



ColomboArts

Biannual Refereed Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities

Volume II | Issue 3

2018

Jathika Chinthanaya: History and Political Significance

Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri

Department of History
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
nrdevasiri@gmail.com

Recommended Citation

Dewasiri, N.R. (2018) *Jathika Chinthanaya: History and Political Significance*. *ColomboArts Biannual Refereed Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, II (3)*

Available at: <http://colomboarts.cmb.ac.lk/?p=360>

Jathika Chinthanaya: History and Political Significance

Dewasiri, N. R.

University of Colombo
nrdevasiri@gmail.com

Abstract

This essay reviews the history of the intellectual discourse known as Jathika Chinthanaya in Sri Lanka. This discourse emerged in the Sinhala-Buddhist south of Sri Lanka as a left-oriented intellectual movement and soon transformed into the intellectual front of extreme Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism. The central problem addressed in this essay is how the movement shifted away from its initial promise to overcome the limits of Marxism and propose an alternative vision to the existing capitalist economic and social order to become instead the intellectual front of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. This problem is investigated through a historical analysis of the evolution of the Jathika Chinthanaya discourse in its first two decades. The essay argues that the key to understanding the history of the movement, particularly the deviation from its left leanings towards an extreme form of ethno-nationalism, is to look at the problem in terms of the way in which it responded to the broader political and ideological circumstances in the Sinhala-Buddhist south in the period under review. Initially, the movement responded to the political vacuum created by the decline of the Left. This response took shape in a context where Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism was looking for new stimulus to face the challenge that came from growing militant Tamil nationalism. Jathika Chinthanaya successfully performed that task, especially by mobilising politically-conscious educated youth in the Sinhala-Buddhist south. Continuing to engage with the task of constructing an effective counter-discourse to the one that legitimised the Tamil political demands, the movement shifted further away from its initial left orientation and became an integral part of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism as its most effective intellectual front.

Keywords: *Gunadasa Amarasekera, Jathika Chinthanaya, Nalin De Silva, Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism, Sinhala-Buddhist South*

Introduction

‘*Jathika Chinthanaya*’ (roughly translated as ‘way of thinking of a nation’) is an intellectual discourse that emerged in the mid-1980s in southern Sri Lanka. It emerged in the context of two epoch-making phenomena in the post-colonial era, namely, the decline of the political left and the rise of Tamil militant nationalism. It provided much needed intellectual stimulus to Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that was under heavy attack from a large contingent of critical intellectuals based in Sri Lanka and the west¹, and proved instrumental in constructing a counter-discourse which transformed Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism into an

¹ Although the list of critical intellectual work on Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism is long and well known, the following works are worth mentioning: Roberts (1979); Committee for Rational Development (Sri Lanka) (1984); Ethnicity and Social Change (1984); and Spenser (1990).

immensely attractive ideological system to a new generation of intelligent and educated youth. It was also a major intellectual force behind the political unification of the Sinhala-Buddhist political south between 2004-2005, which brought the United Peoples' Freedom Front (UPFA) into power under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksha.

Jathika Chinthanaya (JC) is a multifaceted discourse which made serious interventions in a wide range of issues, from day-to-day politics to highly abstract epistemological themes. This essay seeks to examine the origin of JC in the mid-1980s and its evolution in the context of the rise of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in the last three decades.

The essay is based on the premise that the context is more important than the content in understanding an ideologically significant intellectual discourse. This approach is specifically valid in relation to the *JC* discourse, because its proponents always responded, and made reference, to immediate political and cultural circumstances in their interventions. Moreover, the evolution of the discourse shows that its major turning points are closely linked to the immediate political circumstances. Therefore, the focus of this essay is to locate the emergence and evolution of JC within its political and ideological milieu.

JC has indeed drawn the attention of a large array of intellectual work, although few attempts stand out as substantial efforts to understand J.C.B Senaratne (2015) has reviewed the political vision of JC in relation to the state and political leadership, with special reference to its engagement in the debate concerning the Executive Presidential system; he sheds light on the evolution of the JC political vision over the last three decades. Nanayakkara (2004) critically evaluates the major works of Gunadasa Amarasekera and Nalin de Silva and locates the development of JC within the broader context of the evolution of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. From a polemical Marxist point of view, he discredits the JC as a form of jingoism (Nanayakkara 2004). Sumanasekera (2017) reviews some of Nalin de Silva's fundamental premises, including his most elusive concept, 'constructive relativism' (*Nirmanathmaka sapekshatha vadaya*).

This essay attempts to locate the origin and the evolution of the JC in its broader political and ideological contexts. By doing so, the essay offers a new perspective to illuminate the structural conditions that led to the emergence and growth of the JC.

Origin of *Jathika Chinthanaya*

The origin of *JC* is associated with two intellectual figures in the 1980s, Gunadasa Amarasekera (GA) and Nalin de Silva (NdeS). A dentist by profession, GA is a prolific Sinhala writer, and, since the early 1950s, well known as a poet, novelist, and short story writer. He also developed a reputation as a political and cultural commentator. NdeS was an intellectual in the radical Left and a university teacher in mathematics. He received a PhD from Sussex University in 1970. He joined the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP), the prominent left party in Sri Lanka, in the late 1960s, and began to be associated with the ultra-left inner group of the party which split from the LSSP in the mid-1970s to form the Nava Samasamaja Party (NSSP).

Although GA and NdeS came together in the mid-1980s to launch *JC* via two different paths, both justified the need for a *Jathika Chinthanaya* by questioning the validity of Marxism as an emancipatory political ideology. GA's complete rejection of Marxism came a little later. He initially proposed a collaboration between nationalism and Marxism. NdeS, however, had denounced Marxism even before the idea of *Jathika Chinthanaya* was properly coined.

GA had close associations with the Left, while at the same time maintaining a critical distance from it. The nature of his association with the Left is remarkably represented in his own famous series of novels, starting from *Gamanaka Mula (Beginning of a Journey)* (Amarasekera, 1984).² GA's criticism of the Left was sharpened in the late 1970s in the context of the decline of the old Left. In the early 1980s, he raised the need for a new political imagination based on authentic indigenous thinking.³

NdeS's path towards *Jathika Chinthanaya* was somewhat different. In the late 1970s, he began to question the scientific validity of Marxism, in line with Karl Popper's famous criticism of Marxism.⁴ Since then, he gradually moved away from the 'Marxist' line and proposed the need for an alternative emancipatory vision.

² For critical evaluation of the series, see Dewasiri (2007) and Perera (2006).

³ GA articulated these views in two influential essays that he authored in the late 1970s and early 1980s, *AbuddassaYugayak (An era without the teaching of a Buddha)* (Amarasekera, 1976) and *Anagarika Dharmapala Marxvadeeda? (Is Anagarika Dharmapala a Marxist?)* (Amarasekera, 1980).

⁴ This line of thinking could clearly be seen in the article that was published in a Sunday newspaper in 1981 (De Silva, 1981).

During the initial stage of the movement, there was a galaxy of writers who echoed similar sentiments. Among them, Suriya Gunasekera, Kuliyaipitiye Prananda, and G.I.D. Dharmasekera were prominent writers. The *Divaina* Sunday newspaper, founded in 1982, became the popular platform for these writers, as well as for GA and NdeS.⁵ These writers were regular contributors to the monthly magazine *Kaalaya (Time)* that NdeS founded in 1987 (Nanayakkara, 2006).

The Political and Ideological Background of the Emergence of *Jathika Chinthanaya*

A useful way to locate the emergence of JC is to view it as a response to the highly complex political and ideological vicissitudes in the 1980s. This was a juncture when epoch-making changes were unfolding in the economic, political, and cultural spheres. In short, it could be argued that the ‘post-colonial imaginary’ of Sri Lanka was coming to a definite end and a new reality was in the making.⁶ The post-colonial imaginary of ‘a Sri Lanka to-be-built’ had already begun to shatter, especially since April 1971 when the youth insurrection in the Sinhala south shocked the entire sociopolitical fabric. Northern youth also followed suit by signaling the decisive end to the path to solve the ‘Northern question’ through the ‘post-colonial tussle’ between Sinhala and Tamil political elites.

The year 1977 appears to be a symbolic marker of the arrival of a new epoch. It was, in fact, more than symbolic because the landslide election victory of the United National Party (UNP) was an event that produced many tangible effects. In relation to the emergence of JC, the collapse of the United Front (UF) government of 1970-1977 and the victory of the UNP were immensely significant.

The UF government, especially from 1970 to 1975, was a political space that brought together the majority of the Left and nationalist political and ideological forces of the Sinhala-Political South to realize the hegemonic goals of a post-colonial imaginary. This project had indeed isolated some political elements of the far Left, and, more significantly,

⁵ For the importance of the *Divaina* newspaper in this new cultural-political discourse, see Tennekoon (1990).

⁶ Nihal Perera captures this juncture quite perceptively and identifies the 1971 JVP-led insurrection as the marker of that discontinuity. It is useful to quote him: “If Sri Lankan society and space between 1948 and 1970s can be perceived as ‘post-colonial,’ it has been radically changed since then. From the 1970s, the society and space of Sri Lanka were subjected to profound changes and challenges. The challenges include the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP)-led insurrection of 1971, its activism in the 1980s, and the Tamil-based separatist struggle, also from the 1970s. These struggles displaced the primary focus of the post-colonial polity on social and economic issues, with those concerning ethnicities, and to a lesser degree, the rural population and youth, both destabilizing the national society and space and shifting the locus of political negotiation from Colombo to remote rural areas” (Perera, 1998, p. 155).

the Tamil nationalist elements. The dominant architects of the UF government, however, promised to address the concerns of these two excluded forces, and the former was indeed fully convinced about its ability to so.⁷ However, this was not to be the case. In 1975, the UF was effectively collapsed when the LSSP walked out of the government. Then the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL) and more members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) followed two years later. The pioneers of JC had more or less thrown in their lot with the UF government. While GA had close links with the left intelligentsia, NdeS was a member of the LSSP while also being a member of its ultra-left inner group which later broke away and formed the NSSP.

The economic reforms brought about by the new UNP government represented a decisive rupture in the dominant imaginary of post-colonial intellectuals. The frustration and anger towards the new turn were powerfully articulated by another influential cultural intellectual, Prof. Ediriweera Sarachchandra, in his essay *Dharmishta Samajaya (Righteous Society)* (1982). He used the phrase *dharmishtasamajaya* somewhat cynically to mock the UNP campaign slogan at the 1977 election. *Dharmishta samajaya* was a notion that captured the Buddhist social and political imagination. In this work, Sarachchandra presented a critique of the economic thinking of the UNP, as well as the consumerist norms that entailed it. It is also pertinent to note that Sarachchandra, along with the famous Buddhist monk Rev. Maduluwawe Sobhitha, were physically assaulted at a public gathering by thugs associated with the UNP, following the publication of this book.

There was a peculiar character to the intellectual response to the landslide election victory, which may seem uncharacteristic in such an election result with a massive popular response. In this hegemonic intellectual discourse, 1977 was a loss of something that is Sinhala-Buddhist. This sense of loss in 1977 could be compared and contrasted with the mood that followed the 1956 parliamentary election. The latter was celebrated in the Sinhala-Buddhist

⁷ The articulations of the leaders of the LSSP are particularly important in this respect. The LSSP was very well aware of and, to a great degree, sympathetic towards the political concerns of these two excluded parties, namely the ultra-Left and Tamil nationalism. Colvin R. De Silva's (a frontline leader of the LSSP) famous essay that debunked the political thinking behind the 1971 JVP-led insurrection, argued that this "infantile act" reinforced the "right-wing" elements of the UF government and barred the forward march towards the realization of the "leftwing political imaginary" (De Silva, 1971). In another essay, he also attempted to defend the 1972 constitution against its critics, claims that it disregarded the legitimate political concerns of the Tamils (De Silva, 1987).

south as the arrival of a 'People's Government.' This sentiment is still prevalent in the popular political consciousness. '56 *jayagrahanaya* (the victory of '56) has a very special meaning. The characterization of the 1977 election as a '77 *jayagrahanaya*' was not possible except, obviously, for UNP propagandists. Hence, a rupture occurred between the political and economic realm and the dominant intellectual realm. Isn't there a serious paradox here? How could one explain a situation where an election victory with an overwhelming majority, produces a sense of loss in the same society?⁸

It is pertinent here to dwell on this duality of the Sinhala-Buddhist political consciousness, as it is integrally linked to the political behaviour of Sinhala Buddhists. If a comparison is made between 1956 and 1977, the victory of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) in 1956 was largely due to political reasons, while the UNP's victory of 1977 was due to economic reasons. Seneviratne (1999) provides us with a useful framework to understand the dialectic between politics and economy.

Seneviratne, in his famous *Work of Kings* (1999), underlines two different orientations of socially-active modern Buddhist monks. He draws this contrast in connection with the socially-oriented activities of the two dominant modern centres of Buddhist learning (*pirivena*), namely Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara, and develops his argument on the basis of the two facets of Anagarika Dharmapala's social career. Dharmapala focused on both the material and spiritual wellbeing of what was called the 'Sinhala Nation.' According to Seneviratna (1999), these two centres of modern Buddhist learning transformed these two attributes of Dharmapala's vision for the 'Sinhala Nation' into two modes of social actions: Vidyodaya was keen on the material wellbeing of Sinhala Buddhists, while Vidyalankara, in Seneviratne's opinion, 'descended into ideology' (Seneviratne, 1999, p. 130). The case of Vidyalankara was very important, because it was the Vidyalankara bhikkus who became a major political force in constructing a particular political imaginary at the time of the first parliamentary election of 1947. Interestingly, Vidyalankara bhikkus supported the left parties, earning the UNP label of being 'destroyers of Buddhism.'

⁸ Gunadasa Amarasekera's literary works and political commentaries, especially *Abuddssa Yugayak*, a commentary about Sinhalese novels which also contains his political vision that led to JC, clearly represent the contrasting attitudes towards 1956 and 1977. See Dewasiri (2007) for more details on these works.

In this context, it may be inferred from Seneviratne's discussion that the Vidyalkara tradition appealed to the Sinhala-Buddhist political mind, while the Vidyodaya tradition appealed to the economic mind.

It is also significant here that J.R. Jayawardena, who led the UNP into power in 1977, is also claimed to have been inspired by Dharmapala's vision. His campaign slogan in 1977 resonated with Dharmapala's vision of an ideal society, namely *dharmishta samajaya* (righteous society). The UNP, however, was not successful in sustaining a hegemonic link with the Sinhala-Buddhist political imagination, as envisaged by Dharmapala, which evolved later into Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism. This rupture between the UNP and the Sinhala-Buddhist political psyche is highly significant in locating the emergence of JC.

Early Phase of *Jathika Chinthanaya* as a 'Left Wing' Soft Nationalism

The JC's initial promise was to propose a vision of an alternative economic and social order. This was certainly in line with the goals of the Marxist left. GA and NdeS were fully convinced that the Marxist path towards an alternative social order had failed miserably and that fresh thinking was needed; nationalism was seen as the way out. At this initial stage, nationalism appeared to be a means to an end. The end, namely socialism as envisaged by the Marxist tradition, remained unchanged while the path towards it was to be revisited.

GA's early writings aimed at a collaboration between Marxism and nationalism. Both *Abuddassa Yugayak* (AU) and *Anagarika Dharmapala Marx Wadeeda* (ADM) explicitly proposed such a collaboration. These works argued that the Sri Lankan left has not properly understood Marxist writings and that the latter is not necessarily inimical to nationalism. GA argued that the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia was partly a victory of the Russian *Jathika Chinthanaya* (Amarasekara, 2000, pp. 1-8). He based this controversial claim on the work of Polish scholar Andrzej Walicki. Though GA's reading of Walicki is problematic,⁹ the thinking behind this proposition is a desire for a collaboration between Marxism and nationalism. At the early stage of the armed insurrection by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in the late 1980s, GA saw potential in the JVP for such a

⁹ Although Walicki implicitly alludes to the possibility that Lenin was inspired by the ideas of the Populists, it is incorrect to argue that Walicki proposes that the Bolshevik Revolution is a victory of a Russian *Jathika Chintanaya* (Walicki, 1980).

collaboration. This view is found in his work, *Ganaduru Mediyama Dakinemi Arunalu (I see the Rays of Dawn amidst the Darkness of Midnight)* (Amarasekera, 1987).

NdeS was less sympathetic towards Marxism. Unlike GA, NdeS arrives at *Jathika Chinthanaya* via an epistemologically-grounded critique of Marxism. However, his left leanings are still evident in his approach, as he proposed a non-Marxist path to socialism. In 1993, NdeS published an essay, serialised in the *Divaina* Sunday newspaper in the late 1980s, with the gripping title, *Poverty of Marxism: Socialism and the need for new interpretations (Marxvadaye Daridrathavaya: Samajavadaya ha navaarthakathanavalaavashyathavaya)* (De Silva, 1993). Proposing two two fundamental criticisms, he countered the proposition that the only possible path to fight capitalism is via Marxism. First, he questioned the validity of the Marxist notion of class and the idea of revolution which is based on a class-based analysis of history. Second, he argued that Marxism in general is an inseparable part of the western way of thinking (*batahirachinthanaya*). Notwithstanding this scathing attack on Marxism, he may have preferred to identify within the overall identity of the political left, as the total negation of the capitalist order constituted the *raison d'être* of his intellectual intervention.

NdeS also retained, for a short time, another ingredient from his erstwhile leftist baggage, namely sympathy towards Tamil political demands. He continued to support Tamil political demands, even after leaving the NSSP. Writing to *Yathartha* (a journal that he co-edited in 1982), he unequivocally defended the right of Tamils to form a separate state on the basis of the right to self-determination.¹⁰ This was indeed the hallmark of the radical Sri Lankan left's stand on Tamil political demands. Although this hardline approach would disappear soon, he only gradually arrived at his famous hardcore stand against Tamil nationalist political demands.

Referring to the controversial theme of a seminar organised by a group of left-wing intellectuals, with the title, *Do the Sinhalese possess a great culture?*, NdeS remarked in 1984 that “the organizers of this seminar have given it a wrong title. There shouldn't be a question about Sinhalese having a great culture which they indeed have. What should have been emphasised is that the Sinhalese should not attempt to impose their culture over other [ethnic] communities. Those who question whether the Sinhalese possess a great culture

¹⁰ This article was later republished in the *Ravaya*, Sinhala weekly newspaper on January 9, 1994.

would not convey this message to Sinhalese.”¹¹ The last vestige of NdeS’s support for Tamil demands in a much diluted form could be noticed around 1986, as the total rejection of Tamil political demands became clearer in the new political context marked by the Sinhala nationalist protest against the Indo-Lanka accord of July 1987.¹² His new stand on Tamil political demands was clearly articulated in his famous booklet, *Prabhakaran, Ohuge Seeyala, Bappala ha Massinala (Prabhakaran, his Grand Fathers, Uncles and Cousins)* (De Silva 1995).¹³ With this turn, we see a clear sign of a break from the earlier Left-orientation of JC.

Disappearance of Leftism and the Consolidation of the National in *Jathika Chinthanaya*

The leftist phase of JC was characterised by its emphasis on an alternative to the Marxist path for social transformation. The promise to build an alternative social order continued, as the purpose of the *Chinthanaya* idea was to propose a strong basis for deeper social transformation. Nevertheless, the discourse of *Chinthanaya* seemed to have moved away from its sociopolitical focus to a more philosophical path. Parallel to this shift from the political to the philosophical in the articulation of *Chinthanaya*, the political terrain of JC began to place more emphasis on nationalism. Even this nationalist turn was fundamentally shaped by the desire to rejuvenate the Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalist project to counter various non- or moderate-nationalist political discourses, not by the desire for an alternative social and political vision. The need to challenge the ‘separatist threat’ perceived to have come from Tamil nationalism and its local and international allies became the main focus of JC intellectual efforts. NdeS defined this task in terms of the need for a three-pronged strategy to defeat Tamil chauvinism (*demalajathivadaya*), i.e. “defeating Tamil chauvinism militarily, politically and ideologically” (De Silva 2009).

This turn in JC occurred in the context of a worldwide questioning of the validity of the Marxian Left. Coinciding with the collapse of the Soviet Union and other Communist regimes, the defeat of the JVP insurrection was also perceived to be a sign of the irrelevance of the Marxist alternative to the existing social and economic order. Moreover, Marxism

¹¹ *Divaina*, November 30, 1984. Also cited in Tennakoon (1990, p. 213)

¹² I attended a lecture delivered by NdeS at the University of Colombo somewhere in 1986 where he hinted at an intermediary solution to the Tamil problem as a possible way out. This is probably the last phase of NdeS’s sympathy towards Tamil demands.

¹³ For the English version, see De Silva (1997).

became less attractive to the intelligent youth in Sri Lanka who were always the cornerstone of the success of Left politics in Sri Lanka.

The most intelligent sections of the politically conscious youth were already moving away from Marxism as their intellectual horizon. A fascinating instance in this connection is recorded by Champika Ranawaka, now a leading politician of the country, in his autobiography.

When we were undergraduate students (1985), a student in our batch, Indunil, asked a question from our [JVP] student leader, Thilakasiri Gallage. The question was, “Why are you a Marxist?” Gallage’s answer was: “Marxism is scientific”. Indunil asked in turn, “What is science?” Gallage replied: “The system of theories that are based on the scientific method, i.e. proving theories through experiments.” Then Indunil asked whether Marxist theories have been proved by an experiment. I cannot recollect the answer given by Gallage to this last question (Ranawaka, 2009, p. 60).

This questioning had obviously been inspired by NdeS’s writings which were well known to the educated youth during this time. This trend continues to date and is particularly strong among non-liberal arts university students. The impact of hegemonic Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism on politically conscious youth is also a formidable factor in this drift away from Marxism. The massive success of JC in the late 1990s and thereafter indicates its ability to inspire this generation of politically conscious intelligent youth.

The immediate political circumstances after the defeat of the JVP in 1989 were less favourable for JC, as non-nationalist elements gained ascendancy in the political mainstream. The authoritarian tendency that gained momentum, particularly in the context of the brutal suppression of the JVP insurrection, generated strong desire for widening the democratic space. Various political actors, especially liberal and moderate-left, non-nationalist or moderate nationalist political actors, had the upper hand in representing this desire for more democracy, through such non-nationalist issues such as human rights, freedom of expression and other matters related to transitional justice and democracy. There was also a drive within the opposition camp to promote a negotiated settlement to Tamil political demands. The top leadership of the SLFP, the major opposition party, was also in favour of such an initiative, and this became one of the major themes of the victorious election campaign of the SLFP-led People’s Alliance (PA). Although JC was somewhat

politically sidelined owing to the rise of non-nationalist political actors, it continued to grow as an intellectual discourse.

The opportunity came for JC to become a strong political voice in the south when the People's Alliance government decided to propose a package of political solutions to address Tamil political demands. It is in this context that NdeS wrote his highly influential booklet, *Prabhakaran, Ohuge Seeyala, Bappalasaha Massinala* (De Silva, 1995 and 1997).

JC could not monopolise the post-1989 politico-intellectual space, as several contenders were active among intellectually-oriented youth. Three such groupings were particularly challenging to JC. They were *Janatha Mithuro* (JM – friends of the people), the rejuvenated JVP, and the array of young politico-intellectual groups which could be loosely identified as post-Marxist Left groups.

The competition with the JM is particularly important as it was formed by Patali Champika Ranawka and Rev. Aturaliye Ratana, two energetic young political activists who broke ranks with the GA/NdeS axis immediately after the suppression of the JVP insurrection. The JM showed some left orientation with a soft nationalist outlook at the outset. This was quite close to the early ideology of JC. The JM attracted a large contingent of young activists, mostly university students, and posed a challenge to both JC and the JVP.

Although the JVP, in its rejuvenated form in the mid-1990s, was not as attractive as was in the pre-1989 era to educated youth, it continued to dominate student politics in universities. As the nationalist orientation became prominent in its popular appeal, especially at the end of the 1990s, the JC approached the JVP in a somewhat friendly manner. While JC was critical of the JVP's continued allegiance to Marxism, the JC strategy was to encourage the JVP's nationalist orientation. GA worked closely with the JVP, although the association between GA and NdeS at this period was somewhat tenuous. However, young activists who were close to NdeS continued to engage with the JVP with the aim of winning them over to JC.¹⁴ The close political association that was formed between GA and Wimal Weerawansa, the young leader of the JVP, proved to be immensely effective. The latter, an orator with

¹⁴ In 2007, a group of pro-JC students at the University of Peradeniya, identifying as "*Sarasavi Sanvada Kendraya*" (Centre for Dialogue in the University), published a series of letters, exchanged between them and the JVP. The purpose of the letters was to request the JVP to abandon Marxism. They identified the JVP as a genuine political force that represents the social ethos of Sinhala-Buddhist youth and its Marxist orientation was seen as incompatible with its Sinhala-Buddhist heritage (Jayasumana, 2007).

great popular attraction, had emerged as a JVP icon in the late 1990s. He was also moving fast towards Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in a manner that was agreeable to JC.

The challenge posed by the post-Marxist young intellectual Left to JC was fundamentally different from those of the JM and JVP. The hallmark of the former was its critical distance from the nationalist discourse, and, in the eyes of JC, its association with the *batahira chinthanaya* (western way of thinking). As these post-Marxist groups were conversant with various 'Postisms' in the contemporary intellectual world in the west, generally lumped together as postmodernism, they could muster significant interest among sections of politically conscious radical educated youth.

The political significance of JC in the 2000s became self-evident as it constituted an integral part of the emerging Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist political front and was its major intellectual stimulus.¹⁵ NdeS and GA had become major intellectual figures who hitched Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism to the popular political force in the south that brought the UPFA, under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa, into power.

Conclusion

Although JC is not a movement with one organisational centre, its two main intellectual figures, Nalin de Silva and Gunadasa Amarasekera, created an effective discursive terrain, especially for politically conscious and ethno-nationally sensitive educated youth to enter into public politico-intellectual activism. Although the *Jathika Chinthanaya* discourse was inaugurated by promising an alternative to the Marxist path towards an alternative to the existing capitalist socio-economic order, it deviated from this initial promise and provided, instead, an intellectual leadership to the new Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism which was emerging in the late 1990s to counter-weigh the growing strength of Tamil ethno-nationalist political demands and the intellectual discourse that supported those demands. From the point of view of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism, this was a formidable achievement, as it emerged as the major intellectual force behind the political unification of the Sinhala-Buddhist south in the last one-and-a-half decades. Its role is pivotal in the political unification that was manifest in the form of enormous support for the regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa in the last decade. Amidst heavy criticism of the Rajapaksa regime, *Jathika Chinthanaya* provided it with much-needed intellectual justification and moral confidence

¹⁵ For detail about the political significance of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism of this era, see Dewasiri (2017).

as the saviour of the Sinhala-Buddhist cause. JC supported the Rajapaksa regime even when the latter strongly adhered to the dominant economic development model. It was difficult for JC to withdraw its support for the Rajapaksa regime because the JC's ability to appeal to the Sinhala-Buddhist masses was almost irreversibly linked to the political alliance led by Mahinda Rajapaksa.

The young activists who were passionately attached to JC are a major force behind the rejuvenation of the Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalist political force around the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksa after defeats at two consecutive elections in 2015. The challenge that JC faces, however, is the question of the ever-widening gap between its initial promise for a vision of an alternative socio-economic order and its existing association with political forces that are committed to maintaining the socio-economic status quo.

References

- Amarasekera, G. (1976 & 1996). *Abuddassa Yugayak*. Boralessgamuwa, Sri Lanka: Visidunu Publication.
- Amarasekera, G. (1984). *Gamanaka Mula*. Boralessgamuwa, Sri Lanka: Visidunu Publication.
- Amarasekera, G. (2000). *Danasitiya Yuthu Karunu: Deshapalana Samaja Vichara I*. Colombo: S.Godage Saha Sahodarayo.
- Amarasekera, G. (1980 & 2014). *Anagarika Dharmapala Maksvadeeda?* Boralessgamuwa, Sri Lanka: Visidunu Publication.
- Committee for Rational Development, Sri Lanka. (1984). *Sri Lanka: Myths, Realities and Perspectives*.
- De Silva, C. R. (n.d.). *Viplavakaree Janatha Vyaparaya Kuruvakala 71 Kerella*. Colombo: A Samasamajaya Publication.
- De Silva, C. R. (1987). *Safeguards for the Minorities in the 1972 Constitution*. Colombo: A Young Socialist Publication.
- De Silva, N. (1981). Marxvadaya Vidyathmakada. *Silumina* June 7 and 14, 1981. Colombo: The Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd (Lake House).
- De Silva, N. (1986). *Mage Lokaya*. Colombo: Author Publication.
- De Silva, N. (1995). *Prabhakaran, Ohuge Seeyala, Bappala ha Massinala*. Maharagama, Sri Lanka: Chintana Parshadaya.

- De Silva, N. (1997). *An Introduction to Tamil Racism in Sri Lanka*. Maharagama, Sri Lanka: Chintana Parshadaya.
- De Silva, N. (2009). *Demala Jathivadaya Erehiva*. Maharagama, Sri Lanka: Chintana Parshadaya.
- Dewasiri, N. R. (2007). Lankave Sinhala Ihala Mada Panthiye Deshapalana Drushtivadaya ha Gunadasa Amarasekerage Meetakaleena Navakata. In A. T. Kumara, A. Sirisumana, & S. Wijesuriya (Eds.), *Kusuma Karunarathna Abhinandhana*. Mulleriyawa, Sri Lanka: Wijesuriya Grantha Kendraya.
- De Silva, N. (2017). *New Buddhist Extremism and the Challenges to Ethno-Religious Coexistence in Sri Lanka*. Colombo: ICES.
- Jayasumana, C. S. (2007). *Maksvadaya Athharinnayi javipeta yavu lipi*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Sarasavi Sanwada Kendraya.
- Nanayakkara, S. (2004). *Jathika Chinthanaya*. Boralessgamuwa, Sri Lanka: CRC Press.
- Nanayakkara, S. (2016). Transformations in Sinhala Nationalism. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(23).
- Perera, N. (1998). *Society and Space: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Postcolonial Identity in Sri Lanka*. USA: Westview Press.
- Perera, S. (2006). Fiction, Creativity and Politics: Reading Gunadasa Amarasekera's *Gamanaka Meda* – Part I. *The Island*. Retrieved from <http://www.island.lk/2006/05/27/satmag6.html>.
- Ranawaka, C. (2009). *Patisothagamiwa Tis Wasak* (an Autobiography). Nugegoda, Sri Lanka: Author Publication.
- Roberts, M. (1979). *Collective identities, nationalisms, and protest in modern Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Marga.
- Sarachchandra, E. (1982). *Dharmishta Samajaya*. Keleniya, Sri Lanka: Samanala Publications.
- Senaratne, K. (2015). *Jathika Chinthanaya and the Executive Presidency, Reforming Sri Lankan Presidentialism: Provenance, Problems and Prospects*. Colombo: Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- Seneviratne, H.L. (1999). *Work of Kings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Social Scientists' Association. (1984). Ethnicity and social change in Sri Lanka. *Papers presented at a seminar organised by the Social Scientists Association*. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.
- Spencer, J. (Ed.) (1990). *Sri Lanka History and the Roots of Conflict*. London: Routledge.

Sumanasekera, V. (2017). *Sinhala Baudha Manasa Visanyojanaya Kireema*. Retrieved from: <https://bavaweb.wordpress.com/>.

Tennekoon, S. (1990). Newspaper nationalism: Sinhala identity as historical discourse. In J. Spencer (Ed.), *Sri Lanka History and the Roots of Conflict*. London: Routledge.

Walicki, A. (1980). *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.