

La Toya Waha

“Religion and State-Formation in Transitional Societies – Sri Lanka in Comparative Perspective”

Online Appendix

Introduction

The selected interviews have been conducted in May 2016 in and around Colombo. The italics denote the questions by the interviewer. Transcription rules have been applied (see p. 558 in the book). Information which are personal and/or disclose the identity (of H.A. in particular) have been taken out. These include contact and personal details as well as references to relations to non-public persons, who could not consent to publish their relationship to the interview partner. In addition, personal information about the interviewer have been removed as noted. Neither observations of behaviour, like laughing, nor breaks or interruptions are given in this transcription. The informal conversation prior and after the interview are not given in this transcription. *The interviews may not be reproduced without the author's written permission.*

1. Interview with Dhammananda Thero, May 2016, close to Colombo

What would be an ideal Buddhist state and what is the difference between this ideal state and the current state?

What is the curr-, what is the last word?

The current state, like the structure of Sri Lanka as a state, is it now the ideal - (interrupts)¹.

Alright, ok, ok.

... state in the sense of Buddhism, or is it different, and what would be ideal, and what would have to be changed to make it an ideal Buddhist state?

One thing. I have some doubts whether Buddhism, Buddhism described something very clearly what should be the ideal Buddhist state, because Buddhism, Buddhism deals with not that - no much - more about the personal

¹¹ Italics denote the interviewer's questions and comments.

inner change, right. And the liberation, that is the main thing and in that there, some teachings are there about the state, and, you know, certain characteristics of, of a state, that is, ten things it described. But not the state, but king, right, the king. It's, so it is different from today's -. If we develop certain things from Buddhist teaching that, the equality, that there are four things: (unintelligible) is to, that is to please everyone with - but anyway. It, it, among those teachings, there are certain mentions of equality. I, I don't know. Still I have doubt whether Buddhism particularly say about what is the ideal. That's, that's my, according to my knowledge, it is not. You can develop certain ideas whether, what, what would be a Buddhist, you know, state. There Buddhism talks about, about non-violence, right. Non-violence. And the loving-kindness, taking care of everyone and this is equality idea. And those ideas you can see. And give the protection to everyone and the justice and all that. I, you know, again I, I have to tell you that there is no, according to my knowledge, what should be the ideal, ya, state. If you came to the state structure here, I don't see that basic Buddhist teachings has been used for making the, what should be the state structure, policies and there I don't see much of, much teaching is used. That I don't see. So I, I cannot say the state structure today has very much to do with Buddhism. That, that I don't see. Buddhism, instead of, you know-. In the constitution also it mentions about "Buddhism has some special place" and that means I have doubt what Buddhism they refer and that means as to looking after, or helping monasteries, monks and all son of Buddhism, right. It is, it is not. Whether the principles of Buddhist teaching is, is implemented, there I see, there a lot has to be changed and, I do not, I do not, I like to say the present state structure has something to do with, is strongly connected with Buddhism, no, teaching, no.

And what could be done to change it, to make, to implement more of the Buddhist teachings in the Sri Lankan state? How could one do that?

Well, (mentions my name). Well I, I have very different views from -. I don't think that, you know, Buddhism has to be, you know, we have to improve the state into the religious something, right. I understand that state as, as not very much connected with religion, instead it is a secular institute. That is how I understand. If you ask my personal view.

Of course.

And a state has to be a secular institute. And, and, now if we take Buddhist and Buddhism is part of the community that represent a religion, and 69 percent of the people of the population are Buddhist here and rest of the people, 31, non-Buddhist, right. And I don't think, that if we, personally, we, we have to do anything to make the state a Buddhist state. It has to be a secular state, that is my opinion. And religion is a work of the religious people. I mean to, whether to spread the message, and those things, you know, it is part of the religious people to do whether, I mean, -. State is doing something very different. Looking after, I mean, the welfare of the people, protection of the people and equality, maintaining equality idea and, and the develop, this is one nation, the idea of nation, there if you, if you select particular religious

ideology or religious guru that, that will create problems, right. I have no, I have no any, you know; if they, always I emphasise, if they used this equality idea that comes in, it's called (unintelligible). That is, I don't know how to put it in English, there the equality is there. So the, the baseline of the constitution should be equality, right. And those teaching can be used, but not with the label that it is religious something, that is not -. So I, I never encourage, you know, to make a Buddhist state. I don't think, no need, no need to do that. It has to be a secular state, where every citizen is looked after. And the welfare is looked after, and equality idea is promoted. And if we make any such a label, this has to promote to Buddhist state, that you create problems. And already we have, already we have the Tamil people, they were unhappy and if you go into the 1950s, the, the struggle was to make this, you know, the Buddhism idea and Buddhist state and then the Sinhala race comes with Buddhism, you know, that, and they were disappointed and problems started and we had very, very brutal war for about 30 years. And why we try again? Right. That is my idea.

So there should be a secular state. But I have come across a lot of literature where also Buddhist monks stated that it needs a strong state to protect Buddhism, because the sangha and the lay people alone would not be able to protect Buddhism and they refer to the history, the British invasion and so forth. So they said if there is no strong state promoting and securing Buddhism, then Buddhism will cease to be. Do you agree with that?

No. My idea, the state cannot protect Buddhism. And, it is the people, it is the people and the commitment and, you know. State can provide money and land also, you know. But it is not Buddhism there. Buddhism, Buddhism started in India in 6th century B.C. and we believe the Buddha is from royal family member. And if the royal support is needed to protect Buddhism, Buddha himself will go to kings and ask "please protect this", okay, we cannot do it. And it is not -, he, he is from royal family, and he never asked monk to go to kings and rulers and convert them into Buddhism. He said go to the people. That is the youth, mass, the bahujana. Bahujana is the ordinary people, the grass root level people. Go to them and help them. And use this message. And he says "don't, don't follow two person the same path, good", you know. Different directions. And meet ordinary people and work for the betterment of those people. And, there is no mention about state and kings, this is, this is a, I mean, mistake, this is a mistake. And yes when it comes to this, came to this country, the royal support has become, you know, the king become the patron and that has happened. But is historical something and we don't have to go to kings to ask him for protection, right. So, I, I don't agree with that idea. Not only that. See, after this war I have gone to Northern part of Sri Lanka, this my personal -, you know. I went to Killinochi where the, you know, most - and I went to see people, you know, to connect with them, and help. There are so many children, who do not have parents, and, you know. And what I noticed there, there is a, an army camp (unintelligible), right. And then there is a Buddhist temple. I, I was surprised to see a Buddhist temple in Killinochi, because there are no Buddhists there, hardly any Buddhist. And,

and when I meet people, they have no connection with the monk and the Buddhist temple and later on what I learned, it is, it has been built by the army, right. And yeah, I, I met one army officer, and he said “we built the monastery temple there and we are helping the monk to survive”. This is totally, totally going against the message of Buddhism and we have nothing to do with particular government or military something. And we have nothing to do with a particular community, I mean, particular race, right. And if monks live in Killinochi it has to be with the support of the ordinary people. His work is with the people and not the army. I don’t, don’t say that army people are, you know - they are also ordinary people, they are born from village areas, okay, so them also. But his main focus has to be with the people. Whether to construct a temple or not, it is not the work of army. It’s a work of people. And even though I could read those people, the monk who is living there he cannot read, because he is, you know. And one day the army camp is removed I don’t know whether he can survive there, right. So this a mistake, right, to expect the protection from the state or state, state other institutions, or departments. It is with the people. That is Buddhism. And I don’t expect any, you know, state support. And in fact, if you get the support from state, from the state, my opinion that there your message is over, right. You cannot go now, because you are getting something from them, you know, protection and the, the -. But if you are working with people you are protected by people, not any agency. And that is the message, you have to go to the people for asking for a meal, right, it is people who offer you. And that is our connection with the people, and not with the state. So that is how I think.

Okay great, thank you. I have also heard that there is an increase in the Muslim population and an increase in Christian missionaries in the country and some people told me that they were afraid that they would convert all the Buddhists and would take over the country and feel that, you know, Buddhism in Sri Lanka is threatened. Do you see that similarly or different?

Different. Very different. The population growth has nothing to do with religion. It is the education, poverty and the lack of knowledge about the birth control and all those things. So it is, I know very well, among Sinhalese communities hundred percent they are Buddhist but education level is very low, they are poor, they are farmers and then have many children, right. And the reason is one thing, the education. That education and lack of accessibility to get such a knowledge and then they have more children. And those children get married, when they’re very young age. The girls maybe 14,15 and then they get married and the time period that she can (unintelligible), you know, that. So, you will see the same thing is happening among those Sinhalese communities, who are poor and education is less, and who are not doing jobs, you know. So what we have to do is spread the, you know, the education and support them to have a job to, do job, right. If you, when you go for that, there’s no, I don’t think, hardly any difference between the population growth and, you know, their preaching. And among those Islam people who are in city areas, and who have the good educational background, they have less children, because they don’t want too many children. They, that is education

and the knowledge. So, it's a, it's a, this total picture to say that. And I am sure in Iran there are Muslim people, their population growth is very low, right, they have gone to that level. Another country, I think Qatar, Qatar, if you just search, the growth rate is very low and they have achieved that. Earlier they, you know, it was not the picture. And they have achieved that through education. So, it is the education and that, those are the things we have develop and not, not the enmity and make mistrust about communities. That is -. You know, we have to approach, you know, approach has to be changed, right. Yes, if show some families with so many children from particular community, the others will be fear that one day they, the number will be the -, you know. But it is the, if you go and see the, you know, pictures from the (unintelligible) poor families of Sinhalese community, you will see the same thing. So that's my opinion. And, conversion. That also not a truth, and, you know, few hundreds of the Portuguese were here and Dutch and then English and conversion, you will see, very low. I mean, the, maybe 7 percent, below 7 percent of Christian community. And we don't see that, you know, at least, it has to change then drastically, that is no such thing. And the Islam number, increase of the Islam or Christianity I don't see that, the fear. Instead, we have, we ourselves have confined to a particular community there is the problem, why we cannot go to Tamil people, why we do not go to estate Tamil, you know the estate Tamil people, they're Indian Tamil. They are living in uphill area, those tee estates and all that. And they are (unintelligible) and they hardly have any support from us, you know. And Buddhist monks do not go. And my opinion if you go to the other -, you know, you will find, you will, you know, it is not to convert anyone but to go to help them and there the people will like you. And the Buddhist monks they confine only to Sinhalese community. And then they, then they start complaining this thing or that thing. I don't, and again, anyone can, have the right to express their religious views, right. It is not that. What we are doing is the Buddha's. The Buddha was doing the same. The Buddha was asking monks to do that, right. Go to people and give his message. So it is an, at the end it is the, no one convert anyone by force. There is no such thing. And no one will accept such thing. So I don't believe that, you know, there is a threat. There is a threat, that is the kind of fear we have, the fear, the phobia. And we will, we that is a problem that we have. That, yeah, that I understand.

I have come across that the, in "the Heritage of the Bhikku" by Walpola Rahula [...] or the concept of the social service by the monks has been used for making political monks possible. So that monks engage in politics actively by rallying or by advising, but also by becoming political parties and engaging in activities, like the JVP or Bodu Bala Sena or the JHU. Do you think it was his intention to create movements like this?

No. We have to contextualise this book, "Heritage of the Bhikku". It came in 1940s. Then the country was under British rule and at that time, in India there was a struggle, freedom movement. And they had very strong connection with the Indian political movement. In fact, Venerable Rahula, among those monks, venerable Rahula has, I mean, you know, corresponded, writing to

Nehru, and Nehru is writing to Rahula. So, there is a, there had been a connection. They were sharing. So they were part of the freedom struggle and then during that time it is obvious to those Buddhist communities to believe they are the oppressed. Because the Portuguese during that time, the coastal areas, the Buddhist temples had to, you know, they, most of the time monks had to leave. So, if you go to Kernala Vihara, you will see it has been painted there. And during colonial-, that Portuguese and Dutch times, Kernala Vihara was, you know, deserted. Monks had to -, because it was attacked. So, the colonial, particularly the Portuguese, Dutch and English period, it is regarded that they were the oppressed, right. That, that idea was there. And all the (unintelligible) histories narrates that before that the -, you know, they didn't have that problem. So, the freedom struggle, freedom, the freedom for the -, that freedom and this, the, the, from oppressed to, you know, to change their position. Those ideas were there. That is what, how I see. If you read Kalaya newspaper. Kalaya is a newspaper those monks published, okay. The heritage of the Bhikku is the, is, is, it is not their, I mean, their how could you say, manifesto or they political - it is not, right. The heritage of the Bhikku is a response to the opponent political, I mean, the political movement, the D.S. Senanayake. They were the powerful people and they were against monks coming into, you know, social activities, or issues related to society, and, you know. Say said "no, monks role has to be to remain in the monastery and nothing to do with", you know. They're, these, the - Before writing this book, he has - (it is about the mosquitos) - I will close the door and then mosquitos will not (switches on the fan) it is ok that - ?

Ja, ja.

Will that affect the recording?

I hope not. But I think it will work. Thank you.

Ja, in this debate, right, this had been a debate between the, particularly D.S. Senanayake, he was against these monks coming into these kind of activities. Then there had been a meeting in Kandy, I think in the introduction of this book you will see that. There Rahula addressed the gathering for about one and a half hour, or something like that, a very - speech. There the people requested: "please, Rahula, make it a book", right. So he expand it and -. So it is not that they meditated and to, you know, to write "this is our mission" - no! The heritage of the Bhikku is not the mission. To see the mission you have to read Kalaya newspaper. There you will see, it is totally different. They're talking about the, particularly you can see the Buddhist ideas and then how the society, you know, how to develop society. And monks' role in rural areas to uplift the level of the people, you know, like -. They, they suggested to monks, they had a monk organisation Eksa Bhikku Mandalei, or something, you will see, ya, and they, through this paper, they instruct monks to start libraries, right. And to promote people to read and start social service organisations. And organise somadarne, we have the (unintelligible), people freely do something to promote, you know (unintelligible) common things. And then even the hygiene, about and how to, you know. All this knowledge that the monks has to do, (unintelligible). So and during that time those monks

have been spreading these; to spread these ideas they have organised meetings. And in Kalaya newspapers I have read and in one, one particular meeting people, they passed a resolution. In that meeting the resolution is, if you - the, the term, this “political monk” comes in during that period, there they pass it - if any monk do not do politics - that context I am, I am not talking the broader word that we have - at that time, what they mean, right, there they said if a monk do not do politics, that means, that then he doesn't have the right to live with the alms given by the poor people, right. So that means the idea, the politi-, what they mean, if you do politics, that means, you are doing the, your duty to the poor people, right, not the rich. There the argument is if you do not do politics, then only depend on rich people, right. There you can get the idea, what they mean by politics. And they, to, to help the downtrodden people and work for them. So, my opinion, even today, what (unintelligible) the idea is, “the Heritage of the Bhikku”, the book has been misused, taking it out of the context. It has to be contextualised at what time it is written, the context, and then why, right. And the, the, the, if I answer to the question why, it is, it is, part of a debate to defend themselves, the monks, they have written this in the, in the, in the process of the debate. But this book is not their agenda or the main manifesto or no. It is there in Kalaya newspaper. What they want to do. And the free education struggle is one that they used, that they, you know, to implement what they taught in Kalaya newspaper. That is to, to work for the betterment of the ordinary people. During that time the free education bill came to the state council, it was not welcomed by the others. And one particular person wrote this bill by, someone called Kanangare, his name is Kanangare, E.W. Kanangare, and for three years this has not been taken into the discussion, debate. Because the others in the group was against, everyone. Then these monks took this and they promoted, they, they made people aware about the free education and the value and then in the Kalaya, you will see, Kalaya newspaper, you will see the monks, they had instruct monks in regional level “you have to use the Vesak day that, the Buddha (unintelligible) day, in their sermons you have to use it to spread the message to the people, the value of education, right. And promote them to support this free education bill”. So, that is, you know, that is how I see it. This book has been misused, this was not - that is how I see.

If you have more questions about this I like you, I know, if you, ya-
I am very interested in this because I have read that especially the JVP took up this idea, also of education and so forth and many Buddhist monks actually joint and were, I do not know to which extend, involved in also the violent actions. And I mean, when you read “What the Buddha Taught” or something, it becomes very clear that it is about non-violence, that even on a national and international level Rahula saw that it would be better for politics if they were, you know, based on the principles, that everybody else should follow. So I wondered how could the JVP movement and the monks involved use violence as a means to get what they want?

Hmm hmm. Yeah... ohhu... From then onwards, like my, my studies reveal, after 1940s this particular movement, what came from monks, gradually shift

into the nationalistic idea, you know, that, that, that (unintelligible). And one, if you read more about the, what happened 40s, there were few monks who were supporting the opponent groups, I mean the D.S. Senanayake, and there they argued monk has no role in, you know, this kind of activities. But gradually they also came into, you know. And then, they gradually, they, I mean, they were, they become pioneers of nationalistic politics. And then one thing happened, Rahula left Sri Lanka 1950 to Paris, right. And, I don't know whether you know this idea, this thing, because in the moment, Rahula was the one who could read English, you know. There were a group of monks, who were leading this movement that came from Vidiya Lankara, and they had very good knowledge about Eastern, you know, the Pali and the Buddhist teaching, and all those things. But they didn't have the access to the other modern languages. Rahula was the one who had that. That's why the internationally, what is, what was happening and the -. Rahula left the country in 1950. And he didn't come back for many years. Now there was a movement, but there was no kind of leading character to guide it. Then what I see this large body shifting to nationalist politics. And even, and until today it is, you know, it is just going here and there without a head, that is what I see. And there the 1971, the unrest among youths and they were -. In 1971 it was mostly educated children, right. In fact, they're the children of free education, you know. It was, the bill was passed in 1947 and then 71, 47, 57, 67, something like 24 years, right, from free education. With 25 years. That means the children of this free education. Yes they got the chance to study in the schools, and they got the chance to going into universities. Now, what?, right. There was no job opportunities, you know. That in that context, and I think, the influence from what was happening in the other -, that also was there. Even the leader from the JVP came from after his studies in Russia, so those influences are there. So, there they took arms against the government, right. Yes there I see monks engaged, but those monks are not, I mean the, if you take 1940s engagement, they were monks who were living in with the community in monastery in, those are, were then members of the Eksha Bhikku Mandalaya. 1971 it was not the movement that, you know, that widespread movement among monks. It happened based mainly the university student monks. That is how I see. That they were, you know, because the 1971 uprising happened in universities, among university students. So most of the leaders, second level leaders were from universities. So this is, you know, I see, it is different from 1940s and this is something -. I don't know, whether it has any relation with the heritage of the Bhikku or that ideas, this is a development that happened the after freedom the 1948, we got the freedom from colonial rule; and now, it is kind of response comes from the youths who didn't have the job opportunity but education. And there, yes there are monks. Ja. And if you, you know, -. But I have to tell you this was not something widespread movement among monks. Right. It was not. 1971 few number of young monks, youths, in their youth, who had the university education, they were part of it. Because it is mainly the universities were centres of those youths, were the political discussions happened. So that

is how I see it. Yeah.

I have also talked to some other monks and also read a lot about the relation of Buddhism and communism. Which can be found in the JVP in the early stages but also even today. Even though Sri Lanka is not communist, but calls itself socialist republic. So how is the relation between Buddhism, the Buddhist ideas and communism? Does that go together? Or is it not compatible?

I think closer, even if you read Kalaya newspaper, they are talking about socialism, (unintelligible) ideas of, socialist ideas and ideas that comes in Buddhist teaching. The property, the ownership of property. And Buddhism promote the monks to have common property, right. And, and less, less, less property. I mean, least belongings, right, less belongings. And simple life. And all those ideas are there in Buddhist teaching. And the socialist idea, also they talk about the, I mean, at least the ideologically it talks about common property. Idea is common property is there, and then not to promote consumerism, right, (unintelligible). Those ideas are there. So that, yes, we see even those monks in 1940s, and that was the time the socialist ideas were spreading in the world and in this country, and there they have argued that Buddhist teaching, what Buddhism talk about, the particularly things related to economy and property, it is a closer message to Buddhism. That is there, ya, that is true.

So you could say it goes together?

Not together, but, but closer, it is closer. If you ask a, I know, in different way, the, the today's economy, that is the today's economic policies, whether, whether it is closer to Buddhist message of Buddhism - no. This development idea is, has no relation with, you know, Buddhist teaching. And Buddhism talk about the, you know, human bei-, not, it doesn't say, human being is unique, you know, it is not; he is a part of the system, right. So the animals and the environment, ecology and all those things are part of. So any development has to, has to respect the rights of living of other beings and then the protection of the environment and all those things. So the today's development policy doesn't follow that, they just destroy and cut down trees and you know. And then, you know. So, that is how I see it. Today we (unintelligible) far away. In that sense, the socialist idea closer. That is very, ya.

Okay. I, as I said, I have talked to other monks, who said it would be of use if the Maha Nikayas, the head monks of the different sects, would be more united and would speak with one voice. Do you see that similarly?

One word for what?

For, on the one hand for promoting their interests into politics, so advising to the government, and on the other hand also to put down, like violent movements of monks, like the BBS for example. You know, that they had their own jurisdiction, to say "okay, if you behave like this, you are behaving against our rules, so please leave, you are not a Buddhist monk anymore". Do you think that they should be more united and stronger, and more autonomous in a way?

Well, it's different question for me, because who takes power, and is there a system to have a knowledgeable person to be the head of the institute and if someone who doesn't have that knowledge and get the power to control that also is a problem, right. So if you see, I do not see, that the present, the answer is to give power to someone to control. It is not. And it is not Buddhist teaching or the message or so. So when the Buddha was in his last days, he was asked, "after you who will be the leader", and he did not appoint anyone, he says "my message will be the leader", right, "that will lead you". So I'm, I am not, you know, in support of that idea, that particular person has the power to expel someone. Instead, that can happen one day, but present situation I do not support that idea. Instead the more awareness by the community, people, and if people, in fact, this Bodu Bala Sena once came to the court that, I don't know whether you saw those videos, and they, they behaved very violently there and in front of the bus, that, the prison bus, the, that was used to take the Bodu Bala Sena leader to prison, and they, they and the way they behaved and then the people, the reactions, and then we, we saw, they understood their way of behaviour is not accepted by the people – and they, they then have changed, that we saw it. And that is the point, I think the awareness and the, the community reactions. And there we all control ourselves. And if you give power to someone, I, I, I do not promote that idea, because I have doubt the knowledge of the leadership, right. If we have a very good, educated and the, and the person have a very good wish and as (unintelligible) then yes that is fine. But if someone who hasn't that but he has the power, I, I, I really doubt it. It is not, that is not the, the not the way that is promoted by the teaching. But to awareness and education and then more knowledge by the people and then the response. And then you have to change yourself. That is what I promote. And even though, whatever, I, even outside you will see a newspaper article, they had, I was, I was in, no, where ever I get chance I try to spread this messages and educate people. And these are the core teachings of Buddhism and this is, you know, then, if people aware of those things then you cannot do that, right. And, that is how I see. I don't see that the leadership, you know, has more power to do something, because it is not practical. My, my opinion. Because it -. Since we have some problem here, we, we are thinking of giving power, authority to someone. And then after that, if the leadership doesn't have the proper structure and the, you know, and then that will create more problems, so, ja. I want this to be, the freedom has to be there, right, not a strong control by someone.

And also this fits very well with the concept of democracy, like democratic rule, the, you mentioned the equality and the freedom, so do you think that democracy does fit to the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka?

Democracy? That. Yes that the, the, the, you know. You are talking about what we experience today or as a concept, the democracy?

Both.

Both. Okay. Yes the idea of democracy is there in Buddhism, I mean, you know, the, the way monks gather in the chapter house, and the way they proposed something, resolutions, and those, there, you know, you will see the,

the always - . Even there are rules without the absence, you know, if the monks are absent, particular monks are absence, you know, you have to seek what is his opinion about this, okay. So always it is the kind of the common and the discuss, and the, the views, always considered, what is the, you know. In that sense, yes, that, that and the freedom, and the respect, freedom of individuals. Those things are there in Buddhism, and the idea as an idea, Buddhism, yeah, the democracy is very close to this. But today is in Sri Lanka one thing I, I do not see. I cannot see the way the state structure works here has a strong connection with democracy, no, no! Instead I see the fear factor, that whatever you discuss before the population and all those ideas are fear factors. That you, always fear is promoted, that one day this has, you know, this country will become Muslim country. Then the fear comes, right. Then one day the Tamil, (unintelligible), you know, if you go to 1960s there you will see they talk, they don't talk about Muslim, but Tamil, right. And the, the always the, what I see here, the fear factor, there is a fear, and then you need leader to protect you and you do not worry about democracy, or other, your rights, what are your rights, and no. The first thing is the protection and so you need a leader to protect you. And everyone used Buddhism as their, the patrons of Buddhism and then, you know, then people flocked together, you know, and then, that is what I see, every five years, six years time they're fed-up and then they change. Again they follow the same thing, someone who pretend himself as Buddhist. And there I see, most of the leaders here, earlier they had been Catholic, or other religious people they have converted into Buddhism, or they have married a Buddhist lady, right. That also is there and to, you know. The fear factor is stronger here. And to, to find safety you need someone, a Buddhist leader to come as powerful, you know. The monks also, I think, work the same line. They have the fear factor, they are promoting fear factor and then, so, I don't think that democracy, that that kind of ideas are there, human rights, those things are, particularly human rights, those ideas they consider something Western concept and something. Ja, that, I, I, find knowledge about these ideas are less, that is how I see. I don't know how far my views are (interviewer interrupts)

No it's excellent. It is helping me a lot, actually. So then would ask one more question, maybe. Bandaranaike is said to be the 'father' who introduced Buddhism into politics. Do you think Buddhism has been, Buddhist, say, agents have been present in politics before?

Ask other question again. Ya?

So Bandaranaike is said to be the father to bring Buddhism in. But has there been Buddhism in, you know, politics before?

Well this is a different era right. And before that, there were, there have been the kings in the country. And kings were the ruler and there was no election or democracy, right, the from family they become kings. And they were promoting Buddhism as part of their work, promoting and supporting Buddhist institutions, and constructing reservoirs, tanks and those (unintelligible) things. And when this new, new era came, again we have to go to these 1946, 40s, the monks, first time, those Vidyalkara monks, they

were coming into, you know, spreading those ideas and, and the, they were very close, they were very close the ideas disseminated by socialist leaders, right. Then the D.S. Senanayake, particularly D.S. Senanayake, was the other side, you know. The not socialist movement, right. And to face this new trend he wanted other monks, you know, he wanted, if you read Henpitagedera and Gnanavasa, okay there are two monks named Henpitagedera Gnanasiha and Henpitagedera Gnanavasa, and he, they are from his electorate. And they are educated monks and respected monks. And he goes to them and requests, “come and help me. And I don’t have monks. And those monks who are spreading these ideas. And what they spread is very supportive to socialist political parties. So I need support”. There the monks said, those monks said “no” and we are, you know that particular monk Henpitagedera Gnanasiha, as I remember, he was constructing a centre for education for, training centre for monks, ja monks, then D.S. Senanayake says, “No you just come and help me and once I get power, it is nothing for me to help you to construct the –“ (mobil rings and he mutes it) and see that person who doesn’t want monks to come into politics, he himself used monks, too, right. And then the agreement between the monk and D.S., this D.S. Senanayake was to support Buddhism (unintelligible). Particularly he was a innocent monk who wanted a training centre. And this person says if I become the Prime minister, next time I will be the Prime minister to building this training centre is nothing. And once D.S. Senanayake come to power, this monk goes to him and when he requested the support he said, he just laugh and say, the state is a secular institute and I (unintelligible). Then this monk was very disappointed and then he become the person who was against those socialist monks at particular level, now he became a very political monk, that is what my, my, my reading. Then he wanted other person to come into politics, right. He is the one who goes to Bandaranaike, right. And Bandaranaike understand there is, you know, there is a possibility to come to power if he promotes this Sinhala and Buddhist ideas. And this particular monk was against the monks come into politics, I mean, monks mean those monks who represented Vidyalankara and who wrote “the Heritage of the Bhikku” that group, he was against those monks, their ideas. Now this person become very active, active political person and then Bandaranaike came into power, right. So this is, your question was whether this had been in the past, whether using Buddhism coming into power. That question doesn’t arise because there are certain, you know, in the history, second century B.C. a king called Duttugamani, right, and he used religion to unite and make a force to fight against, you know. That we see. Instead of that, I don’t see that particularly Buddhism was used to come into power. And this is the very clear cut occasion that particular political leader used religion to come to power. Even though D.S. Senanayake used few monks to, you know, face the challenge, he was not very much into that politics, that was Bandaranaike, who ja.

He was then killed by a Buddhist monk also.

Yes, yes.

I have read different things. On the one hand I have read that he was really

disappointed and that's why killed him, on the other hand I have read that he was alcohol-addict and was made to do it by a bigger, I mean, leading Buddhist monk. I find so many different sources do you know more about the person?

Well, this, the killing of Bandaranaike was not a result of a movement or any organisation, you know. It was not that monks was against Bandaranaike and, no. I think, what I have learned that particular monk from Kālaniya vihara, and he is a very, it is not, I mean, it's a really rich Buddhist centre, I mean, wealthy centre and he had very close relations with wealthy, politically engaged people, and it is not a movement with people, but very kind of business-like kind of relationship [...]. What I know about, about this particular incident and the monk, he was planning to start a ship company here, a big business, and the policies that was introduced by Bandaranaike was not, I mean, not helpful for him to, and he was, so, he had so much power, and that is what I understand. Personally I know, what I learned from venerable Rahula, then he was in Paris, he was living in Paris, and he told me that particular monk with the (unintelligible) had telephoned him from London and he has said that he is going to start a ship company, right. So the fact that he was going to start a ship company, I think it's a fact, it's, you know, and then some disappointed, disappointments, has created, I think. I don't know whether he killed or who killed, you know, because, yeah, but that, that the (unintelligible) of self-interest, the lose of, you know, that is visible. So, ja. It is, it is not a common monks and there as a result of something comes from Buddhist institution, this is very personal, ja, and that is how I see it.

And can you explain, why he was baptised or converted to Christianity before he was killed?

It is not that particular monk. It is not, there are two monks, right there are two monks. The, the, I mean the person who was behind the conspiracy, I according to my knowledge he did not convert to any baptism. The person who executed dead shot, they, he has, in the person, you know, he has changed, and ja, that has happened. Well I don't see, you know, these are ordinary people and if you can use someone to go and kill and you go and do, and then you are not someone, you know, such kind of person can change his views at any point. And I don't see that, you know, it has something very important things for us to do discuss, because, you know, the leading monk, he is the Buddhakkita, he is the, he is from Kālaniya Vihara, he is a leading character, please check whether he has converted him to other religion. My knowledge no. The person who was used to do, you know, he was just executing what he was asked to do. And that person, ja.

And then maybe one final question. I have heard about a Buddhist monk making a self-immolation in Sri Lanka. This is usually something which is found rather under the Mahayana, Tibetan monks. Can you explain why it came to Sri Lanka and do you have further information?

Yeah. Yes that is right. In Mahayana Buddhism, this has been in Vietnam, they have used this and they have the practise of offering themselves. And we

use the in, how do you say, that, I, I, what is it called? What we used to make fire and keep it as a offering, that gives a fragrance - no, okay, okay, I'll show you, give me a minute - you have time, right?

Of course, of course.

Sorry, I don't know. This is not my language, this is what I was taking about [Joss stick]. That gives, ja? Ja. So as a offering we do this, right. And in Mahayana Buddhism there is a kind of practices to, you stop taking food, but you start taking this kind of, you know. And then one day, as a part of offering you yourself burn, right. It is not something you burn, but you yourself burn as a offering. It is in their Mahayana Buddhism kind of practice. And this was not a practice in Theravada Buddhism, this has never been. And what I, but this Quang Duc incident, some people know here, right, Quang Duc the one (unintelligible) monk who burned himself in Vietnam in '74 or something against American occupation, this was new, new phenomena. My understanding, this is something to do with, which is the result of the war and we as a community saw so much of violent things, right. Day to day news we see violent, violence. And that has affected the minds of, my opinion, the whole community here, in various levels, various degrees. And this particular monk was a member of one extreme political party, the Jathika Hela Urumaya, JHU, right. But he was, he had, you know, what I learned, he had some extreme ideas and he was not welcomed by the, you know, he didn't get higher lever of the -, you know. And maybe there was some personal problems also, you know, tendency to commit suicide and he used what I was, I, I can give you a video, have you watched my videos?

I have seen the video of the monk burning himself.

No not that. My own messages. You know, there are ...

I have seen some.

Okay. I mean one, very recent one, I, which I uploaded for Vesak, no. There I discuss about this particular immolation incident okay. There I discuss, this is the tip of the iceberg, okay. That, the violent mind that is created as a result of the war, seen so much of violent things, and then the way the news reading happened here, and so there are the tendency to violence. What come from this monk is, you know, the, the tip of the iceberg, that I was telling. What I say, why I say that any community you will see people, who tend to commit suicide, that is a different thing, this monk chose the Vesak day for that immolation. You know what is Vesak day, what is Vesak?

[...]

Yes and enlightenment, three things, right. So we regard it as something, you know, a very important day and we tend do, I mean, even the fishermen who go to sea, and they come back, they don't fish on that day. They think what they do is bad, at least this particular day we should refrain from doing that. So immolation once held on that particular day is something totally going against, you know, the cultural practice here. We, they don't do any harmful things, at least on that day. And a monk do it on that day, and again it is not that he is doing it, (unintelligible) he did somewhere else, he go to Kandy, right. Before the Temple of Tooth Relic. The space that he selected and the

way he immolated, you know, that is very painful. So what I understand, this is a result of this war, that is the, what I understand. Second thing, it, the media men knew that this is going to happen, right. He didn't tell anyone and he did not try to stop it. He was having a camera to record this, right. That itself. I mean, someone decided to, decide to commit suicide is something. But an ordinary person with a camera without stopping him and he is waiting to capture the news, right. (unintelligible) His intention is to capture the news, and then media channel was waiting until this person bring this news to telecast, you know, first, before others. So, what I in that video, I, I discuss about these three things and that as an indicator to show the violence that, you know, violence level. So that is how I understand it, the, the outcome, outcome, or outbreak of violent thing that, that has created by the war. And since this came in media, and now you can ask that question, why and, but various other ways you will see this violence comes out, right. And when I go to Killinochi area, I saw there also among Tamil people so much of violence coming. And my understanding is, I always emphasis the need of healing. Heal people and recover. And this war has done so much damage to the minds of people and this particular monk immolation is kind of evidence for me to yeah, that is how I see. And I don't know whether I answered your question, because that is how I see it, it is not that -, he wanted to be, I am sure he thought that he will be a hero. And those political parties also was promoting that he has done a great thing. Now they, I don't think that at least they know the name of the monk, you know, that much, no. He is not a icon here, not an icon here, no one cares. So, ya, that is how I see.

That's really interesting. And do you think that at one point violence is, you know, justifiably at all, I mean for example for self-defence, when I am attacked or something. Is then violence a means, so when somebody comes and beats me up or when a country is attacked by another country. Is violence then "okay" to use to defend oneself.

Well, whether it is okay for me or not, that is not, I mean, that is what happens, right. That anyone who, we, I think by evolution, that we tend to fight, I mean to protect ourselves, right. So that is what happened. But, you know, if I say yes or no, that will not give the correct answer, my you know. If you take the case of, you know, some case, and there we can, we can, no. It is not something, in ancient, I mean, time, when the Portuguese came, there also it was the first time they did not attack, right. It was a development, kind of development. My opinion from Buddhist side, I mean as a monk, how I promote is the, our intervention can change the situation. It is, you know, any violent, I mean if it is the violence is so intense and we don't have a room for going and, you know, engaging. But my opinion is we can change the people by, by our intervention. So, even the war that we faced in Sri Lanka it was not one day incident, it has developed for about 20 years, and we had enough chances to stop this, I mean, to, to develop into that level, right. We, we lose all the chances and then we have the people with guns. There we don't have to room to go and -. But before that, my opinion is, I am very much, very much into the principles of Buddhism and I know with love and kindness you

chance people. And even today, I am sorry I had a programme here today in this morning, I could not, I, I thought the mail has gone, you know -. There it was “Let us Heal”, that is the topic of the programme, and so many people came here and we sit together and there we did not talk about the military people or LTTE. But we talk about the people who have died. Whatever the nationality. And we pray or we transmit our merits for their, you know, happiness. And unless we don’t do that, we will not recover. And in that programme, there were a few people from army families, you know, they have lost their children as army soldiers; there were a few people from Tamil community, they have, in fact, in that programme there also one girl, with, you know, she has some (unintelligible), and I mean, she was from the other side. And if, how we can bring together these people, it is our intervention, right. So that is how I see. That I have no, I mean, personally I have no role in that kind of conflict situation. Go there, no. My message is with people, we can change people. And then that will affect to any, any violent situation. That is how I see.

Okay. Thank you very much!

Thank you, and I don’t know (unintelligible) your aim and the way I, the, the, you know, whether I could do justice to your -, what-.

Definitely. [...] So thank you so much. This was very helpful.

I, I like to share with you that – [...] ² – I went to Kilinochi [...] ³, and there I got the chance to visit one family, young couple, and both had been LTTE cadres and for me it is something, you know, I don’t know how to express my feeling and -. Now they welcomed me to their small house, they have two children and they offered me something, and you know. And I expected they will reject me, because I am coming from, you know, (unintelligible) - no! They welcomed me. And I had meal another house, there they have lost 5 members of their family. So my opinion is that we have a set of ideas, you know, that “they are against us, or”. I’m, I am talking about, they are the core LTTE people, before, you know. Even when I go this time, I saw in one house there was, you know, Prabhakaran’s portrait, the picture is there. They still respect them. Still, we can go, right. What I am trying to tell you is, if you, you know, practise the message and you can go and change, work with people and they welcome you. And that is how I see. And without, you know, without practising what we teach, we are going to protect- I don’t know what we are going to protect. Right. I -. In Buddhism nothing there to protect. That is in simple term what I can see there.

[...] ⁴

And I, I suggest you to, one thing, to see my videos, they are there in YouTube and then our institute creates book, there you will see our approach. And there, ja and that, that will be of an alternative way of responding and I am sure the way we are trying to respond is very different, very different. And we very much abide, we going back to basic teachings and then try to work.

² Information taken out.

³ Information taken out.

⁴ Concluding conversation.

And there the response is very, you know, there is, they are very happy. And that is what I can say. Ya.

2. Interview with Wimalajothi Thero, May 2016, Suburb of Colombo

Before, when we talked you mentioned that you have now this Bhikkuni Centre. Why do you think it is so important – I mean you are also very much involved in all the other educational programmes, like the vocational training centre for Buddhist monks, why do you think it is – for you – so important to put so much energy into the education⁵.

Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country for nearly 2500 years and we are bringing Buddhism generation to generation until invaded, you know, the British and some, Dutch and all those people came here and occupy. Then we have lot of problem with the religion and our culture. So the later, this is 1970s, the beginning of 70s, some of the NGO groups introduced certain things called “Small Family is golden”. So usually our families, they make seven, eight, nine children, each family, father and mother, they have children. Even my family got nine. Then they strongly accepted that concept, and started to make only one or two. So now very difficult to get monks, to become a monk. Parents also reluctant to give, because only they have two children, or one. And, so then the education system also changed into Western education system, go for exam, and O-level, A-level, BA, MA, PhD like that. Then they go to, started to, the monks also, they have given the politician, party politics, you know, they started to giving jobs, teaching post, and pay salary for monks and other various places, whether suitable places for the –, to work, pay salary. So the monks are not actually renounced one, they ordained when they are very young, so they don’t have –, when, with those exam, they don’t have much knowledge about Buddhism, and Buddhist meditation and Buddhist counselling and social welfare and all this thing, which we had in our monks’ education, earlier for thousands of years. Now, because of that there are, we had, we have around more than 12000 temples (unintelligible) all over the island, now more than 2000 has been closed down. And the other, the other country side small temples only have one monk, that, that monk is also very young. And they also very difficult to give the leadership to the village. And they’re not, they are not trained for that purpose. They pass exam. But they cannot give the leadership, the, the any problem come, to call all the people and do the counselling and, you know, to answer back their questions, and you know, in the religious way. Very difficult. Not all the monks, maybe 50 percent of them. And now actually in Sri Lanka, of course I had training temple in Bhikkhu training centres, Bhikkhus trained for two weeks programme for 1990s, I did lot in our meditation centre, I have meditation centre. And then later I have, I have, I have introduced to Sri Lanka temporary ordination. I, I had that experience when I was in Malaysia, and some other Buddhist countries. Ordain, ordain young boys between around 18 years to 40 years, some married men, they can come and ordain for two weeks, temporary ordination, and we have a daily programme, from morning five

⁵ Italics denote the interviewer’s questions and comments.

o'clock up to 10 o'clock, and so the dhamma discussion, and chanting and sermon and the —. We have lot of big programme. So they, they change their lot of bad habits, and they change lot, lot towards their own life and their family even. And later they, some of the ladies, they come and approach me “My husband is very much better, changed lot after this programme. He don't drink, he don't smoke, now our economy also in the house very good, he goes to the temple every full moon day. And he's care about children, we, we have, have a discussion very often, very often in the house, talk to each other, you know, instead of depending on the television and mobile telephone. We talk about problem and solve it. How you did that? And why not you do that, that, that, that type of programme for us also?” A lot of ladies they come and approach me. Then I cannot do that because two weeks they have to stay. I have a big place, 20 acres meditation centre, so I, I found 2 mo— nuns, from another place, and I invited them. I said, “I, I was, I was doing this programme only the male, men, so I, they were requesting for me to do for females also, you come and stay with us and, you know, you look after them. We can get the teachers and all the necessary people to teach and advise and guide them”. They agreed. And they came. And I asked them to manage (unintelligible) the place, that place. They did it very well. Better than monks, who were appointed. And the later and I again and that monk also is getting, disrobing lot, they disrobe and go back, you know, because then they're big and they want to —, they are not renounced people, like the monk disnounced, say he, he renounced already. He, after realising about the impermanence of the —, and all kind of dukkha about this life, and he decided to become a monk. So the nuns are different, they don't go and involve with any politics. They don't go and they don't disrobe also. And they, they'd like to remain, they have the faith and confidence about Buddhism, very much than the men. They, when they go to the temple, we see temple around 95 percent are women. Then the men will be five percent. So I started to train them also, some nuns. Now, because of this lacking of monks and the certain villages actually empty, no monks. So I decided there is no any other choice, to get those who, like women, who become a nun, I, I opened my place, I said “alright, you can come, even married, you aren't successful in your marriage life, or you don't have any responsibilities to children, if you like, you can come. You can do better service. You learn the dharma, you learn meditation, you learn counselling, you learn social welfare work, and you can do better service, and—” But straightaway we don't ordain. They come to temple, stay there at least one year, observe the precepts, 10 precepts, and we, we look, we see about their behaviour and all this thing, if they are capable and if they are suitable, so we decided to ordain them, as novice nuns. I have 40 around now. I am going to increase up to 200. So because certain monks of course not agree with me, the Bhikkuni ordination. But I don't care, there is no any other choice, because the Buddhism there's given similarity the monks and nuns, for human beings, everybody. Buddhism is not only for the male, they (unintelligible) female also can become *arant*. I'm, I am sure you heard about, you know, the Bhikkuni sasana during the Buddha's time. And the Sri Lanka

introduced, the Bhikkuni sasana introduced by King Asoka's daughter, San-
. Arahata mahinda came around 2300 years back and to Anuradhapura, he
brought his sister. Also Arahata. And she introduced Bhikkuni sasana. And it
was flourishing in, in, in all over the island many centuries, due to many
reasons and the kingdom has been changed from place to place, it
disappeared. Now again, nearly more than 100 years ago, they introduce again
the (unintelligible), they want to become a nun, and as the 10 preceptors, so
there are 2000, no, no 4000 nuns, all over the island. 2000 around higher
ordained Bhikkunis. So I introduced that place, very popular now. So any
other nunneries also stayed in a small place in the village side, they can come
and stay and study, learn. There is no proper learning centre for Bhikkunis in
Sri Lanka, so I am doing that. So morning five o'clock up to 10 o'clock there
is a daily routine and they follow that routine.

*So it is important for you to also get the women involved into the whole –
(interrupts) process.*

Definitely. They, they are now actually, I have seen, now lot of women
coming to the meditation centre crying because the husband, quarrel with the
husband, the husband (unintelligible); or the children's problem, or the
boyfriend, boyfriend problem, the boyfriend, they want to commit suicide,
and all this thing, they come to there to get counselling, to get some advice.
Whoever come, you know, they are, they, maybe after view hours they can
vomit everything in front of the, another women. So there is solved problem.
It is very helpful.

So it is a form of social service, no'?

Yeah, yeah.

*I have come across the concept of social service in the discourse on Buddhism
in Sri Lanka and I found also very different opinions on what the social
service especially regarding monks could mean. So, for example –
(interrupts).*

Yeah actually because of that modern education system when they introduced
to Sri Lanka – even during the British time, we have been protected our
temple education. Temple education mean they learn all the *tripitaka*,
commentaries, sub-commentaries, Pali language and some English language,
and they learn about ayurvedic medicine, and lot of things they learn. After
learning all this thing they, everything in the world is there, you know. Even
they learn about the universe. All this scientists whatever they discovered the
Buddha has mentioned everything 2600 years back. So their knowledge is
very good, they know everything about the meditation. But 1970s with the
open economy, there have been introduced and some of our monks, elders
those days, responsible for-, who advised the government they also kept quiet.
And they introduced that type of method to the monks also to study in the
universities, and they can do whatever subject they like, because of that it's a
huge blow to the monks like, and the temples, and the Buddhism.

*So some said that, Walpola Rahula for example, mentioned that, the social
service of monks could also be being involved in politics in one way or the
other – (interrupts).*

That's right, they involve more than politics than the what other (unintelligible), the other social welfare work and com- all this thing (unintelligible) in the village. Why they, they, the monks actually not ordained by, you know, the mind. When they become a monk when they are 12 years, 13 years old boys, usually ordained in Sri Lanka, like Thailand, but they (unintelligible), through education you ordain the mind. About why, what kind of things, what kind of service you can do to yourself and others. And the meditation, the value of the meditation. How much can by you to develop your mind and help others, and social welfare, everything. But they pass exam that introduced that BA, MA, PhD like that, then, then they have given the jobs also. When I come to Sri Lanka after I stayed 25 years in overseas, even no books, you know, not available books. They say, I have been in the jungle like this, I have to start a book centre. It is not done by the government, only by myself. All the teaching was not available. They've come to that level. So, they, they are wearing the robe but they are not doing their duties and responsibilities for themselves and to the society. That is the problem. They had, that happened in the 1970s. They, after opening the economy, they, everybody went, all the people and the people of course -, whatever the way they can make money those days, we, our culture was not like that. So we value the human values. We had very fear to do the bad things, to, even to make money. Even we never given, even certain poisonal, poisons-nal thing to the animals. We think it's a very bad sin. So nowadays, if they want, can make money out of anything, they, they do that. To make money become a goal, money become, become everything. So that's how the society has changed. This has nothing to do with Buddhism. Nothing, nothing to do with the teachings, teaching is day by day becoming true, through whatever all this modern development. But the system going on is not training proper monks and nuns in Sri Lanka.

I have also come across that some monks engage in politics, like really founding political parties. Do you think this is part of the social service or do you think - (interrupts).

No, no, no, no, I don't think so, because if you involve with any party politics, even this temple I have 500 families devotees, so, they, those devotees belong to many political parties. So, if I take one particular party, then the others will get angry, upset with me. Monks always be middle, you know, so, can, should be talking to everybody. Can have a personal view about certain parties and all this thing. They can involve. In the history, monks was involved during the kings' time, in the politics. That politics is giving advice, what to do and what not to do. Not the party politics. But unfortunately it is happening here.

And do you think that the structure of the traditional Buddhist state with the king as a leader and the Buddhist monk as an advisor would be also an ideal state for Sri Lanka, or do you think that time has changed and other, say, ideal states for Sri Lanka would be (interrupts).

Now already changed, now already very difficult to turn back. Now very difficult to turn back. You know. So slowly, slowly they change and, you know, monks directly involve with the political parties and you know. So.

They, the monks, their dhamma knowledge may be not very, very good, very high, high knowledge about the *tripitaka* and commentaries. And they involve with the politics, and you know, so they even go for all the rallies and everything and so, they demand to so “we doesn’t want to learn this, we doesn’t want to do that, we want to do this”, like that. Then in party politics they are working for votes, to get more, more, more votes, you know (unintelligible). Then they say it like that, they, they –. Also implement those rules and regulation, which is not benefit to the Buddhism.

Do you think the rules, the Vinaya rules still matter a lot for those monks, who are involved in politics?

Involved with the politics –. Some monks are of course, they follow the Vinaya rules, while some are not.

And in an ideal state, or how would an ideal Sri Lankan state look like for you, in your opinion? How would an ideal state look like, how should people behave, how should the government look like, which structure should the Sri Lankan state – (interrupts).

Because in the world, in the world, there is no any other country, have the written history, 2500 years written history, one nation, one nation, one culture, one religion. You find no, you cannot find anyone else in the world. 2500 years, of course we go further then, but written history. Even not in India. Sri Lanka is a majority, all the time around – close to those days around – 90 percent Buddhist then it reduced up to, you know, now around 70 percent Buddhist and Buddhist culture. Buddhism made the culture also. And language and then –, and those things are, we value, always Buddhism value the nature, so the four elements. You know. Do you know what is four elements? Air, air, the heat we are getting from sun and moon, earth, and the wind. We never pollute. We know we also part of the nature. We never polluted to make money for those nature. We always, Buddhism is very friendly with the nature. But to make money, so they destroy the nature. They burn, they cut the trees. They put all kind of things to grow the paddy land and other vegetables, and all this thing, the poisonal thing bringing from overseas and put the things into their field to kill the small insect, and you know, so those mix with the other water – everything is poisoned. And the air also become poisoned, polluted. So this is against Buddhism. But it is happening. Political lay people, also those politicians, they don’t care about that, you know. Buddha was born under the tree, he was, became enlightened under the tree, he passed away under the tree, so Buddhism live with the nature. Because we, are all part of the, whole body’s nature. When the mind come to the mother’s womb, the baby baths in the, in the, whatever the mother eat. Mother breath air, and the baby also get that air, and whatever mother eat, drink and water, that baby get all this thing. This child become 10 months inside the mother, whatever the mother has taken from outside, out from the nature. Then they once it birth, that man made out of nature. Nature has helped him, not, not, nobody else, not the God or anybody else.

And what can one do – (interrupts).

And when we die, then you left the body, the nature and become a fertiliser

to the wood and everything and then the mind go to another place.

And what can one do to change it back, is that possible?

Very difficult, all over the world, actually this going after money and corruption and all this thing, so very –. Nowadays the education system and everything has been changed going after to make money, (unintelligible). To have, to build a big house and, you know, so to plant, you know. Before they make all those, what you call, chemicals and all this thing, people live – in this world. But chemicals made, make also outside in the, in other countries to make money. And so those chemical bring here and put poison all, all over –, they must realise. Now I know, they are talking. They are talking the air pollution, cut down trees is very bad, and you know. So they have a–. Those days we never touch our mountains, British come and plant tea plantation. Even the, everywhere, like, like my head, you know, the mountain, plant tea on them. All that wash away. And our rivers begin, started from those mountains and also –, not like those days water coming, certain days very dry, certain months of the year. And then –. They should keep the jungle in the top, you know, the top part, you know, below that of course you can plant some vegetable and those things. But those white people they never did that. They don't care about our country, our nature, our religion and all this thing. They, they, they cut down, kill the people and clear up everything and plant tea.

So this negative idea of the economy – (interrupts).

Also because weather –, climate has changed. Everything changed. Now last week, we have rain and flooded. Whole world. Now the Europe, flooded. Those, those disturb, all this thing, done, not done by animals or other living beings, only human beings. This two-legged animals. They are worse than (laughs) the other animal. They never destroyed the nature.

When one wants to defend, for example when you the laws of the nature, is there, I mean when there is no other visible option than violence would violence be allowed to use?

Hm?

If you want to protect something, for example, if you wanted to say “no, we don't want you to destroy our mountains or our nature” is violence an option to defend oneself?

Before, no. Now they are talking. Now I heard parliament talking and there are some ministries and to protect and to plant more trees, and but it is still more chemicals coming. Bringing into the country. So the people are getting more sick⁶. Then lot of people get cancer, and all kind of new sicknesses and then the hospitals have to spend, the government have to spend billions of rupees to maintain the hospitals. And on the other side they allow to bring all this thing. And poison the earth. Not only, actually, when we were small days, when we go to the paddy land, even in the paddy land, we can drink water. So clean! And when we going to get water you can see small fish there. Now no more. Nobody drink paddy water, paddy land all the small, what you call,

⁶ In the book, it was corrected into “sicker”, p. 405.

small rivers, and all these – they are poisonous. We never thought around 50 years back we had to drink bottle water in this country. Very fortunate, very good. You know, all over the island we have rivers, coming from the middle, middle like that Sri Lanka, middle mountain and the rivers. Big 4 rivers and small around 30, so we got water. They cut all these mountains and planted tea. This done by not, actually, started not by our, our people; those who occupied this country by force. They did the damage and then later they introduced this education system, and their culture, everything and so –, what to do? Lot of people they, they like it, they don't like to go slow, and they want –, everybody want to make a big house and get a big car, and a lot of money, and you know. So, they don't care about nature, they don't care about the future generation. And the children born, and the grandchildren when they come here, where to live? We destroyed, and we die.

And the new government tries to implement a new constitution. Do you think they really care about such problems?

Of course! They, they must introduce and they put very high law and very –, ban the law and do punishment, also bringing, but it was not happening in certain politicians, they, they bring everything secretly and, you know, they get bribe and all this thing, and so, and their bring chemicals and all this thing. Certain, of course I'm, I am, I don't like to mention that, not, not, not I don't like certain Muslims, you know. Their business, they bring all this thing. From outside. Bring in and introduce. Even drugs, even all this chemicals, and even some tablet where the, our ladies, cannot, to, young girls cannot have children. So, all this thing are bringing, you know, everywhere now that's available. After taking around all those tablets around one, few months and after that then they cannot have children a whole life-time.

And why would they do that?

Maybe they, they doesn't want Sri – Sinhalese Buddhist people to slowly generation go down, and they increase their population, they marry four wives and they can have a lot of children and you know. This is happening in Europe also.

Yes, I wanted to mention, we [Germany] have opened our doors for many refugees

They introduce, they bringing lot of tablets and there is lot of poisonal things, and slowly introduced new the schools and everywhere available.

And some people in Germany fear for the – (interrupts).

Yeah! We also fear. Now, now, people are, a lot of people are dying. And they don't make children and cannot have children. They marry and after taking all this tablet and even university girls. And the men also take tablet. No. They don't take all this thing – the Muslim they don't take. And then later their population is increasing like, you know, when I was young, around under 6 percent, now I think 13 percent. Now, now, the way how they speak going on, when I come here, when I come here 1989, only one Muslim family in this whole area. Now 65 percent Muslim here. They buying, they have lot of money. Not, we are not against but because of the religious label -; actually we are all human beings, we are all equal. When we take dogs, in American

dogs or German dogs, or Sri Lankan dogs, all they say, no, bark, bark, bark, bark in the same way. According to Buddha, (unintelligible) not only one person has been born into this world without father and mother. Virgin Mary Jesus Christ, according to his. The others all – (unintelligible). When children came here international school, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and you know, they have a discussion with me. After discussion one girl asked me whether I believe God, created God, then I told her, I don't believe myself. She got a shock. I thought this body belongs to me, earlier, now I know this fellow is not belongs to me, if it belonged to me, I, I, I don't like to grow old, I don't like to have sicknesses here and there, I don't like to have pain, I like to be all the time handsome, so it doesn't work according to my wish, that man not belongs to me. Then I thought my mind belongs to me. I like to be happy and contented and all the time. Problems, worries, all this thing come to my mind. Then they asked me, "then who created you?". I said that know, I know very well. I know that very well: my mother instead of go praying to the Buddha or God or anywhere, she went and found my father. They two get together and created me. I said, who created you? "Yes father and mother, yes". I say, in this world, even in America, or even in Europe, even in Africa, even in Asia is there anybody else born like, you know, without father and mother? Everybody comes the same way! Everybody come to the mother's womb, everybody, like a child, (unintelligible) stay in the, in the mother's tummy. And they are born, they have to eat the –, whatever the nature –, the air, they have to breath air, they have to eat the nature, what they have provided. Not from somebody else. And they are subject to young age, middle age, you know, then old age and sicknesses and death. All same. Like other animals, other, other living beings. Human beings whether they're born in Germany or so, whether born in America or in, in Sri Lanka. Only one person, I said, Jesus Christ was –, according to the book, there is the Virgin Mary – born without father.

So what can be done against, I mean if everyone is equal and everyone has the equal rights what can be done to secure this long history – (interrupts).

But they are, they are already strongly labelise, labelled. Before around 5000 years back only one in, in, in the Sri Lanka, in India had one religion, they prayed to god, they used the word god, (unintelligible) the rain, they don't know how to rain, then the rain god; sun (unintelligible), after several hours one sun come and light and, you know, and go back. They cannot understand, five years back. Then they said sun-god, moon-god, huge-mountain-god. When the heavy rain come and flood, there is the water, they pray to the water. They prayed to the water–, the nature and you know, and the nature is angry that particular person. Look, they do not know how to make, how it happened. Now around then in the Hinduism, around 5000 years like that, they go, then say there are many gods and another one particular person called Brahman. Brahman and has created all the other gods, and one chief Brahman. After 2500, 600 years back, the, that society born, Buddha has born. And he developed his mind through meditation and become enlightened, and he said, "there is no god, you are your own god. If you work, this is how it work, it's

called living beings, there is a life, there is a mental energy and karmic energy, karmic energy, whatever we do intentionally it becomes a karmic energy. So that your, your energy, your, your than there are five senses. Whatever you see there, be here and you, all this thing, are responsible for yourself, no, nobody else. If you want to purify your mind, that I have to do. I cannot do that. I cannot tell the path. And that is that all the human beings are same. But then Buddhism and Hinduism not agree with that. Another 2000, 2016 years back Jesus Christ came. And then a few generations later then Christianity introduced another label. 1500, 600 years back, Mohammad came. Islam – another label. So we put label and we divided and fight. Same, everybody is saying “my religion is right, you are wrong”. If they can think we are all equal, this problem won’t happen. Buddhism is not a religion in that way, there is no god. You are your own god. I am my own god. I am responsible for my fate, if I study hard, I can pass exam, not by praying, (unintelligible). If you look after your health, don’t take all the wrong food and everything, you can be healthy.

So, but is there then a way to – (interrupts).

They have to understand. They (unintelligible) say, so called development. So, development they make all kind of machine. So they, they, even they make, when, when, when Western countries they development scientifically material things up to the atomic bomb, to destroy. Why they make all this thing? To show their power. They want to grab, they want. Buddha went in a spiritual way. Spiritual development. If there is spiritual way, if they can understand the nature, and why, who am I, about impermanency, and all this, every living being, we should love each other, everybody have to live. Then no problem, it don’t happen. Our –, and then to become equally don’t think, you know, (unintelligible) and all this thing, the money, they do anything. To make money people make, what you call, heroin, what you call, narcotics, and all this, heroin. They make money. They know after –, after they make money to feed they wife and children, they know when they take this thing, lot of thousands people will die. And their children and their wife, and they become –, nobody to help. And the, the young boys take, they, they destroy their whole life, with cancer. They know. Those who make chemicals, and they know. They do all get money. So. But. In Sri Lanka also lot of people now, they, they, they, they think money is the more important. They can cut all this trees and sell. They don’t care about nature. They want money. Nobody actually follow their religious teachers. We are fighting each other. We won’t show commonality. We fight each other, we want to show, we are greater than –. Animals, among them, animals no problem. Now of course they are very unfortunate, because they cannot talk, they cannot think, and you know, they cannot do, they cannot tell when they have pain here and there, they are hungry. And they are so called animals and it’s, it’s–, very unfortunate. But human beings are the only beings, human beings in this universe. The, those, who, they can think, and they can develop their mind. Even to become a Buddha, or become a scientist, become all this, astrologist, you know. Even the Buddha has mentioned very clearly and when he was

preaching. Now they say only one sun and moon and, you know, one galaxy system. Buddha said 2000 galaxies in the universe. After dhamma chacra patra sutra, they say, then they say after hearing this – dhamma chacra is the sutta – it is so many, in the first sermon it says, it says so many devas, and devas mean another kind of fortunate living beings. And brahmas and, you know, they are also, they say sadhu, excellent, you know, and after finishing dhamma charca, first ceremon. See. So many galaxies. It is mentioned in the, in the books. That can see through developed mind. Not only Buddhas. So developed minds is, you should, you must eradicated your anger, jealousy, grudge, hatred and all this thing. You have loving kindness and compassion and kindness and all this thing. You do a lot of the meditation, so you also can purify your mind. Through purification, you can –, we have, we have attachment towards in our life, “my life, my body”, and finally you realise there is no “mine”, there is no “I”. This is some sort of illusion. That, when once that realisation come you’re ready. You can stop that completely.

So the solution to the problem, also with the Muslims in Sri Lanka or in Germany or whatever, would be to just purify the own mind and not go against the Muslims? Or to educate the Muslims?

Of course we practise loving kindness. There is no point we are killing other people, you know, no point in hurting them. But, what to do? They’re in ignorance, they’re, they’re in the dark. They’re in, they’re blind actually. They, so they think, they’re right. How can you kill yourself? Today I can, saw, I saw the news, in Iraq, I –, some fighters, and they kill other Muslims. Their own people. There are some new sects, groups, you know. They kill each other. Other living beings never do that. They are worse than livin–, animals. Other living beings they want to kill only their food. Other than that they don’t simply kill others. If not, they want to catch their country and you know. And the Europeans come here and they kill lot of people and they, so their, gun you know, out of Europe. And we never had guns. So basically they occupied here.

So nothing to do against it?

Nothing. Everything is changing. Nothing, no, no, no way. Only thing we have practise our kindness, our love, our compassion to everybody. That’s all. Hatred is so strong, grudge is so strong. They think “I, our, mine, my religion, my people and only have to live, others must kill”. The Muslims they think like that. Just kill everybody and then your only Allah must live (unintelligible). I don’t know. Some exchange with Christian group also say like that.

All over the world. I also heard that there is a movement – (interrupts).

They can understand if they can really can understand actually the nature, we are part of nature. Our body is made by nature – not somebody else, you know. As I mentioned, without air can we live? Five minutes? But we pollute air. Who pollute? Not other animals – human beings. Can we live without water? Other animals, they pollute, don’t pollute the water. Who pollute the water? This two-legged animals. Who give the food? Those trees. And the polluted air also cleaned by all those tress. And the water collect and, you know, go to

the underground and that make the steam and go up and bring and share everybody – nature. And we don't value all that. They think that god is with them, some people (unintelligible). So we are destroying not only ourselves, even our future. And people getting less age, you know. They're dying. They (unintelligible) getting sicknesses and they are dying. Now they're, they make all this big bomb and all this thing. They put, they are not doing enough for Sri Lanka. Can't mention. Okay?

Sad picture but probably you are right.

Probably.

[...]

Do you, what do you think?

I agree. Especially the nature is very important. For example in Germany, we stopped selling plastic bags – (interrupts).

Yes, I saw, I saw. They made chemical, and all this thing (rises voice to talk over interviewer's objection). We, they say, they said we are advanced, we developed. But through that development, if you do some harm to the nature, what is (unintelligible) nature, what's the meaning of that development?

Now people in Europe start realising what you have just said. [...]

But of course, European people are realising and you know, America also realising. But some religious label, so stupid, they don't realise that. They don't realise that. They are so blind. They cannot think like that. They don't allow to think people, they cannot allow to read even other books. You are not permitted.

I heard that in Burma there is this 969 movement allegedly going after Muslims. Is that, do you think that is true? Or does that fit – (interrupts).

I know, I know. There is a big problem there also. 969. That is the Buddha dhamma and sangha. The virtues of the Buddha dhamma and sangha. And people read and buy their things. And then they contact, you know and otherwise and when you go their shop and they will sell certain poisonous things, and you know. Same thing what they do here in Sri Lanka, happened there. They can do everything. Kill other religious believers. Very secretly they do. They go every Friday to the mosque and they tell. They can, everybody can, every week can send their message to everybody. Not like other, Muslims and Christians and Muslims they do this. They are so blindly believe that. And how can –, Sri Lanka is a hot country. That all the ladies going with a black cloth, everything covered – they cannot (unintelligible) to the, on the other men, only the husband can see that body. "Aaah that is the Allah wish".

[...] ⁷

They're burning, and burning, and sweating. Sweating and, you know, that doesn't matter. And they have to tolerate two wives, three. So four wives "That is the Allah's wish". Four rooms have four wives. Can you tolerate that?

[...] ⁸

⁷ Personal information left out.

⁸ Personal information left out.

Okay. Share your husband? Share the husband?

[...]⁹

No, no, I mean, I mean. I mean, if you are going to their country, – in your country or the other families, can they do that?

No it's not allowed.

But they, they, even they tolerate that. Name of their religion. They, if they do and go and see another man or anything, they can kill their – kill her. But men do have many women, you cannot do this...

What to do? I don't know.

If they are born in that family and (unintelligible) they are finished, especially as a female.

So- (interrupts).

Did you learn something from me?

Yes, definitely. Thank you very much. It was very interesting to listen to you.

Okay thank you very much.

Thank you very much for your time.

⁹ Personal information left out.

3. Interview with Dilanthe Withanage, Colombo, May 2016

First of all I would like to know, you have been very active, in the newspapers you could see a lot of actions and obviously you are aiming at something to change within the Sri Lankan state, so I wondered, what would be the ideal Sri Lankan state for you and what is the problem right now¹⁰?

O, it's very difficult to explain with very short, you know, interview about all our plans, but what we think is that during last couple of years we have observed that there are number of forces working, I don't see that against us or against, right, but with their own objectives. But we strongly feel that disturb. A very minority population in Sri Lanka, in the world basically, right. Some people might argue about this, because Sinhalese Buddhist are majority in terms of numbers in Sri Lanka. But when it comes to global world it's a very small population. So global population is 7 billion people, 7 billion, and Sinhala Buddhist population is only less than 40 million. So we consider. One minute. I forgot to switch off [the mobile phone]. Right. Now we think that, you know, for example that because of this forces, right, this population has number of issues. Although we have so called Buddhist, Sinhala Buddhist government, we don't understand as a Sinhala Buddhist government. Or in favour of Sinhala Buddhists, all right. So what are these forces? We identified those forces as three forces. One: During last 500 years, we are forced to some of, you know, things dictated by the British. Now if you look at Sri Lankan education system that is completely transformed by British according to their requirements. For example, they wanted to have plantation industry here for their benefit and they wanted to run this country for their economic benefits, so they established schools, road structures, we are really appreciate about it, we don't blame them, right, cause that's their need and they did it, and we benefit from them. But still, that destroyed or that distorted our roots; the way how we think, now for example, if you asked somebody about vegetables in Sri Lanka, their answer is: beans, carrot, beet roots, anybody you asked. Why? Because our thinking pattern influenced by British so much, so the way how we think, how we dress, even how we talk. Now if you ask 99 percent Sinhalese people how they sign – they sign in English. Even they can't speak in English. Why? That is influence. So what, what, what we think is that our language, our culture, our thinking, all influenced by British and behind that, we think that Catholic Church is there. Why? Because their interest is to, you know, propagate their religion with their, you know, commercial interest, they got their religious interest also, as a result of that, if you look at Sri Lanka, you get many churches. We don't against them. But I am trying to say that, what happened to Sri Lanka. So it was primarily a Buddhist country. Hindu also lived here. Muslims also lived here. Some sort of maybe very small percentage of Christians, but state sponsored Christian missionaries change lot in this country. So now they are part of our country, we don't have any

¹⁰ Italics denote the interviewer's questions and comments.

problem with them, but now, the new form of Christian evangelical groups come here, and they do various, what we think as unethical conversions. They try to do, you understand that poor, now for example here maximum salary as university lecturer I used to get from university of Colombo, something like less than 1000 dollars. The people from US, who get monthly 10000 US, so then if they collect small, small pennies, even they send it here, it may be huge amount for a small, poor family. So looking at poverty, looking at illnesses and all these, right, disadvantage situations, they manipulate and they try to convert people into their religion. So, therefore we understand that Catholic action is there for couple of years through their education system, through their commercial activities, through their religious institutes, in order to, maybe I can't say to destroy us, but in order to expand their activities. And that has impact on us. That is one. Then, the second problem. That is also if you look at this Catholic action also not something we created. That's a global force. They are doing it not only in Sri Lanka. They are doing it Australia, they are doing it in, say, Korea. They are doing it in all over the world. So therefore this Catholic action is international force working for their benefit, but that disturbs minority groups. Because as a small population, we don't have financial power, we don't have economic power, we don't have political power, we don't have media power, nothing. But them. If you look at the Catholic population, they have huge support from the world. From those so called rich, what you call, privileged governments. That is one. Then, after the Soviet revolution in Russia, there was a tendency to create global communist world, and I know you are also part of that problem, for some time. So that also impacted on us. Now for example if you look at, what you call, communist parties; they tried to change regime here. They even took arms. They wanted to convert this into communist regime. So that communist agenda also, right, worked in Sri Lanka. In '71, we lost over some like 60000 youth. In '89 riots we also lost a huge number of youth. So that disturbed Sinhala Buddhist population and at the same time the very energetic, very, you know, potential youth lost their life. And that is a, what you call, what I'm, what I think as cost, opportunity cost for us. We have lost lot of opportunities. Because we have lost those people. And opportunities for development also we lost, so that also not our agenda. We never wanted, Sinhalese-Buddhist never wanted to have a communist regime here. But because what happened in Soviet Union, because Karl Marx and Lenin did something, so they want to bring that, so like that other religion also forced. That is second problem. So that also destroyed during Buddhist during British with their Catholic action interest they destroyed many temples here, they destroyed, they killed many monks here. Of course we appreciate I can speak in English because of the British came here. So we have maybe these colleges because of them. I am not, we are not against and we are not antagonising but we have to understand what happened to us. Then third is global Tamil issue. Tamils, in the world Sinhalese only 14 million. Tamils over 80 million. As Sinhalese we have a saying although we call this a multi-cultural society Sinhalese people feel, that there is a country for them. But Tamils in the

world, they feel that they don't have a country. That's a really genuine issue. But, for that also, victims are us. So global Tamil community wants to establish a Tamil state. That are also like global Catholic action, global communist action, then global Tamil action. They develop some groups in Sri Lanka because they felt this is the best possible place politically, to create Tamil state. Because that's difficult in India, although they had 60 million. It is very difficult because of that power, super power. So "where is weak government, where you can form such government?". So they identified and then they used some of the issues faced by Tamil people here; discrimination and all, so we agree. And discrimination is not only for Tamils. It happened to even Sinhalese here. No jobs, so employment problems, education problems, those are common problems of Sinhalese, Muslims, Tamils and everybody. But they took that as because of their language and because of that. They had some problems, but I don't say it's complete wrong, but they used this global need to create problems here in order to create Tamil Eelam, Tamil state. That also grow the problem, that also created loss of human lives of Sri Lanka, lot of, you know, lost opportunities for development. And that is also impact on Sinhalese, not only Tamils so therefore, I understand these as three major concern for us. Then forth is - Islamic issue. So we understand that from their religious perspective as well as their political perspectives they want to expand, so they have their strategies. So although Sinhalese Muslim are living with Sri Lankan Sinhalese peacefully for ages, with dollar, you know, petro dollar money and rise of, you know, their power in Middle East countries, they started pumping money into promote Wahhabism and extremist activities here. The fundamentalism and extremism. And that might lead to terrorism in future. As what is happening in some of the, you know, other countries in the world. So therefore we think that Sinhalese, one of the minority nations globally, is in threat, is under threat. And we see there are four main forces working for this. One, global Catholic action, global communist action, still that is there although, what you call, Soviet Union is no more there, still the mentality, the ideologies created among our people still here. That disturb. That disturb the university system. They organise crimes. They organise all, you know, destructive activities in this country. Then, still the global Tamil agenda is there. And global Islamic agenda is there. So we are victims of those. So we think, we have right to look at our interest and fight for rights. And government also cannot protect our rights because they are under influence of international community, international powers. Because they are so powerful. When you see Muslims, what is the population 1500 million in the world. If something happened to us, now for example, something happened to a Sinhalese girl raped, no embassy will come and say anything. Because Sinhalese government, they think "Ah this's Sinhalese government". But if something happened to Muslims, something happened to Tamil, they say it's a minority issue. Right. So I, I think all are wrong. Whether it happens to Sinhalese girl or Sinhalese boy, or the Tamil or the Muslim - if it is wrong, 's wrong. Right. But, but international community, focus through their lenses, through this, they use all this international

instruments like human right, what you call, treaties or conventions and all, in order to protect minorities. So what about our rights? So this is what our main focus is. So we don't want to have, you know, any violence, any, what you call, illegal actions. We always use our democratic means and constitutional rights in order to fight for rights. But unfortunately because of some other groups did wrong acts, those groups put all blame to use here. So then when you look at, during Rajapaksa's time, you know Rajapaksa previous president, time something happened in Aluthgama. So they put all blame to us. So we were arguing with new government, right. We demanded new government, if you blame, for, doing this to Bodu Bala Sena, BBS, so take actions. They can't do that. It's all words. They are all fabricated stories. Of course we had made very hard speeches. Remarkable, for example, what is happening in US. So this Donald Trump is making hard speeches doesn't mean he is a racist. He has to protect his nation. He has to speak of, of, right, if he does speak racism, that's a different story. I don't know, I don't want to protect him. I don't have any affiliation with him. But similarly we made speeches. But we never used arms, we never used, what you call, weapons. We never used forces to do so, anything. We always had our fight against certain extremist activities, peacefully, but of course verbally. We might, you know, had hard speeches, where we criticised highly. But unfortunately these things also translated, sometimes interpreted completely wrongly by media, because even the media all maintained by not-Sinhalese-Buddhists. So if you look at Sri Lankan media, even if you go to most of the universities, lecturer and professors, right, their mentality is not Sinhala-Buddhist mentality. So they think Sinhala-Buddhism is something (unintelligible) bad for the country. So with, that is created by - you know, I, I am not blaming anybody - that system. Now so for example. We had our indigenous medicine. I believe that Russia also had indigenous medicine. German also had indigenous medicine. But with the industrial revolution, you, what you call, indigenous medicine developed, improved, so that no matter what medicine you have is, the modernised indigenous medicine. What happened to our country? We had the indigenous medicine, the British came with their Western medicine, they call, Western medicine. Now we have two sides of medicine: indigenous medicine and the Western medicine. We call, Sinhala medicine and the British medicine. Now students, who go to medical colleges from the very first day you create a atmosphere, you criticise Sinhala medicine. You reject Sinhala medicine, that mentality is great. You understand what I am trying to say? So there's from our education system the way how, the way, our thinking patterns, our paradigms all created, so that we're always against our roots. Our, you know, local values. That's a problem. So we, we want to appreciate, we - now for example as a German you should respect German culture (unintelligible). But in this country we have two groups, culturally divided. So we think that is not good for the country. You can't when people are culturally divided, when people are, you know, religious-wise divided, then language-wise divided; within the community also there are big cultural, you know, conflicts. These cultural conflicts between Sinhalese is a major threat

for the development.

So who is then an ideal, you know, Buddhist in Sri Lanka? Who would be, [...] - (interrupts)

No, I, I don't think that we have a ideal Buddhist or ideal Buddhism in this country. Because that also distorted because, we, I, we don't, we, we, you know, if you look at British period for couple of years, hundred years then afterwards also, took by the people trained by the British. So they don't have. They used religion for their benefit. To gain power. But if not to create a religious society. I mean religious and this is, you know, philosophical religious, I mean, society. It is not that, their aim. Now, they want to celebrate Vesak, to have pandols and alls, we have these celebrations, just to please people that are, they're Buddhist. But Buddhism is not that, no'. Buddhism is complete different from that. It's a philosophy. We are, we have simple, we probably should promote simple life, we should promote critical thinking and that's not happening here. So I don't think that, you can't, it's very difficult to find Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Okay. But how could this situation - (interrupts)

But we have cultural Buddhists. Not philosophically Buddhist. Culturally we are Buddhist. But not philosophically.

Okay. And how could this situation be changed, I mean, how could you create a, you know, ideal Buddhist - (interrupts) society?

I think, I think one thing is, that we should understand, first thing that we should understand, what happened to us. Where we are, what are the problems, we are facing. If people are aware, then people get change. So I think first step is to create awareness about this situation. Right.

Okay

So if I am aware of, right, might taken up for an example, think about in this country if you go to any government office; so with a tie, right, right, with shoes and with this hot weather - do you need it? But that's how we respect that. So I always, I, I, I because of this thing I changed my, I am just wearing only this trouser and the shirt and with slippers, I just walk. I just go try-. If you look at more, even places like this, it is very difficult for ordinary people to come like this. They think "the guy is a mad guy". So if you want to be a, you know, "gentleman" you have to have tie, and nice shoes. That's, that's the perception. Why? That doesn't suit us. Whatever food we eat here, that doesn't suit us. Now for example certain, now for example, all like international standards created, about, what do you call, nutritional based on Western values. Maybe in your winter you need certain food, you need certain level of fat. Do I need the same fat here? No. But we also push to, listen that, and practise it. And we don't grow vegetables in our houses, where we can do it. And we don't really need fertiliser to be imported from other countries. You need it, fertiliser. Why? Because in your environment, it is very difficult to grow within very short time period; maybe you need it. But countries like Sri Lanka, if you just throw something, it will grow. But we, we were pushed to purchase, to buy huge amounts of fertiliser from Western world. So we have to think about this, we have to re-think about our roots. And I think the

first step is to create awareness. It's very difficult - changing the mind-set.

And then, after you changed the mind-set, what could be done?

Then people, when, when mind-set is changed, there will be social change.

Okay. Towards a more Buddhist conscious society and also state?

I, We don't want to lablise Buddhism, but unfortunately we have to, it will happen. But you know, because what we think is Buddhism is one the philosophies, where they allow anybody to live peacefully, and allow, you know, dissent opinion and allow all other religions, all other books to live. That's what happened during last hundred, say, couple of hundred, you know, couple of centuries. How it's difficult. Everyone is forcing, right, you get money to change people towards other religions, get weapons to change religions. So it's happening in the world, no'. Now if you look at Middle East countries, they kill if you, they, they, believe other religion, but this happen-, never happened in this part of the country, part of the world. So, we think that, you know, if we destroy Buddhism here, that this is the end of free thinking.

Okay. I have read Walpola Rahula, and also the Mahavamsa, and I have read - (interrupts)

Mahavamsa is the chronic, right.

Yes. And I have seen that in an ideal, say ideal, Buddhist society, you have the king, and the Buddhist monks advising to the king. Would that be also possible in Sri Lanka?

Maybe it was what happened in the past. I think it maybe not the, maybe not go back to the, I mean, go back to the root, doesn't mean that we should not modernise. So we are for modernisation. But modernisation while maintaining our roots, right. I think the king should be like where it comes from the family and people have no right to (unintelligible) select, you know (unintelligible), you know, vote for somebody and to select somebody, the choice is not there. But I think, BBS is more towards democratic regime, but present democratic system is not what we anticipated to have, or expected to have.

And also I have read - I mean I can only focus and give only the views of the media I have read. I have read that you have contacts also to the 969 movement.

Now actually all are, like for example, I can tell you, actually I was behind taking venerable Gnanasara Thero also to Burma. We went to, what you call, Thailand, Bangkok, there are organisations I can introduce you: "International Network of Socially Engaged Buddhist". They want to have some training programme for our leaders. So when we went there, we thought that we should go and visit Burma. And when I, when we visited Burma, three people went there, we (unintelligible) to the, even Virathu was not, Venerable Virathu was not aware that we are coming. We just met him in his big, huge temple, monastery, right. I think some thousands of monks studying there. So we just when we were crossing the road, we met him. Then he invited us to the library. Then invited me to and venerable Gnanasara to sign the visitors' book. Then we took some photographs, we sent it here. And it was promoted that 969 and BBS signed a MoU. Can you imagine? That's how media created

those stories. We just met there and we had, still we have some link, I think we recently, we've planned to go there. We don't have any official link. But we work with many groups. But the Western media promoted that "Ah, two terrorist groups joint together", like. Now you can understand, if we are terrorists how you can work here and even change, after the change, change of the government, the, we've wrote to the new president that we want to meet him. Then we met him. Right, and the former president now criticising us, so, we are living peacefully here. And we don't have any official, or police or some other protection. So.

I have also read about, also in the media, that many monks are involved in the Bodu Bala Sena. Could you maybe describe the structure of the organisation?

Now actually, when Bodu Bala Sena was started it was formed by three, four monks and myself as a co-group. I was working as a theoretician like for example, you know, conceptualising many things, but the life, you know, person of that, who become very popular is venerable Gnanasara Thero. And he was, he became very popular figure and people considered him as the leader of the whole organisation. But we had a senior monk, who was the president of the whole organisation, but after, you know, this Aluthgama incident he, he, he got afraid of it. Like for example he got blamed from many and he thought that "why should I work in his organisation?" - all voluntary work - he decided to resign. And mostly myself and Gnanasara Thero is working on this. And we have, you know, structures in, at village level, we have some committee members. And already we are working to our member network.

Okay. Thank you.

But from Colombo it's like a basically very small team operating here, decision making level.

Okay. I have also read about a self-immolating monk, who was claiming that he was against the unlawful conversions and also the halal-food organisation, halal food labelling. And I wondered, did you know the monk by any chance or was he just, you know, where did he come from, why would he do that?

Which, which?

I think in 2014, a monk

Yeah that is about this, about this is about, this is in Kandy, no'? What happened?

I think yes.

Yeah. Actually he was not part of us. Actually he used to come to our office and he was against, I think, not halal, not unethical conversion only, maybe he was behind that also, but he was opposing the killing of cows in Sri Lanka, no'. Mostly, against that. He wanted to ban slaughtering cows here.

Can you imagine why he used this kind of method? I mean it's mainly in the Tibetan, Mahayana Buddhist tradition?

I, I don't think it is good for any Buddhist tradition. Because with that you can't solve problems. But there are practices of that nature in the past. Maybe

that he thought that maybe the way to get the attention and at least because he, you know, did this, his contribution. Because of his contribution, he thought that president will take this chance to do that. But didn't happen.

And then I would also like to know what happens if, you know, democratic means fail to bring about change? Is it also possible that like the JVP to, you know, take up arms also?

No I don't think because (unintelligible)¹¹ it's difficult, now, for example as a Buddhist organisation to take up arms is not possible in principal. JVP, because, what is their, their, you know, foundation is communism. They follow what happened in Russia, what happened in Germany maybe, what happened in Cuba. Where all revolution took place with weapons. Muslims also can do that because they also had involved in taking arms to promote their religion. Even the Christian groups also can do that – don't misunderstand, because they had fight to promote their religion, you know this, they had lot of fights in West, no'. But as a religion, philosophy, Buddhists never fought to promote their ideology.

And what about Duttugamani

Hu?

Duttugamani?

No he never fought to promote Buddhism. Please understand two different things. Fighting: you go to some place, now for example, British come to Sri Lanka – British coming from thousand miles away, come to Sri Lanka, promote their religion, they kill monks. Similarly, Muslim groups come to India, they destroyed Buddhist temples, right, that's possible. We never in our history, in Buddhist history, Buddhists never went to some other country or some other place to force other people to believe their religion. Of course peaceful means, you know, educating other people. Democratic means, it happened from the day on, first day onwards for last twelve-two-thousand-five-hundred years of Buddhist history of this Buddha. We never took arms to promote religion. We never took money to promote religion. We never took political forces to promote religion. But self-defence yes, now for example lot of Western media wrongly interpret that Buddhist monks chanting soldiers, who go for war. That doesn't mean that they chant – Buddhist monks chanting – soldiers to fight, no. Completely wrong interpretation. When soldiers go to war, they take photographs 'are Buddhist monks chanting soldiers, no. They chant for the protection of soldiers. But that can be interpreted as different thing. We never went outside country and fought. Duttugamani never did that. When he had forces coming to destroy Buddhist places of his, he fought.

So that would be also a possible means then if for example...-

No that maybe like for example for self-defence, now for example, if somebody, it is wrong also, but as human. If somebody tried to kill me, so for protection doing that I don't even there disagree. But it is the human nature. But if I go and kill somebody that is complete wrong. Why soldiers fought here, because there was a tendency to divide this country. That is external

¹¹ The (unintelligible) was left out in the quote on p. 436 in the book.

forces.

And how do you evaluate the 969 movement's action against the minority?

That also, I checked with venerable Virathu. He says that he, they never used forces. They, most of the stories are fabricated stories and, you know it's a - *And why do the, I mean, why does the media promote that kind of news. I mean something must have happened, for example also in Altuthgama. But who was it and why would the media blame on you? I mean, I tried to understand.*

No, no, no I understand. I show, I can give you videos, I can give you various links where this, some of the Muslim groups attack Sinhala people there, when they were covering. But it completely went out because, now for example, - you are living in a village. There is a mosque. You are walking through that, close to that mosque. Somebody attack you. You go home. And your parents get upset, your neighbours get upset, some come and attacked the Muslim-, the mosque. It is what happening in your part of the world. Because of your system, because of your mentality and education. But here it's different. We are a violent society. Not because of Buddhism. We are violent, because we had to be violent throughout last couple of years. Why? British came and killed us. So for self-defence we had to fight. Not that we went to UK and fought, no'. They came and fought here. Then, what happened. Then communist started funding here and fought. Then what happened. Global Tamil agenda also funded here. So because of this, this society is violent. So we have innocent Tamils, we have innocent Muslims, we have innocent Sinhalese, but still their mentality is violent. And our education system also don't, doesn't heal us. That also promote violence because of the unnecessary competitions, and you know, the economic structure and education structure and all also some sort of promote, you know, great foundation for violence. This unnecessary competition and institution and, you know, traffic and all this, you know, fuelling violence. So it doesn't support healing. So therefore it is possible to happened these things but we never triggered. We have evidence, we have requested government official three, four times, even we wrote to them. "Have investigations! If we are wrong, take actions!" So far no, because they can't.

So when I want get, you know, properly informed without all this media make up, where could I look?

I can give you some video clips and all that. So now for example, already you are leaving within one weeks time, no?

[...] ¹²

So if we can meet next time. What I can do, I can find you some more details. And what you can do, so I can give you my email address. So you can email me some questions. Then I can find some information and I can email you. And we can have some other, you know, way of communication. Even if you go there I can send, send you information.

That would be really great.

¹² Information left out.

Sure, sure. Only you will have to remind me, because I am also living within a very busy setting.

Of course, of course. I mean, if you could just send me the things, because I really want to know and understand.

Definitely. So I am also, we are also willing to, willing people to know about that thing. You know, I am a vegetarian. I don't even, like you for example, if I see that, you know, insects, right, which I like to remove and do that. Why, why I should kill people? I am very close friend of, I have very close Muslim friends. So even I have Muslim friends come and live in my house. I don't have any -. Now even yesterday, when I went to, they have a campus in Galle, Muslim friend from Galle came to see me, we had lunch together. And I am still trying to help him, for some he's (unintelligible) he was trying to find a job, so, there, he is a good man. And why I should deprive of him having good opportunity?

So peaceful coexistence with all...?

Definitely.

... with all the minorities is possible but only the conversions are a problem and- (interrupts)

No, we, we don't. Now for example, if Saudi Arabia stopped their funding to here. If U.S. and other governments, (unintelligible) government, can stop this huge funding coming here to promote Evangelical, you know, operations, so even the diaspora Tamil and all their spending money for these things. Why not? We are definitely that Buddhism is coexistence, Buddhism is non-violence.

Great. You answered all my questions.

4. Interview with H.A., May 2016, undisclosed location

What are the books you read? Sri Lankan.

Yes, Sri Lankan. It is very difficult for me with the names. I have read a book called "The work of kings", for example and also the "History of Sri Lanka" by Mr. de Silva. And books like this, I have read¹³.

There are some more books to read. I will check whether I have them or not (unintelligible). There are not in my office. You can buy, I, I can't remember the publishers, sometimes (unintelligible). One scholar named Gunawardana, Professor R.A.L.H Gunawardana. He has a research title "Robe and Plough", Robe and Plough. Robe means the dress of the Buddhist monks, plough mean the sowing instrument. Robe and Plough. That means the religion and economy of Sri Lanka combined, were, were, were combined. Religious practises, and actually Buddhist monks and agriculture got together and that formed the government, governing bodies. Robe and Plough. Other thing, other, other, one book is by Professor Tilak Hettiarachchy, former vice chancellor of Colombo University, Professor Tilak Hettiarachchy, "Origin of Kingship in Ancient Ceylon", "Origin of Kingship in Ancient Ceylon". And one other book, written Prof. Walpola Rahula - you read that?

Yes I read that.

Okay.

"What the Buddha Taught" and also the "Heritage of the Bhikku"...

Yes whatever -, he has done his research, PhD research, this is called "Buddhist history of Ancient Ceylon". Walpola Rahula. Then you can, you can read those books and have some idea. Okay. Now you can start your questions.

Thank you so much for that already. My first question would be, in the idea of you as a JVP member, what would be the ideal Sri Lankan state? How should it look like? And how much has to be done until it looks like the ideal Sri Lankan state?

Yes. Actually, according to our chronicles; we have a number of chronicles, historical chronicles. We have heard that mahavamsa, dipavamsa. Mahavamsa was translated by Wilhelm Geiger. There are many facts regarding the Sri Lankan state-formation, kingship and everything. According to those chronicles, when Buddhism introduced Sri Lanka, the kings and nobles and ordinary people embraced Buddhism. Then they formed their -, everything, their laws, their political activities, their economic concepts, everything, according to Buddhism. That's okay for that time. Actually, real Buddhism is very close to Marxism, very close to Marxism. Lord Buddha organised his ordain, that means (unintelligible) according to socialist basis. There are no private properties in the Buddhist ordain, among Buddhist monks. They have common, common properties. Nobody have no, nobody have any private property, they have common property. That's very, very close to socialism. Then actually, the Buddhist philosophy is very close to

¹³ Italics denote the interviewer's questions and comments.

Marxist philosophy, Marxist philosophy. Then, the kings, most of the kings ruled the country according to Buddhism. Bhikkus were the instructions -, say, the advisors of the kings. Then they had 10 policies, 10 policies preached by Lord Buddha; dāhne, sila, pariyaṅga (recites three), that like that (unintelligible). That's the raja dharma. 10, 10 royal policies. And they had some other policies preached by the lord Buddha. They ruled according to those rules. Actually, that is like socialist state, ancient, in ancient. But when South Indian rulers invaded Sri Lanka, ancient ruling policies were changed. Then actually, Chola emperor, Rajaraja the first, he was imperialist, he was an imperialist, and his main object was to bring the wealth of Sri Lankan people to South India. He, he had a very, very powerful navy, naval, naval activities he had. He had very strong commercial network, and he destroyed the ruling power of the Anuradhapura kingdom and he occupied the Anuradhapura kingdom and took the wealth of Sri Lanka to South India. After that the ancient ruling policies were changed. Then, actually, I think that was the beginning of, beginning of capitalism in Sri Lanka, in the 19th, 9th century, 9th century. After that our agriculture was destroyed and our other economic activities were destroyed and people migrated to the Western part of the country. Till that they lived in the centre provinces, North-Central provinces, like that. The, they lived in wet zones based on agriculture. They had their livelihoods and actually they had very prosperous economy. Then after Chola invaders, invasions they migrated to wet zone, Colombo, Gampara, (unintelligible), Galle, Matara, and like that, areas like that. Then, in the beginning of the 15th century, Portuguese invaded Sri Lanka. In 1505, Portuguese invaded and they destroyed the other remaining things in our coastal belts. All around the Sri Lankan island, they destroyed everything and occupied that area. Then after about 150 years, Dutch also invaded Sri Lanka. They also occupied coastal belt. And in 1815 English invaded. And they occupied the whole island under their rule. Then we had, we lost, we that we, everything we had, everything we had; our culture, our economy, everything. Then, now we have our rule, our, I think our mean, our should be written in inverted commas. It's not, actually it is not ours. The ruling policy, economy, culture, everything, introduced by the British, British rule. So actually we have to, now we have to introduce, we have to fight for socialism. For Sri Lankan society, because there are millions of people, millions of people who have no sufficient food. They have no sufficient food. Their total income is less than 200 rupees. They are, they are living in very bad conditions. They have no sufficient food, no roof, no cloths. Their children have no sufficient facilities for their schooling. They are suffering. Actually, they are suffering. But very small number of people who own wealth, who have wealth, who, who do commercial activities, and politicians, they are enjoying more than 70 per cent of the total income of the country. That's the actual situation. So we have to -. We had a very good rule, very good, very prosperous, very strong economy in the past and after Chola invasion, we lost, after Western invasion, we lost everything we had. Now we are facing the problems introduced by them (unintelligible). Actually we have very good climate, you, you

experienced bad weather last five, six days, but normally we have a very good climate and we have very, very well (unintelligible) natural resources, we have. But all those resources and our good environment have destroyed by those politicians who had power after the independence in 1948. That's the situation. Now, as a member of the JVP and well-wisher for the JVP I would like to have solve those problems to have a JVP government and actually socialist government, otherwise those problems cannot be solved.

So you still want to have a democratic state but with an elected JVP government?

Yes.

Or would you like to also restructure the state?

Sure, yes, sure. Because in our constitution Sri Lanka is named as Sri Lankan Socialist Democratic Republic; Socialist, Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka. But we are not socialist. We have no democracy. Actually we are, we have no republic. Although our constitution mention we are socialist, democratic, and republic, all three words are not in the land, in the ground, we have no. So, actually democracy is also good, if we have. But we have no democracy, no democracy. So, we have to establish socialist state in Sri Lanka, otherwise we can't solve those problems. Even JVP leaders receive power under this situation, they also can't solve those problems. But, so we have to change the formation, the structure. The structural changes can solve those problems. Otherwise we can't solve.

Ok. And which place would Buddhism have in the real socialist Sri Lankan state? Would there be, you know like, would Buddhism have a foremost place within the state, would it be, you know, furthered and supported by the state, or would you tend to have rather a secular state in Sri Lanka?

Actually, you may have heard about Mahavihare. Mahavihare in Anuradhapura. The oldest Buddhist temple, temple, but actually it is not a temple, it is a large place like university. And also Abhayagiri, it is a different institute who had some kind of, some kind of different ideas about Buddhism, they also had a institute like it, it is, it was also like a university. Mahavihare had about 10000 Buddhist monks. Abhayagiri (unintelligible) also had the same number and there are other places in Southern parts of the coun-, Sri Lanka, of Sri Lanka, it's called (unintelligible), near Hambantota area. All those Buddhist temples, Buddhist institute instructed the kings. They, they guided the kings to rule smoothly, not to harm people, not to levy heavy taxes and rule smoothly. Then they interfered to begin economic activities. That book "rob and plough", you can see there, they, they interfered to economic activities, they, the base of those economic activities were Buddhist concepts. They, they engaged in economic activities based on Buddhist concepts, Buddhist policies. Then, actually, they maintained the spiritual values of the people as well as the economic strength of the people. They, they interfered to develop those two parts of the people. Then they had a very good intellectual power, they had very important ethics, ethical values, and moral values and social values, they had. They had a very nice, very good social condition under the supervision of the Buddhist monks. And at the same times

they had a very strong economy. They had agriculture, then, what is called, fate in cattles, everything. And they had trading activities, commercial activities, like that. And, actually, they had the foreign commercial activities also. By those economic activities they had a very strong economy. Based on this strong economy they built, they built, Buddhist monasteries with huge buildings, very strong buildings, all those you can see in Anuradhapura and Polunaruwa. You visited there?

Yes. [...] ¹⁴

Yes. Good. All those monuments were built, built due to the strength of our economy. That economy, actually, economic development -. Buddhist monks fade away to develop and have this strong economic base, economic place. So Buddhist monks developed the spiritual side as well as the economic side, the economic part of the society. So I think, I think the kings always honoured the Buddhist monks. There are one or two kings, who did not care about the Buddhist monks. But most of the kings always honoured the Buddhist monks and they always searched their help, their assistance to rule the country. Then the society goes very smoothly running. And people were living happily. They helped each other, they had leisure time to enjoy their lives. Because there, most of -, they were cultivators, no'. They, they are doing their agricultural activities during one or two seasons, the other time they had very low, leisure periods. So their enjoyed their lives. They do their agricultural activities and have a very low 2, 3 months, sometimes 4 months, leisure time. They do their religious activities, what they can do for the benefit of the religion. And actually they had a very relaxed lives, they had. That's the thing people need. They have their, they have sufficient food, they have their homes to live and they have very relaxed lives. Under socialism also people need to fulfil their basic requirements. So I think, ancient Sri Lankan society is not a socialist society like we think today, but it is a, some kind of socialist society.

Okay. I have read a lot about violence in 1971, so I wondered why would the JVP become so violent and how did the JVP movement emerge?

Yes. Actually, violence is not a (unintelligible) thing to Sri Lankan society. In 1818, under the British rule, the people fought against the invader, British people, British rule, for their liberation. 1818 that's called Uva-Wellassa, Uva-Wellassa uprising. Actually it was a liberation movement, liberation fight against the British rulers. It was destroyed by the British people, British rulers. And again in 1848, Sri Lankan people fought against the British rule; it also was destroyed and defeated. So, violence when there is war situation normally, violence is, we can see violence. It is, normally, it becomes viewed. In 1971 also situation like that. Although we say we were, we had independence in 1948, actually we had no independence. From the hands of the British rulers we had independence to some kind of Sri Lankan leaders who also¹⁵ were British. By birth they are Sri Lankans, but by mind, they're, by their activities, their thinking, actually they also were British people. So we had no independence. And there were also some leftist parties also joining

¹⁴ Personal information left out.

¹⁵ In the book it was wrongly quoted as "always" on p. 419.

the, those ruling classes, ruling class. So in 1971, actually JVP originated in 1965 [...] ¹⁶ the emerging of JVP was a historical need to Sri Lanka, historical need. Actually at the beginning, at the beginning they worked under, under the democratic way. But the government, UNP government at that time, they started to, started to, destroy, government started to destroy the New Leftist wing, New Leftist movement. UNP government. So, JVP had no alternative at that time accept having arms. Then in 1970 the government changed, the SLFP government was in power and all the ancient left parties SLSP [LSSP] and CP, Communist party and Lanka Sama Samaja Party also, joint to the SLFP government. They also continued the same policy for destroying the New Leftist movement. And comrade Wijeweera also arrested, he was imprisoned in Jaffna, in a small island. And I think that also is a third attempt, first attempt is 1818 against the British rule, second also in 1848 against British rule, and this, I think, in my opinion, I think, this is the third attempt against the British rule. Because the ruling people are Sri Lankan, were Sri Lankans, but they are, they worked, their policies are British, so this is the third attempt. So I think the third attempt against the British rule. In 1972, after the 1971, the uprising, government had to introduce new constitution. Actually that is the time, we, we had real independence from the British rule. So violence, actually we had, we experienced violence in 1971, and even 1989, [...] ¹⁷ yes, we experienced, we had no alternative. We had no alternative. Otherwise in, actually in even 1989 UNP government had a very bad situation and they killed innocent people, innocent people. Hundreds of people were shot dead in Colombo, in Colombo. 1987. That's why JVP had to fight against that government. We had no alternative, we had no. But now. Now, we are working in democratic way. We are, we have agreed not to have arms anymore, anymore. Now we are working. People are very concerned about that. People, now, we accept-, now people are accepting our, our works that we done. And now we are, people appreciating what we are doing now, and actually they have, now, now they are thinking the JVP is the correct movement in Sri Lanka. Actually, in last days we had floods. Government people had no plan to help those innocent people. JVP people are the first helpers. They went there and saved the lives. And they helped, they distributed the food, cooked food. And even tried food (unintelligible). And they distributed and they helped to clean their houses - everything. Government people reached there very slowly. So, actually, now people are appreciating the work JVP did and have done.

I have read that especially in 1971 young Buddhist monks were involved in the JVP movement, and sometimes I also read that no Tamil people or very few Tamil people. So on the one hand I wonder how can Buddhist monks who say of themselves that they don't use violence be involved in a violent uprising on the one hand and why did no Tamil people who had similar problems, especially concerning education, why were so few Tamil people involved?

Yeah. Yes. Very good two points. One thing is Buddhist monks, Sri Lankan

¹⁶ Information left out.

¹⁷ Information left out.

Buddhist monks always engaged in liberation movements. In, in the 2. century B.C., one invader came from South India, called Elara, one prince from Southern part of Sri Lanka, he was a Sinhala prince, he had an army and he had the journey to defeat the invader. 500 Buddhist monks accompanied the army. But according to original Buddhism, Buddhist monks can't harm even a tree. Not even a animal, even a, not people, animals and even a tree. They can't harm. But in the second of BC, 500 Buddhist monks accompanied the Gamani's army. And in our history as a (unintelligible) when invader came, when invader came to Sri Lanka and they had power in Anuradhapura or Polunaru, Buddhist monks, although Lord Buddha has prohibited to harm or harmful things, harmful activities, they came forth, came forth. They helped two local king or local princes to destroy the enemy, destroy the invader. Most of them are invaders. In 1971 also there was a invader, invisible invader. That's British rule. In 1818 also, in 1848 also, monks, Buddhist monks fought against the British rulers. And in 1848 there was a Buddhist monk who disrobed and become the king, became the king. Some Buddhist monks have disrobed. They became lay people and joined the army. The fought against the invaders. So in 1971 also most of the Buddhist monks, young Buddhist monks helped JVP. They were participated in JVP activities because of they had their heritage. That is their heritage. Although Lord Buddha has, has rejected, has -. Actually Buddhist-, Buddhism is religion without harm, without harm. It always rejects doing harmful things for everything. But Buddhist monks, Sri Lankan Buddhist monks engaged against that Buddhist principles to protect the country, to protect the country from invaders. I think in 1971 also Buddhist monks experienced their heritage, heritage and that's the reason to your first question why Buddhist monks engaged in those activities. And second part of your question, why Tamil people, most of Tamil people did not help for JVP activities. Actually, there are some historical background for this situation. Sri Lanka we have close relationship with India. The most closest part of India is the Tamil country, Tamil Nadu, Tamil Nadu. In ancient times always the invaders came from that part. Second century BC, Elara, came from Tamil Nadu, Chola rata, Chola rata, means Tamil country. Then Sena (unintelligible) then 5 Tamils, 7 Tamils, then Rajaraja, Rajendra, all of them came from South India, they are Tamils. Then, Sinhalese and Tamils historically have a bad relation. Although they lived together, they had bad relations. They are friends, they have marriages, intermarriages - but all we have those good relationships - but in their minds, depth of their minds, they have that historical, historical, bad experiences, they have. I think in 19-, even today, even today, I have my very close Tamil professors here. They are very close, very close, very friendly, very nice people. But even today that historical situation sometimes come up. Sometimes come up. So I think, I, actually I have no full idea about that fact, I think, in my opinion, historical background caused to prevent Tamil people engage in 1971; and even today JVP have a small number of Tamil people, like Chandaresekare. There, there are, but few. I think historical background is there.

Then I have one further question: In Germany we also have this tradition of Marxism, we get educated about Karl Marx and his ideas. And on the one hand he wanted that all the working classes unite against the ruling class.

Yes.

And on the other hand he said "religion is the opium for the people". So I wonder if the JVP is a Marxist organisation; they did not take all the workers, for example the other Tamils and the Muslims and so forth and united against the ruling class, but they had religion. How does that go together? I mean that they, you know, used Buddhism also a source and had this religious thoughts and the monks in it?

Yes. Well, actually - . Religion is opium Marx has said, but I think, this is also my personal opinion, I wonder whether Marx had some idea about the Buddhism when he wrote this idea. Actually, yes, that is partly correct. People always used religion to have something from one almighty god or something, from someone like that. But actually real Buddhism, Buddhist philosophy is based on human activities. Human beings are the most important according to Buddhist philosophy. But now, even today, people are begging something from Lord Buddha. Now, real Buddhism is not opium, but we have made Buddhism opium. They have, they have used to have something from Lord Buddha. They are asking for wealth and everything from Lord Buddha. There is the opium. So, actually, Buddhist philosophy is not like other religious faiths. It is based on cause and effect theory. Everything originates due to some reasons and destroying those reasons, causes, we can manage anything. And I think we also have some idea like that. Human beings can control something. We, we can't control everything, but we can control, we can manage our environment. That's the Buddhist philosophy also. So, JVP, actually in one sutra called Brahmajala Sutta, you have, you may have heard that in Buddhist sutra, Lord Buddha have pointed out this thing: When people have no wealth, people have no way to have wealth, they have no chance to produce some income, poverty will spread all over the world. So the state should have plans, should have their programmes to have people, have ways, people should have ways to earn some, earn some living expenses - (recites) that means, (repeats the Pali words) is poor people, (Pali words) poor people have no path to have income, no ways to have income. (Repeats the Pali words) means poverty, poverty increases. (Pali words) when poverty is there, violence is there. (Repeats the Pali words) Then violence is there killing, stealing, are there. Then Buddha has pointed out – it is very same to Marx, Marxist, Marxist philosophy – people should have ways to earn money, earn their living expenses. Otherwise there are violence in the society. So I think Buddhism is very close to Marxist philosophy. So although Marx has said religion, religion is opium, like opium, this not relevant to Buddhism comparing other religions. I think. Yes that is that (unintelligible). Yes and other part, actually, we accept, we have, we were unable to organise our people, working people together. That is our fault, that's our, yes, it is our fault. But we are trying to do that. We are trying to unite the whole working people. Actually now, now, our working people that means wealth-less people, it can say like this, classes

have changed, classes have changed. Farmers, labourers are also wealth-less people, but today, even government officers are wealth-less people. They have no sufficient income to live. So classes have changed. They are, they are having tie and cotton everything, and even suit, but they also have very less income. Very poor, they are living very poor lives. So classes has changed. But the class of wealth owned, they are there, capitalists are there. But other people are-, some of those business men, politicians and landowners, except those people, others are poor people. We have to unite them. We have -. Actually, we have the very big problems that we have to understand, we have to teach them, they are not the people who have no, wealth. They think “I have job. I have a salary, I have a car”. But that car was bought by having bank loans. They have to pay their salary for their lifetime for the banks. They are bank, bank’s slaves, I think. There are some kind of slave system. Men power slaves us (unintelligible) also here, no’. The slavery is having in separate mode in Sri Lanka. And, actually not in Sri Lanka, even other parts of the South Asia also same, in India, Pakistan (unintelligible). Slavery is there. But the appearance is, appearance is different from those who farming, those who (unintelligible) those are labourers like that. The appearance is different but the condition of all those people are same. We are having that challenge to unite those people by teaching them “although you are having vehicles, buying with bank loans, and although you have air-conditioned rooms to work, you are also some kind of poor, wealth-less people”. We are doing but actually we accept. Due to some bad experience in our recent history, we having some problems. But we are doing. We think, we believe in future we can, we, we can have victory. We are believing that. We are organising for that. In every time. Although I am here, always I am doing my best to teach the people history and everything. History and everything.

Then I have one more question regarding caste. I have heard from another professor who told me that caste in the JVP movement mattered a lot. Do you think on the one hand it mattered in the 70s and 80s and do you think caste still matters in Sri Lanka today?

Yes, caste is there. But actually it is, now it is not a huge problem. But it is still there, still there. When people are ready to do their marriages, they always consider the caste. Actually those are backwardness of our society. We have to go forward with those backwardnesses. There are, still there are. But actually in ancient times, caste system was very, very smoothtic. They had to work something. Some people were doing their agricultural work, some made pots, some made instruments like (unintelligible), knives, and -. So they have expertise in some areas. That was the base of Sri Lankan caste system. The people who do agricultural works, they are farmers, they’re called Goyigama. Some people made pots, pots and pans, they’re called (unintelligible). Some people made iron or steal instruments. They are said Hambakara. Society needed all those expertise. Without pots, without that instruments people who cultivate their lands can’t do their work. Then agricultural society – (interrupted) agricultural society wants all those services. That’s the base. But later after the South Indian invasion, they had

very strong caste system. Without any, any hesitation, any repulsion we accepted. Even Buddhist monks. Buddha has refused caste system, he is the first person who rejected caste system. (Recites). No changes according to birth, no changes according to birth. There are changes according to activities. Lord Buddha set that concepts, but even Buddhist monks, even Buddhist monks allowing the caste system, even today. Some Buddhist sects are not allowing to enter their sect low cast monks, they say, actually, I don't believe in low caste or high caste, this they are saying, "Those people who are low cast, they can't enter our sect". And even those who are, who called low caste people, they also thinking, we are low caste and they are, they have proud like that. I, I, I can't understand that. High caste people can proud, no. They are thinking we are high caste. But even low caste people also say "we are low caste, we are proud about that". That is the thing. It is very different thing. It is difficult to understand.

And then I would have one final question.

Yes. Sure, sure.

There is also now the JHU, and the Bodu Bala Sena, which turned to the BJP.

What do you think about monks being politically active in that way.

Yes. It is actually very bad thing, very miserable thing, very miserable. Actually in the past Buddhist monks were liberal minded, liberal minded. They, I said, there are some experiences in the history; Buddhist monks went with the government army to defeat the invader. But they have, there are no evidences that Buddhist monks harmed the Tamil people or Muslim people. Now, this is very bad, bad¹⁸ situation. Rajapaksa government helped those people. They are thugs. Actually they are thugs. They are doing the same thing what Prabakaran did there. They have proved extremes, no'. There are Tamil extremist there, and here we have Sinhala Buddhist extremists. That is not Buddhism. There's rejected all those things, but they are doing the thing, things Buddha rejected. Entirely. We have to defeat, actually, but they can have their-, sometimes, they can have people, they can have people for their, their ideas, their words, for sometimes, those people, ordinary people, no', they say "we are Sri Lankans, we are Sinhalese, we are coming from a lion, so we are the great!". Ordinary people, yes, yes, yes that is true. But they are doing the worst thing in the history. They should be defeated. Their mentality should be removed from the society. That concept, we have to, we have to uproot it.

And how could one do that? I mean, how could one get rid of all these ideas and also these groups?

Very difficult. Very difficult. Because ordinary people think, Buddhist -, some ordinary people think, whatever Buddhist monks said, is true and correct. Very (unintelligible). But it is not. It is not true. So we have to, we have to, tell the truth. They are realising the truth slowly. They are understanding the lie very rapidly, very rapidly. Very soon they are, they can work under the lie. But work under the truth is very difficult.

¹⁸ One of the two "bad" is missing on p. 420 in the book.

If I want to inform myself about the current political developments in Sri Lanka, which sources could I use? Because I have heard that many newspapers are either, you know, introduced by the English and some are introduced by the government. So when I want to get proper information, where could I look? In which newspaper or whatever?

Yes, there are some news, but they are, most of them are in Sinhalese. I will send some email or SMS to you or mentioning those names. [...] ¹⁹

¹⁹ At this point he gives contact details, information left out.