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THE RELIGIOUS FRAMEWORK OF NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE POLITICO-CULTURAL ROLE OF BUDDHIST MONKS IN SRI LANKA

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Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the reign of King Asoka (268-232 BCE), and it was established not just in the form of Buddhism, but also as the royal command of King Asoka. This paved the way for developing Buddhism in Sri Lanka in parallel with the political order of the country. From its very inception, a dominant authority among the Buddhist monks could be noticed over the political order. This caused the social transition of Buddhist monks to appear in the society as land-owned temple incumbents who were able to make a pivotal repercussion in the political order. Buddhist dominance over the Sri Lankan politico-cultural strata can be witnessed through the statement that made it mandatory to possess the Tooth Relic and the sacred Alms Bowl Relic of the Buddha for the legitimate kingship of the island, which also paved the path for the origin of Sinhala Buddhist nationality. The most ancient interference of Buddhist monks in political order can be noticed in the period of King Dutugemunu. Thenceforth, the epithet "Protectors of Nation" reified the glorification of the role of Buddhist monks in politico-cultural interferences. A peculiar tendency of national movements could be noticed in colonial and post-colonial periods, which were most critical in terms of the religious conversion of the Sinhalese people. Conversely, the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist Movement assured an authentic set of values for the Sinhalese culture, but on the other hand, it was noticed that in each of these phases, monks gradually failed to fulfill their responsibilities as spiritual leaders in particular. The topmost stage of this tendency could be identified through acquiring religious rites by the government to protect their purity and transparency. The Sinhala Buddhist National Movement has been questioned in diverse ways in Sri Lankan society on the root of ethics in Buddhism, for the formation of harmony and cohesion. A question has been raised by many scholars as: Is it possible to redefine Buddhism to justify the violence of the Nationalist Movement? What is the ethicality of religious framing of the Nationalist Movement? This research focuses on the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist dominance in Sri Lankan politics, and how Buddhism has been utilised to frame the Nationalist Movement for the sustainability of the government. Colonial and post-colonial periods are expected to be examined in this research with critical attention on the contemporary Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist Movements and the roots of their origins.

Keywords: Buddhism, National Movement, King Dutugemunu, Sri Lanka, Politico-cultural role, Sinhala Buddhist identity