today the *Amarapura Nikāya* has a unified leadership (Tilakaratne, 2006, p.215-216). One of the chief patriarchs of the *Amarapura Nikāya*, Venerable *Madihē Paññāsītha* was a leading figure in the aforementioned movement for unity (Tilakaratne, 2006, p.215-216).

The smallest of the three *nikāyas* is the *Rāmañña Nikāya*, which was founded in 1863, not in caste opposition to *Siyam Nikāya* but rather as a religious reform movement (De Silva, 2006, p.204). Unlike the other two *nikayas*, though organised into regional units, *Rāmañña* is unitary in structure and has a single *mahānāyaka* (De Silva, 2006, p.204). It has a particular stronghold in the South-West (around Colombo) and is caste-inclusive, though many of its lay supporters were from the *karāva* (fisherman) caste, many of whom are wealthy. The early generation of scholars were mainly concerned with the causes and socio-political consequences of the split among the Sangha and their relationships with hierarchically organised Sri Lankan Society.

H. L. Seneviratne's study (1999) *'The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka'*, significantly differed from the rest of the studies as his focus was on the new role of monks in modern Sri Lankan politics. He had particularly concentrated on the role of Buddhist Monks in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Seneviratne, 1999, p.25). He had elaborated on the broad framework of the definition of this role with the rise of Buddhist modernism, an aspect of the momentous changes brought about by contact with the Western world. Sri Lanka was first exposed to the West at the beginning of the 16th century with the arrival of the Portuguese. The Portuguese, and later the Dutch, controlled the coastal regions of the island, and thereby exerted socio-economic and cultural influence. The most sustained and significant influences were those brought about by the conquest of the island by the British, who exercised a systematic and centralised rule over the entire island. How this vast influence affected the society is the subject of study by most of the contemporary historiography (Roberts, 1979, p.1-61). From their own particular point of view, sociologists and anthropologists have also written a great deal about these changes in that area of special anthropologist focus. Changes in that area were by the emerging new classes to modernise Buddhism. Obeysekere highlighted the embracing of aspects and strategies of Protestantism by the Buddhist to face the challenges emerging out of modern capitalist practices (Gombrich & Obeysekere, 1988, p.202-240). The definition of a new role for the monks was part of this creative process of modernising Buddhism. Anthropologists refer to this process as 'Buddhist modernism' or 'Neo-Buddhism' (Obeysekera, 1972; Gombrich & Obeysekere, 1988). According to this process, Buddhist Monks had accepted the politics and the economics. While rejecting Christianity as a faith the new Buddhists consciously modelled their religion on it. Gananath Obeysekere

referred to this process as 'Protestant Buddhism' (Obeysekera, 1972, p.43-63).

Some other scholars on Sri Lankan Buddhism and politics stressed the innovative strategies that had been put into practice and preserved the faith in rapidly changing socio-economic and cultural conditions. They focused on the emerging ethno-nationalism and its sources extracted from Buddhism. Contemporary political debate among Sri Lankan Buddhist Monks had been heavily influenced by modern Sinhala nationalist ideology (Tambiah, 1992; Seneviratne, 1999). According to this ideology that was supported both by monks and by lay people the former glories of the Sinhalese were to be restored. In the view of its adherents, the Sinhala nation constituted a unified Sinhala-speaking people, who were egalitarian in their social relations, farmed their paddy fields, and lived in austere simplicity and in accordance with Buddhist morality (Senaviratne, 1999, p.1-23). The primary function of the Buddhist Monk has either been personal spiritual development, the life of the forest monk, or teaching and providing ritual services to the laity, the role of the village monk (Senaviratne, 1999, p.26-27).

The literature also highlighted the gradual emergence of a new concept of Buddhist monkhood. A new conception of the Buddhist Monk developed during the 1930s and 1940s. It was spearheaded by the internationally renowned Venerable Walpola Rahula (1907-97). It is in this context that Walpola Rahula wrote *'The Heritage of the Bhikkhu'* (Sinhala entitled *Bhiksuvage Urumaya*) which was published in 1946, and updated to an English translation in 1974. It has influenced the monkhood more than any other publication in the recent history of Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism (Seneviratne, 1999, p.135).

According to Walpola Rahula, the primary role of the Buddhist Monk was a political one (Rahula, 2008, p.133-4). He argued that the political monk role had nothing to do with self-gain and his agenda was beyond self-interest - urging social unity it contrasts with the aims of self-interested politicians. Those monks that followed this line of thought saw themselves as legitimate actors in the political arena and as protectors of Sri Lanka. However, they often found themselves at a loss when it came to dealing with the pragmatic realities of day-to-day politics. Since the publication of *'The Heritage of the Bhikku'*, the degree of involvement of Buddhist Monks in Sri Lankan politics has gradually increased, marking clear phases of radical developments (Seneviratne, 1999, p.185-186).

The Buddhist Sinhalese have grieved that throughout Sri Lanka's post-independence period, Buddhism had not been rightfully restored to the powerful place it occupied during pre-colonial times (Malalgoda, 1972, p.156-69). Therefore, rallying to enhance the formal role of Buddhism within the state has been an important political project since independence. The rights and expectations of the Sinhala Buddhist population were most clearly articulated in 1956 with the coming of *Mahajana Eksath Peramuna* political party into power (Tambiah, 1992, p.30-41). Simultaneously, the first monastic political group, the *Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna* (EBP), was formed. The EBP supported S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) populist slogan related to the 'Sinhala Only policy' in 1956 and the restoration of Buddhism (Tambiah, 1992, p. 30-41). Their cause was also aided by the 2,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Buddha's passing away, which was celebrated the same year. Those celebrations appealed to popular sentiment about the importance of Buddhism within Sri Lankan society and politics.



The scholars who studied the forces behind the 1956 General Elections revealed that nationalism based on religion and language made a significant contribution to the final outcome of the election. Consequently, the State started to patronise Buddhism by way of creating a cultural ministry etc. Further, giving official recognition to Buddhism under the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Republican Constitutions and the resulting ethnic grievances had been well documented (Abeyrathne, 2004, p.86-87). However, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Republican Constitutions did not totally convert Sri Lanka to a religious state for they had made provision for equal protection for other faiths while giving the foremost position to Buddhism (Wilson, 1974, p.68). However, this was challenged by a proposed bill to prevent 'unethical conversions' of existing believers of all faith by foreign Christian Evangelical groups (Frydenlund, 2005, p.14-16). Such evangelical movements were of major concern to Buddhist Monks in Sri Lanka. In fact many monks had been far more concerned about 'unethical conversions' than about the Norwegian-facilitated peace process taking place at that time (Frydenlund, 2005, p.24-25). Indeed, the 'Anti-conversion Bill' was perhaps the most important issue for *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU) monks elected to parliament in April 2004.

Socially and politically active monks have been heavily criticised, both by other sections of the Sangha and by the laity. In fact, a common criticism levelled at the political monks is that they lack the necessary competence in, for example, constitutional affairs or economic policies to play a political role (Seneviratne, 1999, p.277-330). Moreover, the laity overwhelmingly view the Sangha's role as religious, not political. The existing literature also points out that political neutrality simply does not mean non-engagement in politics by Buddhist Monks. It is perceived

that monks should be above the party politics and remains an active force and be rallying points by all in national issues such as war, social welfare and resolution of political conflict (Edirisinghe, 1999, p.169-87).

One of the questions regarding Buddhist Monks' engagement in politics has been the difficulty in measuring the level of political influence of the monks in Sri Lanka. Existing literature has also dealt with the division within the Sangha and the political implications of such division. In the 1960s and 1970s, a bipolar division occurred within the Sangha, paralleling the divide between the United National Party (UNP) and the SLFP. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Sangha became increasingly differentiated, owing to the participation of many young monks in the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) (Deegalle, 2006, p.234). The egalitarian and populist Sinhala Buddhist character of the JVP appealed to young monks of rural origin (Deegalle, 2006, p.234). However, all of the political parties in Sri Lanka have monks, and those monks may be mobilised when public support and religious justification for a party's policy are needed. In daily parlance, monks related to the SLFP, the UNP and the JVP had often been referred to by the colour of their party, that is, as blue, green and red monks, respectively (Tambiah, 1992, p.95-6). The third millennium in Sri Lankan Buddhism marked an important and provocative phase of Buddhism in Sri Lankan history. With respect to the Sangha as an institution, the year 2001 (and 2004) became a significant milestone, for it marked the entering of Buddhist Monks in the public policy making process of the country through electoral politics while some of them became active in politics in relation to the ethnic conflict and violent climate in Sri Lanka (Deegalle, 2006, p. 233-4).

In the above context, H.L. Seneviratne's (1999) *'The Work of Kings'* made a major contribution to the study of the contemporary Sri Lanka Sangha and to study the Sangha's role in relation to the present study. Though Seneviratne's work could be regarded as a continuation of S.J. Tambiah's *'Buddhism betrayed?'*(1992), he had differed very much from that of Tambiah for his approach was much wider in its perspective and posed a serious criticism. The main objective of Seneviratne's work had been to explore why Buddhist modernism in Sri Lanka did not usher a civil society characterised by such universal values of tolerance, non-violence and pluralism for Buddhism has been a religion that preached equanimity for flora and fauna. The study of T. Bartholomeusz and C.R. de Silva (2001) *'The role of the Sangha in the Reconciliation Process'* also sheds light on the present study. It reflected the importance of the Sangha in the ethnic reconciliation process (Bartholomeusz & De Silva, 2001, p.1). A key point in their argument is that the education that Buddhist Monks receive is largely responsible for the "negative perceptions of Sinhala-Tamil power sharing" (Bartholomeusz & De Silva, 2001, p.1). They hold that the appropriate changes in the monastic system will make the Sangha of Sri Lanka adopt a more inclusive attitude towards the other communities including the Tamils. The study ends with the suggestion that the education of the Sangha and education about the Sangha should receive the highest priority. One of the important steps that is yet to be taken in this direction is the understanding of the perceptions of Buddhist Monk in the ethnic reconciliation process. The major departure point of the present study was to understand how Buddhist Monks perceive their role in the reconciliation process of ethnic groups in post conflict Sri Lankan politics.

### **5.3 Research problem/questions and hypotheses:**

What are the Buddhist Monks views/perceptions of the post-conflict reconciliation process and are these views shared by the entire Buddhist monastic order, the Sangha, as a whole?

What arguments for and against the ethnic conflict and federal solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka have been advanced by Buddhist Monks?

In what ways can Buddhist Monks be made reconciliation promoters in Sri Lanka?

### **5.4 Objectives**

The overall objective of the present study was to fill the above gap in the literature. Within the above overall objective of the study, the following sub-objectives were perused.

1. To understand the role of religion in a plural society as perceived by Buddhist Monks.
2. To understand what Buddhist Monks perceive as their role in the Ethnic Reconciliation Process.
3. To analyse the different discourses among Buddhist Monks on the reconciliation process.
4. To contribute to the existing knowledge on reconciliation.

### **5.5 Methodology**

The information for the study was extracted from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with the Sangha of the Southern Province to understand how Bikkhus of the Three Chapters had

perceived their role in the plural society of Sri Lanka and to understand how they measured their role. Finally, an attempt was made to understand the different discourses they had on the reconciliation process. Fifteen Buddhist Monks in the Galle, Matara and Hambantota administrative districts were interviewed. Five monks from each district were selected on the basis of their popularity among Buddhist lay followers. In addition to the above criteria, the interviews covered all the present major sects among Buddhists in Sri Lanka. The information thus collected, together with the library survey, were descriptively analysed and presented thematically.

## **5.6 Significance of the study**

The present study has a two-fold significance. The first is in its academic importance for it fills a major gap in the literature. The study explored the various dimensions of perceptions that monks had in relation to the ethnic war and the reconciliation process in Sri Lankan politics. The practical significance of the study has to do with the identification of divergent perceptions by Buddhist Monks, would help in devising strategies for ethnic reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

## **5.7 Limitations of the study**

The study had certain limitations. The first limitation of study is that it did not explore the perspectives of Buddhist Monks throughout the country. Thus, this study had limitations with regard to scope and coverage. It covered only key important informant monks in the Southern Province. This signals the possibility of other monks having different perceptions and it is

categorically stated that future researchers must consider these limitations whenever they use this study's findings and conclusions for their own studies.

## **5.8 Buddhism within the plural society of Sri Lanka**

The history of Sri Lanka reveals that Buddhism was practiced by people across the ethnic divide. However, many of the Buddhist Monks believed that Buddhism was a heritage of the Sinhalese and protecting it was their duty, and it was recognised by the Buddha himself when he breathed last in *Kusinara*. This was largely promoted by *Mahāvamsa* ideology and that message was conveyed to the interviewer when the respondents insisted that the *Mahāvamsa* should be referred when one want to understand the link the Sinhalese had with Buddhism. The other important points that 12 out of the 15 respondents pointed out wasthat Sri Lanka had other ethnic groups because the Sinhalese had become a tolerant society because of Buddhism itself. They also expressed that minorities had become a privileged group of people under colonial rule for the colonial rulers' ultimate objective was the destruction of Buddhism and thereby the Sinhalese nation. It was observed that these kinds of extremeviews were presentmore among the monks of the *Amarapura* Chapter of the Sangha. The Bikkhus of the *Rāmañña* Chapter and the *Siyam* Chapter had adopted more moderate views towards other ethnic groups and they had accepted that Tamils had been living side-by-side with them and the two groups had shared many things in common. One Bikkhu of the *Rāmañña* Chapter identified himself as of the *Karāva* Caste and went on to explain that he is related to the Tamil fold. He stated that the ethnic problem was an unnecessary invention by shrewd politicians and there would be a day where the Tamils and

Sinhalese fight against the emerging terrorism of Muslims. That statement pointed to a possible perception of another enemy in the post-war context. In contrast, one Bikkhu who was closely associated with a traditional politically leftist party stated that Buddhists could never be associated with ethnic groups for Buddha's message of love and tolerance had been universal. According to his perception, the situation was made into a conflict not by Sinhalese and ordinary Tamils but by the colonial rulers and greedy politicians of Tamils who acted as agents of Western Christian conspirators who had strived to destroy Buddhism. Almost all the Bikkhus who were interviewed were of the view that they were not against peace but the demoralising process that was promoted by so-called peace brokers of the capitalist Western Christian countries. They pointed out that they were for a home-grown negotiated settlement that upheld the principle of the unitary state, where Buddhism and the Sinhalese were secure and protected by the state.

## **5.9 Buddhist Monks' assessment of their roles**

Regarding the roles played by the Sinhalese-Buddhist clergy today in relation to ethnic war, their perceptions were varied. According to many of the respondent Bikkhus, it was they who protected Sri Lanka and peace in Sri Lanka. Many of them were familiar with the Chronicle *Mahāvamsa* and were capable of memorising how the Sangha had intervened in the question of Kingship among competing individuals and dynasties. The monks perceived that they were duty bound to protect the Sinhalese in times of danger at the risk of possible division of the country. They pointed out the heroic acts of some Bikkhus in the bordering village communities in the Northern and Eastern

Provinces of the country, for example Kithalagama Sri Seelalankara Thera.

They also showed a sense of satisfaction in promoting the idea of maintaining a buffer zone against Tamil Militant Groups during war time and promoting the idea of possible military defeat of terrorist outfits in the country. However, they also revealed a failure of the Sangha, for they were not interested in going to the Tamil areas and spreading the message of the Buddha. Many of the Bikkhus held the view that the majority of Tamils in the North and East were not Tamil Hindus but converted Sinhalese Buddhists who had been converted to Hinduism and became gradually naturalised Tamil speakers. Taken as whole, many respondent monks displayed a difficulty in clearly demarcating a path between ethnic conflict and war and the path of spiritual emancipation.

### **5.10 Different discourses among the monks on war and ethnic reconciliation**

The Buddhist Monks who responded to the interview questions had almost accepted the fact that the Buddhist perspective on relations among any number of ethnic groups was the unequivocal condemnation of violence. However, the monks made desperate efforts at justifying the Government resorting to guns and weapons of multiple killing. The monks resorted to a discourse to justify the killing of people in ethnic war, based on the concept of Karma doctrine and Season norms. The deaths of families and groups had to do with their previous deeds. Apart from these pre-death actions in previous births, the Season that they wereborn into also caused death and hence such killings were not related to their deeds nor of their choice but a mere question of the time that they had to face. Strikingly this



perspective is very similar to the *Mahāvamsa* perspective of the killing of Tamils by King *Dutugāmunu*.

The other dominant view that many of the Bikkhus shared was the perception that ethnic reconciliation as a concept is foreign and European, and absolutely not needed by Sri Lankans. Some monks held the view that the end of the war itself was the end of the conflict. Nothing more was required to heal the wounds and such wounds would heal naturally during the course of time.

There was also a slightly deviating strong discourse by a few monks. That is the idea that the Government would have to engage in providing facilities for the war displaced persons in the Northern and Eastern part of the country. They also emphasised that the Sinhalese of Northern Sri Lanka who had been displaced should be resettled first, as the composition of Sri Lankans in the Northern Province had changed drastically during the war favouring the Tamil community.

There was an extreme point of view that for reconciliation in Sri Lanka and to prevent future wars on an ethnic basis, the Government has to demarcate provinces where no minority becomes the majority. The other perspective that went hand-in-hand with the aforementioned perception was that the Government should encourage the policy to make all people speak Sinhala and encourage Buddhist missionaries in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka.

The post-war governmental initiatives such as the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) and inviting the United Nations (UN) Chief to visit Sri Lanka immediately after the end of war were perceived as totally unnecessary and foolish decisions taken by the Government. All except for one monk (who identified with the traditional political leftist party) perceived any

political solution that promoted power sharing among ethnic groups in the governing process of the country as absolutely unnecessary. They viewed such reconciliation based on negotiated political settlement and power sharing as a conspiracy to win the demands that became impossible to win through war.

### **5.11 Findings and conclusions**

This study was helpful in identifying several perceptions held among Buddhist Monks in relation to the ethnic war and the reconciliation process. These perceptions have been summarised into the following characteristics:

1. The ethnic problem was unnatural and it had to do with the shrewd Tamil politicians and colonial rulers of the country.
2. Tamils and Sinhalese were closely related.
3. Many of the Tamils Hindus were converted Buddhist Sinhalese taken into the Hindu Fold and then gradually became naturalised Tamil speakers.
4. Promoters of ethnic reconciliation were conspirators of Christian Europeans.
5. Any negotiated solution should recognise the essential Sinhalese and Buddhist character of Sri Lanka.
6. The extremist positions were common among the monks of *Amarapura* sect of the Sangha.

7. The monks associated with traditional leftist parties were more tolerant and adopted more power sharing attitudes to ethnic reconciliation.
8. There was an emerging discourse among Buddhist monks on the need for Sinhalese and Tamils getting together to fight against what was viewed as Muslim Terrorists in Sri Lanka.

The discussion and findings of the study confirmed that traditional monastic education promoted negative perceptions of power sharing solutions to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka and worked as a hindrance in promoting peace and harmony. However, the discourse on shared history by Tamils and Sinhalese was a blessing in disguise for it can be used to support the ethnic reconciliation process. The history making following the *Mahāvamsa* tradition needs to be discouraged and meaningful historiography needs to be encouraged within monastic education and the universal human discourse within Buddhism needs to be rediscovered, if Buddhist Monks are to be effective peace and reconciliation facilitators. On the academic side, scholars need to concentrate on whether minority caste groups promote extreme chauvinism in Sri Lanka and why they did so is worthy of further study for many of *Amarapura* sect monks had adopted extreme positions.

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