

Department of Political Science

"Two contrasting perceptions of India in the minds of the Sinhala-Buddhists in Sri Lanka."

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The post-colonial Indo-Sri Lanka relations are always intriguing topic. From the Sri Lankan vantage point, this relations are mostly shaped by strong public perceptions towards India by the Sinhala-Buddhists, while for India, it is mostly strategic and economic. A marked feature of this perception was the certain sense of dual attitude, opposite to each other. The ancient Pali Chronicle Mahawamsa, a paradigmatic text of the modern Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness, articulates this dual attitude in an oppositional relationship to the North India and South India, where South India is viewed as the place where the ancient civilization, within which the text was produced, originated from, while the South India is viewed as the place where its destroyers were from. This duality is articulated in the modern discourses as well. Anagarika Dharmapala, the celebrated hero of the modern Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, in no uncertain terms, emphasized the North Indian and Aryan origin of the Sinhala nation, as against the South Indian and non-Aryan origin of Tamils, while the latter are always connected to the destroyer. This soft-corner towards the North India was decisively changed during the development of the post-colonial Sinhala-Buddhist political mind. During the controversial Indo-

Lanka Accord of 1987 and the occupation of the North by the Indian army, this negative perception was projected towards the North India as well, and were articulated with special reference to the Ramayana epic where the "North Indian" Rama, who was supported by the "Monkey Army" was perceived as the aggressor. This popular perception has become an unsurpassable structural constrain in Indo-Lanka relations.



Dr. Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri is Head of the Department of History and Senior Lecturer at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He specializes in social transformation in agrarian societies, history and ideology, European colonialism in Asia, post-colonial state-building, and ethno-nationalism. Dr. Dewasiri is an author of 'The Adaptable Peasant. Agrarian Society in Western Sri Lanka under Dutch Rule, 1740–1800' (2007)

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All are cordially invited!

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