

NATIONALISM AND THE BUDDHIST REVIVALIST MOVEMENT IN COLONIAL SRI LANKA

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Nationalism is a modern concept analyzed by contemporary scholars in the East and the West. The concept of Nationalism and National consciousness emerged in Western countries while forming their own nation states. Nationalism in the western world had been created under the framework of nation state, though in Asia, it emerged while countries sought independence from imperialism. In the first half of the nineteenth century under British imperialism, western culture and missionary activities spread to a great extent throughout the Island suppressing local religions, languages and traditional practices. During this period, the Theosophical society, under the leadership of Anagarika Dharmapala, Ven. Migettuwatte Gunananda, Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala, Ven. Weligama Sumangala, and Walsinghe Harischandra opposed these missionary activities and launched the Buddhist revivalist movement in Sri Lanka. The main aim of this movement was to create national feelings and promote a national identity among the Sinhala Buddhist community so that indigenous values against the challenges of missionary activities could be protected. To achieve this purpose, they utilized newspapers, pamphlets, novels, dramas, and music as media to propagate their movement. They also organized various lectures everywhere in the island to attract people to their movement. This research studies the background, formation and development of nationalism in Sri Lanka under the British colonial context through the Buddhist revivalist movement. The main objective here is to identify and examine the methods that were used to arouse the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideologies and feelings by the Buddhist Revivalist Movement. The research problem addresses the impact of the conditions created by the Buddhist Revivalist Movement in order to organize and develop nationalism in the colonial Sri Lankan society. A historical methodology has been used in this research to gather and analyze data collected from primary and secondary sources with the former being documents of the Buddhist revivalist movement, speeches and diaries of its leaders, contemporary newspapers, and dramas and novels. Analyzing the above data, it seems that the activities of the Buddhist revivalist movement have created an environment to nourish the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist values and feelings. It differed from the concept of European Nationalism. However it was the first step taken against British imperialism in Sri Lanka using the national identity.

Keywords: Colonial, Buddhist revivalist movement, Imperialism, Nationalism