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### The Many Faces of Ravana

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The present study investigates and discusses the revitalisation of Ravana among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority in post-war (after 2009) Sri Lanka, referred to by the author as *Ravanisation*. Ravana, generally (but not exclusively) known as a demon king from Hindu mythology, is in the post-war period by several Sinhalese Buddhists turned into a hero with whom they can identify themselves. Through an ethnographical exploration of positive Ravana representations at an urban and a rural site in Sri Lanka, the volume explores the material, ritual, and spatial dimensions of *Ravanisation* on a grassroots level. It shows why and how several of the post-war Ravana representations contribute to a wide(r) appeal of this phenomenon among Sinhalese Buddhists – compared to earlier waves of interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka – and what the Hela-Ravana representation of the past indicates about post-war Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism.

**Deborah de Koning** studied religious studies with a focus on Hinduism and Buddhism at Utrecht University and Tilburg University. Her main fields of interest are contemporary (ritual) practices among Hindus and Buddhists in South Asia and in diaspora contexts. For her PhD research she received an individual grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

# The Many Faces of Ravana



*Ravanisation: The Revitalisation of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in Post-War Sri Lanka*

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ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan Tilburg University,  
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Cover image: Front piece of a Ravana procession chariot. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, 23 March, 2018

Lay-out door Karin Berkhout, Departement Cultuurwetenschappen, Tilburg University  
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At the time of my first fieldwork period (in 2016), I was affiliated to the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies. In that year some of the rules and regulations for visa applications changed, and I thank Deepthi for supporting me and helping me to stay calm during the unsure process of visa extension. I am also grateful to the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo for their support. It was at their centre that I had the opportunity to share thoughts with other scholars.

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some were definitely better qualified for this job than others. The best ones often stopped working for me because they got appointed at very good academic positions. I loved to spend time with my first (and best) research assistant, Sanduni Seneratne. I will always remember your warm and strong personality. I also would like to thank my research assistants Venuri Perera, Nuwanthika Dharmaratne, Nalanga Hettiarachchi, and Malithi Weerakoon. You all have high potential, and I hope you are given the opportunities to pursue your dreams.

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## PART I: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this thesis, I introduce my research topic, methodology, and conceptual framework, as well as the socio-historical context of the research. The first chapter introduces the basic narrative of Rama, Sita, and Ravana as known from Hinduism. I then discuss some academic contributions on how segments of the *Ramayana* (especially about Ravana) evolved in Sri Lanka and gradually became part of the Sinhalese mythistorical imagination. I do this mainly by referring to the special section of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* on the literary history of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka. I employ the five articles from this special section as a point of reference for positioning the topic, research foci, and methods of this thesis. In addition to the research question, I introduce the concept of *Ravanisation* to denote the research topic: the revitalisation of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war (after 2009) Sri Lanka. The second part of the first chapter discusses the research methodologies that were used. It introduces how, when, and why the two localities of in-depth research were selected and which research methods were employed at different stages of the research. It also discusses some of the challenges that were faced in the field and in the phase of data analysis. The chapter concludes with some notes on translation and transcription.

Chapter 2 introduces Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious diversity, both past and present. It provides a specific backdrop to understand some of the dynamics of the phenomenon of *Ravanisation*. Because this thesis focusses specifically on representations of Ravana that have emerged at and around Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka, I discuss in this chapter some interactions of Sri Lankan (mainly Theravada) Buddhists with Hindus and sympathisers of Mahayana Buddhism and specific rituals within the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon. In addition, I introduce some key developments of the twentieth-century Buddhist revival. In this chapter, I also explore the development of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and political Buddhism in twentieth and twenty-first century Sri Lanka and the relevance of some twentieth-century interpretations of the Sri Lankan chronicle the *Mahavamsa* to define a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology.

In Chapter 3, I introduce several concepts that I employ throughout this thesis. Key to my research are the concepts of representation and revitalisation. For the latter, I mainly discuss how ethno-symbolist theorists employ the concept revitalisation to denote the use of existing myth-symbol complexes to create a new set of ideas (ideologies) at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations. This chapter also explains why I use the concepts ethno-nationalism over nationalism and mythistory over myth or history in this

thesis.<sup>1</sup> I conclude the chapter with an introduction of two concepts that I employ in my thesis to investigate the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation*: the imagined and religious landscape.

---

<sup>1</sup> I employ the concept 'mythistory' not only because myths are central to the perception of the past but also because Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana consider stories of Ravana to be history (*ithihasa*). For a theoretical reflection on mythistory, see Section 3.3.3.

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: The Many Faces of Ravana in Sri Lanka



**Figure 1.1** (left): Members of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* perform a *surya namaskar* (sun salutation) at sunrise in front of the archaeological building at Galge.

**Figure 1.2** (right): Members of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* prepare the area around a tree at the backside of the terrain of the archaeological site at Galge to perform a *Ravana puja* (offering). Pictures taken by author, Dondra, April 12, 2017.



### Box 1.1: The Performance of the *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutation) at Galge

On April 12, 2017, I woke up in Colombo at 1:30 a.m. to join a group of men of between 30 and 60 years old to go to Dondra (the South of Sri Lanka). The men were all members of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi*. I became close friends with several of the members of this research group, especially those men who frequently visited the Buddhist temple site in Pannipitiya where I conducted a considerable part of my fieldwork research (see Chapter 6).

On that particular day, we left in a minivan to collectively perform a *surya namaskar* (sun salutation)<sup>2</sup> at Galge in Dondra. The members of the *Ravana Shakthi* selected a day in the week before the Sinhalese new year as an auspicious time to perform the *surya namaskar* since they believed the sun to be at its highest point in April (around New Year's Day). At the exact time of the sunrise they all changed their clothes, and in traditional white they lined up in front of the building at this site to perform the sun salutation (see Figure 1.1).<sup>3</sup> They considered the building at this archaeological site a sun *devalaya* (shrine, temple).<sup>4</sup> According to them, the Hela (ancient Sinhalese, see Section 4.2)<sup>5</sup> worshipped the sun, and this site was one of the places where the ancient Hela practiced this ritual.<sup>6</sup> The president of the *Ravana Shakthi* explained that the ancient Hela used solar power as the main source of energy and that they worshipped the sun. At present, the members of the *Ravana Shakthi* practice the *surya namaskar* as part of their meditation (yoga) to develop their minds and to reach inner peace.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The official transcription of the Sinhala is *sūrya namaskāra*. Because this yoga posture is known across the world as *surya namaskar*, however, and is also transcribed by Sinhalese in this way, I use *surya namaskar* here. *Surya* means sun and *namaskara* means reverence, salutation. See: Clough, B. (1892), *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, Kollupitiya: Wesleyan Mission Press, 'Sūrya,' 704, 'Namaskāra,' 277.

<sup>3</sup> Performance of *surya namaskar* (sun salutation) with members of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* at Galge, Dondra, April 12, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Gombrich and Obeyesekere point out that '[a] Sinhala building for gods (*deviyō, deyyiyō*), whether or not it is on the premises of a Buddhist temple, we call a shrine (*dēvālaya, dēvāle*).'

Gombrich, R. F., & Obeyesekere, G. (1988), *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, xvi. Throughout this thesis, I translate *devalaya* as shrine regardless of whether the use of the concept by people exactly matches the definition as provided by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (as is the case in this example). See also: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Dēwālaya,' 259.

<sup>5</sup> The official transcription of this is Hela. The *ḷ* makes no difference in present-day spoken Sinhala, however, nor does the *ṇ* in Ravana. For this reason, I use Hela and Ravana in this thesis. For more on translation and transcription, see Section 1.3. Clough translates Hela as the ancient name of Sri Lanka. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Hela,' 742. In the process of *Ravanisation* this concept is used to denote the (ancient) Sinhalese.

<sup>6</sup> The popular Ravana research group, the *Ravana Shakthi* (Ravana's strength, power), has existed since 1997 (informal conversation with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, on the way from Colombo to Dondra, April 4, 2017). Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Śakti,' 628. Compared to most of the other popular Ravana research groups, which only came to existence in the last decade, the *Ravana Shakthi* thus has older roots. In 2014, they posted a collection of PowerPoint slides on their Facebook page, and I received this collection from the president of the *Ravana Shakthi*. One of the slides noted (with reference to another author, Mathugama Seneviruvan) that Galge was a *hiru devol* (sun temple). Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Hiru,' 734.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 19, 2017. While in Sri Lanka, I came across the representation of Ravana performing the *surya namaskar* in several contexts, indicating that he was a practitioner of yoga and/or worshipper of the sun. That Ravana and the Hela were sun-worshippers was propagated by one of the main instigators of the recent Ravana interest: Mirando Obeyesekere (Interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, author of the book *Ravana King of Lanka*, Madipola, March 15, 2018; for more on Mirando Obeyesekere, see Box 4.2). Ravana is depicted in the *surya namaskar* posture in a newspaper article in *Lankadīpa*: Bandara, S. K. (2017, May 21), *Ravanage Ratey Pradhana Susana Bhumiya* [The Main Graveyard of Ravana's Country], *Lankadīpa*, 5. In 2017, this newspaper published a series on Ravana inspired by Mirando Obeyesekere. Also, the Ravana shrine constructed at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya – the Buddhist temple site that I describe in detail in Chapter 6 – contains a mural of Ravana in the *surya namaskar* position.

For several reasons I will not soon forget this fieldwork trip. When we arrived, the men were in a hurry to enter the building. I heard some of them breathing faster out of enthusiasm while they took pictures of every corner of the building (of which I could not see the relevance to Ravana). Also, one hour after we arrived at Galge, the overseer of the site came to reprimand the members of the *Ravana Shakthi*: they were not allowed to burn incense around this archaeological building. We thus moved to the backside of the terrain to conduct an extensive *puja* (offering) to Ravana.<sup>8</sup> The men had a basket full of ritual paraphernalia that they placed in and around a very large tree. These included a copperplate with Ravana on it, and several candles and oil lamps. They also found a local monk willing to participate in their ritual. While the president chanted, we all stood around the tree and kept part of a thread in our hands that had been connected to some of the ritual paraphernalia and the tree prior to the ritual (see Figure 1.2). After the men finished chanting, the monk tied the thread around our wrists and chanted over it. One of the men then placed a *yashti* (wooden stick) against our foreheads.<sup>9</sup> The *yashti* was made of special wood that easily absorbed the solar power and transferred this energy when placed against the forehead. We then cleaned the place and went to visit the famous Vishnu *devalaya* at Dondra since the men believed that there was some carving at the site that was related to Ravana. As we were all extremely exhausted after a night without sleep, the driver of the minivan hit the crash barrier on the highway while on the way back to Colombo. Luckily, the accident caused only a minor fender bender to the car.

The above example (Box 1.1) of a group of men engaging in the practice of a certain yoga posture (the *surya namaskar*) and ritual to Ravana is but one example of practices related to the contemporary interest of Sinhalese Buddhists in Ravana, a character primarily known from the Hindu epic the *Ramayana* as the cruel king of Lanka (see Section 1.1). This group of men believed that the ancient Hela (on Hela and Sinhalese, see Section 4.2) were worshippers of the sun who used solar power as the main source of energy. They invented an ancient practice through their performance of the *surya namaskar* in front of an alleged ancient sun temple. Also, the yoga posture and the offering to Ravana had present-day relevance to these men as it allegedly empowered them and helped to attain a certain mindset. They even tried to absorb the solar powers by making use of a specially designed wooden stick.

This ritual performed by members of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi*, is just one example of the rituals and the appropriation of an actual site in the country as part of the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists (who constitute between 70 and 75 percent of Sri Lanka's population; see also Section 2.1).<sup>10</sup> Ravana

<sup>8</sup> For more on definitions of *puja* in Sri Lankan Buddhism, see Section 2.2.2.

<sup>9</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Yashtika,' 511.

<sup>10</sup> In the census report of 2012, an ethnic division of Sri Lanka's population was made between the Sinhalese (74.9 percent), the Sri Lankan Tamils (11.2 percent), Indian Tamils (4.1 percent), and Muslims (9.3 percent). See: DeVotta, N. (2016b), Engaging Sinhalese Buddhist Majoritarianism and Countering Religious Animus in Sri Lanka: Recommendations for the Incoming U.S. Administration, *Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 14(2), 76-85, 76. No official recent information is available on the ethnic and religious division of the Sri Lankan population at the time of writing. For more on the multiplicity of religions in Sri Lanka, see Section 2.1.

is mainly known as a story character from the *Ramayana*. In this family of Hindu epics, he is often portrayed as a cruel king. How and why, then, has this Ravana gained the interest of a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority? What inspires these and other men to invest time, money, and energy into Ravana research? This thesis is the result of my efforts to investigate why there is an increased interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka (after 2009) and how this becomes visible in diverse strata of the society. In order to do so, I present certain key representations of Ravana and practices related to Ravana that have gained popularity in the last decade. I have selected two localities to investigate the recent interest in Ravana in detail but the findings that I present in the following chapters are not limited to these localities. My analysis also includes a reflection on what this phenomenon tells us about broader processes of (resurgence of) Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism at work in post-war Sri Lanka and how this Ravana phenomenon discloses some of these processes and dynamics.

At the time I conducted fieldwork research in Sri Lanka (mostly in 2016, 2017, and 2018, see Section 1.2) it sometimes occurred to me that the sky is the limit when it comes to the present-day interest in Ravana in Sri Lanka. In 2019, this was made permanent (and somewhat literally) by Sinhalese Buddhists in the galaxy. In the article 'Why Sri Lanka named its first-ever satellite after Ravana,' the Chennai-based journalist Sruthisagar Yamunan explains that on June 19, 2019, Sri Lanka named its first satellite after Ravana. He argues that the *Raavana 1* is not just a significant technological achievement for the Sinhalese but that it also reveals a cultural ambition. What he calls the 'attempts to remould Ravana as a national hero' are (according to him) based on anti-India feelings that have been continually present in the last century but have risen to prominence during and after the civil war.<sup>11</sup>

In this chapter, I briefly introduce the wider context of my research, 'Ravana in (Sri) Lanka,' to point out why this interest in Ravana is worth investigating. In Section 1.1, I pay extensive attention to the contributions of the special section of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* on the literary history of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka (Section 1.1.1). These articles all include references to the contemporary interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. Whereas the explorative articles on the present-day interest in Ravana from this special issue primarily focus on the discursive and narrative dimensions of the phenomenon, my thesis focusses on the representations and practices related to Ravana emerging among people in the field. With reference to these academic contributions, I

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<sup>11</sup> Yamunan, S. (2019, July 6), Why Sri Lanka Named its First-ever Satellite after Ravana, *Scroll*, <https://scroll.in/article/929015/why-sri-lanka-named-its-first-ever-satellite-after-ravana> (retrieved May 11, 2020). As the author explains, interest in Ravana was present among Sinhalese Buddhists as an alternative discourse opposing the Indian origin story as presented in the dominant cultural narrative of the twentieth century, the *Mahavamsa* (for more on this Buddhist chronicle, see Section 2.3.1.1). The naming of the satellite after Ravana made the '[...] mythical king's transformation into a political symbol [...] complete.' He further adds that the dominant idea of Ravana using an aerial chariot might have contributed to the naming of the satellite after Ravana. He also refers to an article of mine published in 2018: De Koning, D. D. C. (2018), The Ritualizing of the Martial and Benevolent Side of Ravana in Two Annual Rituals at the Sri Devram Maha Vihara in Pannipitiya, Sri Lanka, *Religions* 9(9): 250.



position my own research and introduce my specific research foci and research question (Section 1.1.2). In Section 1.1.3, I briefly introduce *Ravanisation*, a concept coined to denote the topic of my research. With reference to my definition of *Ravanisation*, I then point out some delimitations of my thesis.

Section 1.2 discusses my methodology, which over time became an emotionally charged topic for me. Initially, I extensively outlined the methodology I planned to use: I wrote research plans and prepared multiple topic lists and two of the extensive courses that I attended in my PhD trajectory dealt with qualitative research strategies and how to use ATLAS.ti. As a result, I was theoretically prepared to conduct my fieldwork research. My fieldwork experiences, however, taught me that most of my preparations were useless. My self-imposed procedures of how to conduct the research in the field and analyse the data, combined with ‘western’ ethical rules and regulations, made me feel imprisoned. I realised that these emotions were caused by the dedication to my job, my love for fieldwork, and my endeavours to conduct the research in the right way. I thus decided to make the best out of it, polish those three gems and gave them prominence over my eventual shortcomings with this book as its result.

## 1.1 Context of the Research: Ravana in (Sri) Lanka

I learned about Ravana through the *Ramcharitmanas*, a version of the *Ramayana* that is popular among the Hindustani community in my home country, the Netherlands.<sup>12</sup> The encounter with the famous Hindu epic the *Ramayana* is – I suppose – (still) the way most people learn about Ravana. The *Ramayana* recounts that prince Rama was sent into exile due to a trap set by his jealous stepmother. Together with his wife Sita and his brother Lakshman, Rama leaves the royal palace to spend the period of exile in the forests. There, Rama and his family members have violent encounters with several demons and also run into Shurpanakha (Ravana’s sister), who tries to seduce the brothers. Lakshman spurns and wounds her. Shurpanakha recounts this to her brother Ravana. Ravana, the king of Lanka, wants to take revenge on Rama and Lakshman. To mislead Rama and Lakshman he insists one of his allies to assume the form of a beautiful golden deer. After catching a glimpse of the beautiful deer, Sita summons Rama and Lakshman to go and look for it. Sita, left alone for a while, is then approached by Ravana who appears to her in the guise of a holy man begging for alms. Ravana abducts Sita as revenge for mistreating his sister. Ravana travels with Sita in his aerial chariot to his kingdom Lanka and wants her to become his wife. Rama and Lakshman find out that they had been tricked by Ravana and start their search for the abducted Sita. They get help from the monkey Hanuman and his army. Hanuman is able to cross the strait between India and Lanka and finds Sita there in custody. Hanuman and his monkey army build a bridge between India and Lanka so that Rama and Lakshman are able to cross the strait as well. In Lanka,

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<sup>12</sup> Bakker, F. L. (2003), *Surinaams Hindoeïsme: Een Variant van het Caraïbisch Hindoeïsme* [Surinamese Hinduism: A Variant of Caribbean Hinduism], Kampen: Kok, 30.

several violent encounters between Rama and Ravana take place. Rama is able to defeat Ravana when he receives information from Ravana's brother Vibhishana. The two enemies meet each other at the battlefield where Ravana is killed by Rama in a devastating war. Rama returns with Sita to the royal palace and is crowned king.

This story of Rama's marriage, exile, and battle with Ravana is referred to by scholars as *Ramkatha* (Rama's story).<sup>13</sup> The most authoritative text of the *Ramkatha* in India is the *Ramayana* attributed to the sage Valmiki. It has been composed in Sanskrit and it dates back between 500 BCE and 250 CE.<sup>14</sup> The equivocal nature of parts of Valmiki's *Ramayana* has provided room for adaptations.<sup>15</sup> These become clearly visible in the multiple devotional regional retellings, folk tales, TV-series, and plays based on the *Ramkatha*. For this reason, Paula Richman suggests that the *Ramayana* is a tradition of storytelling rather than a story.<sup>16</sup>

### Box 1.2: Ravana: A Material Perspective

An example of recent academic research on Ravana beyond the narrative/discursive approach, is the article published by Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger 'Standing in Cement: Possibilities created by Ravana on the Chhattisgarhi Plains.' Flueckiger introduces several of what she calls large cement statues of Ravana that can be found at the central plains of the Indian state of Chhattisgarh. The cement images of Ravana are often ritually employed during the festival of *dashara*, a festival celebrated by (North) Indians in which Ravana effigies are burnt to celebrate the triumph of good over evil.<sup>17</sup> On the specific day of *dashara*, Rama allegedly killed Ravana (on this festival, see also Section 4.3.1).<sup>18</sup> Whereas in other regions in India Ravana effigies are ritually burnt, the cement images of Ravana in Chhattisgarh remain throughout the years. Flueckiger mentions that several reasons were given to her to explain the permanence of the statues and prominence given to Ravana: people of the Gond caste consider him for instance a *brahmin* (priest) and their ancestor.<sup>19</sup> This connection of Ravana to the Gond has resulted in some villages to an adaptation of Ravana into the Gond pantheon and ritual propitiation of Ravana in processions. The references to Ravana as a Gond king and ancestor by

<sup>13</sup> Richman, P. (2008), Introduction: Whose Ramayana is it? In P. Richman (Ed.), *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India: An Anthology*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1-36, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Richman, Introduction, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Richman, P. (2008), Preface: Compiling a Ramayana Anthology, in P. Richman (Ed.), *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India: An Anthology*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, xiii-xvi, xiii; Richman, Introduction, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Richman, Introduction, 1, 8.

<sup>17</sup> On *dashara* see: Johnson, W. J. (2010), *Dictionary of Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 'Dasara,' 94.

<sup>18</sup> Shukla, A. (2011), From Evil to Evil: Revisiting Ravana as a Tool for Community Building, in A. Fahraeus & D. Yakali-Çamoglu (Eds.), *Villains and Villainy: Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 175-191, 175-177.

<sup>19</sup> One of the meanings of *brahmin* is 'relating of belonging to the Brāhmins or the sacerdotal class [...].' See: Monier-Williams, M., Leumann, E., & Cappeller, C. (1976), *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 'Brāhmá,' 741.

Gond activists are relatively recent and illustrate the relevance of ethnic identification of Ravana with the Gond.

Flueckiger's article is of relevance to my research because it looks at an alternative Ravana culture from a material perspective, including rituals. The author criticises the narrow focus on narrative and discursive forms of alternative cultures that are often central to academic exercises in the field of the study of the *Ramayana*.<sup>20</sup> As I point out in Section 1.1.2, I also employ other research angles than the narrative and discursive perspectives to investigate the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka.

Although the *Ramkatha* is known in parts of Asia beyond South Asia, such as Central and Southeast Asia,<sup>21</sup> it still remains presented as a Hindu story. According to Frank Reynolds (who worked in the fields of the history of religions and Buddhist studies), this characterization is justifiable because the story is most elaborated upon in Hinduism.<sup>22</sup> It was also pointed out, for instance by Richard Gombrich (Indologist and Sanskrit, Pali, and Buddhist studies scholar) in the 1980s, that the *Ramayana* was quite marginal in Sinhalese culture.<sup>23</sup> Despite the absence of a Sinhala *Ramayana*, Sinhalese Buddhists are historically familiarised with Rama, Sita, and Ravana in some alternative ways. An example of this is the *kohomba kankariya*. The ritual text of the *kohomba kankariya* includes an extensive story on Sita (see Box 1.3). Also, at the time of my research Sinhalese Buddhists frequently mentioned the *Ramayana* and often explained that it was a distorted story when it came to the character portrayals of Rama and Ravana.<sup>24</sup> Given the fact that Ravana is traditionally embedded within a Hindu story, why do Sinhalese Buddhists take an interest in Ravana and how is this *Ramayana* related context dealt with? I aim to answer these questions by exploring (emerging) representations of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in this thesis.

To my knowledge, the recent popularity of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka has not yet been studied in detail, at least not academically. Some explorative research on this topic is conducted within the context of *Ramayana* research. I mention in the following section five articles – as a literature review to my own work – that are pub-

<sup>20</sup> Flueckiger, J. B. (2017), Standing in Cement: Possibilities Created by Ravan on the Chhattisgarhi Plains, *South Asian History and Culture* 8(4), 1-17, 3 DOI: 10.1080/19472498.2017.1371489.

<sup>21</sup> Reynolds, F. R. (1991), *Ramayana, Rama Jataka, and Ramakien: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, in P. Richman (Ed.), *Many Rāmāyānas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 50-66, 51.

Kumaradasa, the author of sixth-century Sanskrit *Janakiharana* (Theft of Sita in Sri Lanka), is a Sri Lankan king according to Sinhalese tradition. See: Hallisay, C. (2003), Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture, in S. I. Pollock (Ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 689-748, 690.

<sup>22</sup> Reynolds, *Ramayana, Rama Jataka, and Ramakien*, 51.

<sup>23</sup> Gombrich, R. (1985), The Vessantara Jāṭaka, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Dasaratha Jāṭaka, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 105(3), 427-437, 436.

<sup>24</sup> At the time of my fieldwork, I noticed some Sinhala versions of the *Ramayana* in bookshops in Colombo. There is probably an increased familiarity of Sinhalese Buddhists with selected parts of the *Ramayana*.

lished in a special section of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* on the literary history of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka.

### Box 1.3: *Kohomba Kankariya*: A Rama-Sita narrative from a Sinhalese Folk Ritual

A Rama-Sita narrative is part of a specific folk ritual in Sri Lanka: the *kohomba yakkama* or *kohomba kankariya*. Susan Reed defines this ritual as an all-night village ceremony performed high in the mountains near Kandy that aims to bring prosperity to the village and protect the harvest.<sup>25</sup> In the 1940s, C.E. Godakumbura translated part of the ritual text of which I summarise some fragments here.

Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu,<sup>26</sup> falls under a curse and he has to spend seven years in the guise of an elephant in the forest. Meanwhile, Ravana kidnaps Sita and takes her to Lanka. After seven years, Rama returns and starts to search for his wife. He encounters Vali in the forests and they form an alliance to get their wives back. After getting back Vali's wife, Vali leaves for Lanka and enters the vicinity of Ravana's palace in search for Sita. Sita comes up with the idea to make fun of Vali by setting his tail on fire. The city is burned down, and Ravana returns Sita to Rama. Back home Uma visits Sita. Uma is curious to know about Ravana, and Sita makes a drawing of Ravana. Sita hides the drawing under her bed. When Rama sits down on the bed, the bed begins to shake by the power of Ravana. Rama discovers her drawing and gets furious at her. He summons his brother to take Sita to the forest and behead her. His brother leaves Sita close to Valmiki's hermitage without beheading her, and the ritual text then continues how Sita spends her days in Valmiki's hermitage.<sup>27</sup>

At the start of the twentieth century, the *kohomba kankariya* (of which the origins are unclear but the earliest literary accounts do not date back further than the fifteenth century)<sup>28</sup> was almost extinct in Sri Lanka. However, Kandyan dance, which is mainly derived from the *kohomba kankariya*, came to be extensively promoted by the state in the 1940s and 1950s, and in the 1980s and 1990s the ritual was mainly performed as cultural heritage event.<sup>29</sup>

I mention the *kohomba kankariya* here since it contains a Sinhalese Rama-Sita story. Also, its re-invention as a cultural heritage event shows an effort to promote Sinhalese Buddhist

<sup>25</sup> Reed, S. A. (2010), *Dance and the Nation: Performance, Ritual, and Politics in Sri Lanka*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 3, 15.

<sup>26</sup> In this text Rama is referred to both as Vishnu and as Rama by Godakumbura. See: Godakumbura, C. E. (1946), The Rāmāyaṇa: A Version of Rāma's Story from Ceylon, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 78(1/2), 14-22, 14-15.

<sup>27</sup> The summary of this story is derived from: Godakumbura, The Rāmāyaṇa: A Version of Rāma's Story from Ceylon, 16. Stories of Sita's banishment on account of her drawing of Ravana can be found not only in Indian folksongs and performances but in the Thai version of the *Ramayana* (the *Ramakien*) as well. See for instance: Reynolds, *Ramayana*, Rama Jataka, and Ramakien, 38; Narayana Rao, V. (1991), *A Ramayana of Their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telugu*, in P. Richman (Ed.), *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 114-137, 126-127. In the Tamil ballad *Kucalavan Katai Kaikeyi*, Sita's stepmother suspects her of infidelity. She asks Sita to draw a painting of Ravana back in Ayodhya. Sita hides the drawing under her bed, but when Rama discovers it and a drop of sweat falls on the drawing, Ravana is resurrected and Rama has to fight him again. See: Dubyanskiy, A. (2020), Specific Features of the Tamil Ballad: *Kucalavan katai* (*The Story of Kusalavan*), in D. Stasik (Ed.), *Oral-Written-Performed: The Rāmāyaṇa Narratives in Indian Literature and Arts*, Heidelberg: CrossAsia-eBooks, 133-138, 134.

<sup>28</sup> Godakumbura, The Rāmāyaṇa: A Version of Rāma's Story from Ceylon, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Reed, *Dance and the Nation*, 10, 11, 24, 174, 180.

rituals. This active contribution of government officials in promoting (allegedly) ancient rituals and a focus on lore in the context of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism, is part of my discussion of the Ravana *yakkama* in Chapter 7.

### 1.1.1 The Special Section on the Literary History of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka as a Point of Reference

In 2019 a section of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* was devoted to the literary history of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka. The five articles included in this section explore '[...] the role of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lankan art, literature, religious ritual and political discourse in shaping Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Shaiva perceptions of the island's distant past.'<sup>30</sup> I discuss the articles from this special section here for two reasons. First, they include references to the post-war popularity of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists, and second, they provide detailed information on how Ravana and the *Ramayana* were considered in Sri Lanka in the past. The first three articles provide a historical backdrop to my research since I myself do not aim to give an extensive historical overview of the development of the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

From the first three articles I mainly emphasise – in addition to the main argument – the processes and remarks that are relevant to my own research. The last two articles explore the present-day interest in Ravana. I mainly discuss how my research relates to – and differs from – these articles. I also refer to these articles in the course of my thesis to discuss the continuation/discontinuation of the interest in Ravana in Sri Lanka in past and present. Also, several articles contain very detailed information that I address throughout this thesis.

#### Explorations in the Transmission of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka (by Justin Henry)

In the first contribution to the special section, Justin Henry argues that there is no indication that 'Lanka' or Lankapura (the city of Lanka on top of the Trikuta mountain) as mentioned in Valmiki's *Ramayana* was intended to correspond with Sri Lanka.<sup>31</sup> The connection of Lanka to Sri Lanka emerged among the South Indian Cholas who invaded Sri Lanka in the early tenth century (see Section 2.2.1). The Sri Lankan Tamils living in the North of Sri Lanka borrowed the identification of Sri Lanka with Lankapura (from the *Ramayana*) from the invading South Indian Cholas.<sup>32</sup> Henry discusses that several prominent people involved in political and military encounters in Sri Lanka were identified with characters from the *Ramayana*. Also, as he mentions, the Sri Lankan Tamils reversed

<sup>30</sup> Henry, J. W., & Padma, S. (2019), Lankapura: The Legacy of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42(4), 726-731, 726. DOI: 10.1080/00856401.2019.1626127

<sup>31</sup> Justin Henry holds a PhD in the History of Religions from the University of Chicago Divinity School and was, at the time of publication, visiting lecturer at Georgia College and State University. Sree Padma holds a PhD in history and archaeology and was, at the time of publication, visiting research associate professor at the University of Chicago.

<sup>32</sup> Henry, J. W. (2019), Explorations in the Transmission of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42(4), 732-746, 733-734. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1631739>

the negative and demonic representation of Ravana of the Cholas.<sup>33</sup> The Sinhalese further started to consider Ravana the king of Sri Lanka. One of Henry's speculative observations is that Ravana, whom Sinhalese Buddhists had portrayed in an *a-dharmic* fashion (as opposed to the Buddhist *dharma*, or teachings),<sup>34</sup> became more positively displayed in later Sinhala poems. As an example, he refers to the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century poem the *Ravana Kathava*. The author of this work explicitly recounted that his inspiration was derived from Tamil teachers.<sup>35</sup> In the poem the virtuous deeds of Ravana are praised.<sup>36</sup> As Henry argues, with reference to the scholar John Holt, the positive portrayal of Ravana probably took place at a time when the Sinhalese tried to subordinate Hindu deities to Buddha. Among these Hindu deities was Vishnu who is, in his incarnation as Rama, the archenemy of Ravana.

Henry attempts in his article to show that Ravana became positively displayed in the Sri Lankan Tamil literature, but provides only – as he mentions – a 'speculative observation' of an increased positive portrayal of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in the eighteenth century.<sup>37</sup> Henry's contribution is of relevance to my own research as it shows that the identification of Lanka (from the *Ramayana*) with Sri Lanka and Ravana as the king of Lanka have been part of (alternative) mythistorical imaginations of the Sinhalese. Also, his examples show the power of the *Ramayana* over time and the employment of certain characters in changing political contexts.

### **Borders Crossed: Vibhishana in the *Ramayana* and Beyond (by Sree Padma)**

In 'Borders Crossed: Vibhishana in the *Ramayana* and Beyond,' Sree Padma provides a detailed description of the Vibhishana cult in Sri Lanka. In the *Ramayana* tradition, Vibhishana is the brother of Ravana who joined Rama and gave away information to him (see Section 1.1). After the war, Rama crowned Vibhishana king of Lanka. Vibhishana became part of the Buddhist pantheon (see Section 2.2.1) and a local Vibhishana cult among Sinhalese Buddhists exists in the Kelaniya area (North of Colombo) up to the present day.<sup>38</sup> According to Padma, the Vibhishana cult is unique to Sri Lanka. She men-

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<sup>33</sup> In several Sri Lankan temple histories Sri Lankan Tamils for instance praised Ravana as a devotee of Shiva. See also: Henry, J. W. (2017), *Distant Shores of Dharma: Historical Imagination in Sri Lanka from the Late Medieval Period* [doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago]. <https://knowledge.uchicago.edu/record/923>

<sup>34</sup> *Adharmaya* translates as unrighteousness, all behaviour contrary to religious and legal institutes. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Adharmaya,' 23; Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'ā-dharma,' 20. Dharma can be translated as righteousness, moral and religious instructions. *Dharma* (Sinhala and Sanskrit) or *dhamma* is used in Sri Lanka to denote the Buddhist teachings. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Dharma,' 268; Davids, T. W. R., & Stede W. (1921-1925), *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, London: Pali Text Society, 'Dhamma,' 376.

<sup>35</sup> Henry, Explorations in the Transmission of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka, 743-745.

<sup>36</sup> Henry, Explorations in the Transmission of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka, 744.

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, the contribution of A. Shukla as mentioned in the previous section.

<sup>38</sup> For a brief explanation on the role of Vibhishana in the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon, see: Holt, J. C. (1991), *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka*, New York/Oxford: Oxford

tions that in the past South Indian invaders in Sri Lanka, who often considered themselves incarnations of Rama, strategically positioned Vibhishana as an example of an 'Indian ruler in Sri Lanka' to legitimise their own political ends.<sup>39</sup> This has contributed to the identification of Vibhishana as a guardian king of the island.<sup>40</sup> In addition to a guardian king, Vibhishana is sometimes portrayed as a *bodhisatta* (Buddha-to-be) in Sri Lanka, and this Buddhicisation is essential for Vibhishana to become part of the island's mythical history.<sup>41</sup> Padma includes in her article some remarks on the recent popularity of Ravana as well by referring to a story told to her by the lay-priest of the Vibhishana shrine at the Buddhist site in Kelaniya. This lay-priest explained that Vibhishana killed Ravana and that they are descendants of the *yakshas* (considered in the process of *Ravani-sation* an alleged ancient indigenous tribe, see on the *yaksha* concept Section 4.2). As Padma comments on the lay-priests explanation: 'This version of the story seems to be gaining currency among some sections in Sri Lanka, reflecting growing nationalist sentiment about indigenous heritage in which Ravana is coming to symbolise that heritage. It is probable that this atmosphere of seeking grandeur, in combination with the agricultural rituals invoking Ravana, led to his veneration in Ramnamure [*sic*] village in Matale district.'<sup>42</sup>

Padma's remark on the collective ritual veneration of Ravana in Ramamure (a village located in Lakegala area, see Section 7.1) is based on a highly biased article. In Chapter 7, I explain that there is no active Ravana cult in Ramamure and that this idea of an ancient tradition most probably is recently put forward by people with an interest in Ravana. Also, Padma contrasts the rise of Ravana as a Sinhalese nationalist rewriting of the island's history to the comfort, wealth, and well-being that Vibhishana provides to his devotees. This contrast, as I argue especially in Chapter 6, is less strong when we look at some of the rituals conducted to Ravana. There are more similarities and 'common motivators' in the processes of indigenisation of the two brothers in Sri Lanka than Padma suggests. Vibhishana has multiple facets that have contributed to the rise and popularity of his cult. In this thesis, I show that several Ravana representations or 'facets' have emerged in the past ten years and that these contribute to his present-day appeal.

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University Press, 131-132. See also Section 2.2.1.

<sup>39</sup> Sree Padma (2019), *Borders Crossed: Vibhishana in the Ramayana and Beyond*, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42(4), 747-767, 750-751. DOI: 10.1080/00856401.2019.1631738

<sup>40</sup> Padma, *Borders Crossed*, 752. Also, the fact that both Ravana and Vibhishana are referred to as *yakshas* in colloquial Sinhala versions of the *Ramayana* instead of *rakshas* (as in Valmiki's *Ramayana*) has contributed to consider Vibhishana as a guardian deity in Sri Lanka because *yakshas* are identified in Buddhist mythology as guardians, and also connected to fertility. Padma, *Borders Crossed*, 753. I discuss the *yaksha* concept in more detail in Section 4.2.

<sup>41</sup> Padma, *Borders Crossed*, 765. Padma mentions that "'Buddhicisation" involves bringing a deity into the Buddhist pantheon of gods, acting according to the Buddha dhamma, and serving the Buddha who occupies the highest position.' Padma, *Borders Crossed*, 752.

<sup>42</sup> Padma, *Borders Crossed*, 764.

### Mapping Lanka's Moral Boundaries: Representations of Socio-Political Difference in the *Ravana Rajavaliya* (by Jonathan Young and Philip Friedrich)

In this third contribution, Jonathan Young and Philip Friedrich provide a close reading of the fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Sinhala *Ravana Rajavaliya*.<sup>43</sup> The *Ravana Rajavaliya* is a so-called *kadaim* or 'boundary book' that presents a geography of Sri Lanka and provides details on the limitations of villages and areas (see on the *Ravana Rajavaliya* also Section 4.1.2).<sup>44</sup> In the article, the authors mainly discuss how the *Ravana Rajavaliya* provides a moral topography. As they mention: '[...] the enchanting of the Lankan landscape provided a recognisable set of discursive devices (the characters, legends and places of the *Ramayana* traditions) upon which any individual who was capable of it could draw as a means of fashioning their own stories and making their own claims.'<sup>45</sup> The *Ravana Rajavaliya* includes a brief 'Ravana narrative,' which Young and Friedrich have translated. In this narrative, Ravana is presented as someone who was very powerful but whose kingdom was destroyed due to his *a-dharmic* behaviour. This story has functioned as a cautionary tale placing certain groups of people in a favourable light and warning against other morally-questionable groups of people who held powers similar to Ravana.<sup>46</sup> As the authors mention, '[t]his particular *kadaim* text, as its primary title suggests, employs a narrative of Ravana, the demonic villain of the *Ramayana*, as part of its overall project to construct and define not merely a simple geography, but also a moral topography which draws explicit connections between various episodes of the *Ramayana* epic and specific geographical locations on the island.'<sup>47</sup>

These authors provide an in-depth reading of a Sinhala text that discusses Ravana. It is of relevance to my thesis to see how Sinhalese in the past have associated Ravana with different (caste) groups and regions, resulting in (disputed) claims and implications. This article – like the first contribution to the special issue – shows the relevance of the *Ramayana* over time and the employment of Ravana and other characters to frame (political) situations. The *Ravana Rajavaliya* has provided, as the authors argue, the landscape with a mythical layer. I also explore in this thesis the relevance of mythistorical projection upon the landscape in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7. The connection of characters and fragments from the *Ramayana* to the landscape discloses the cultural-religious and political relevance of Ravana in the present. In addition to this insight from the article on which my thesis will build, I point out the discontinuity with the representation of Ravana as *a-dharmic* in the *Ravana Rajavaliya* and some present-day representations of Ravana.

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<sup>43</sup> At the time of publication, Jonathan Young was professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at California State University, and Philip Friedrich a PhD candidate at the University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>44</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Kada-ima,' 99.

<sup>45</sup> Young, J., & Friedrich, P. (2019), Mapping Lanka's Moral Boundaries: Representations of Socio-Political Difference in the *Ravana Rajavaliya*. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42(4), 768-780, 771, 772. DOI: 10.1080/00856401.2019.1633114

<sup>46</sup> Young & Friedrich, Mapping Lanka's Moral Boundaries, 772, 773, 779.

<sup>47</sup> Young & Friedrich, Mapping Lanka's Moral Boundaries, 769.



### **Ravana's Sri Lanka: Redefining the Sinhala Nation? (By Dileepa Witharana)**

Before I make some remarks related to the fourth contribution to the special issue, I have to mention here that I myself have published in 2018 – thus one year prior to this special section – an article about one of my case studies (Pannipitiya, see Chapter 6).<sup>48</sup> In that article I argue that post-war Sinhalese Buddhists have distanced Ravana from his Hindu/*Ramayana* context and increasingly refer to Sinhalese (Buddhist) chronicles and texts instead. I also pointed out in that article, that Ravana provides the Sinhalese with a story of indigenous inhabitation and ancestry as Sinhalese Buddhists propagate that Ravana lived prior to the arrival of the Indian prince Vijaya. The narrative of the coming of Vijaya to Lanka told in the *Mahavamsa* – a Sinhalese chronicle that became incredibly popular in twentieth-century Sri Lanka (see Section 2.3.1.1) – became the commonly accepted myth of the Sinhalese origin, starting from this Indian prince. In his article, D. Witharana refers to my article and makes similar remarks.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, I mainly present here those arguments from his article that I am critical of.

Witharana argues that the story of an autochthonous 'Hela Ravana' challenges the Vijaya narrative from the *Mahavamsa*, which has provided the Sinhalese with an allochthonous story of ancestry.<sup>50</sup> On his reading, the Hela Ravana narrative provides an alternative to the Vijaya story as known from the *Mahavamsa*. The centrality of autochthonous ancestry – as provided by the Ravana story – has to be understood as a renewed sense of national pride after the end of the civil war. For the present-day appeal of Ravana, the author mentions that Ravana is distanced from his traditional depiction as presented in the *Ramayana*.<sup>51</sup> For this, Witharana makes reference to the palm leaf manuscript the *Vargapurnikava* and the novel *Ravana Mission*.

Although Witharana refers in his article to other media than texts, he illustrates his argument that the representation of Ravana is distanced from the *Ramayana* by mentioning two texts (the *Vargapurnikava* and *Ravana Mission*). The novel *Ravana Mission*, however, was never mentioned to me in the field, and the selection of this text indicates his main focus on the discursive and narrative dimension of this phenomenon.<sup>52</sup> In this thesis, I look beyond the discursive and narrative dimensions of the interest in Ravana: the present-day appeal of Ravana to Sinhalese Buddhists – including his distancing from the *Ramayana* context – becomes fully disclosed in actions and convictions (some of these convictions which, of course, are selectively appropriated from a multiplicity of media).

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<sup>48</sup> De Koning, The Ritualizing of the Martial and Benevolent Side of Ravana.

<sup>49</sup> Dileepa Witharana was at the time of publication senior lecturer at the Mathematics and Philosophy of Engineering Department at the Open University of Sri Lanka.

<sup>50</sup> Witharana, D. (2019), Ravana's Sri Lanka: Redefining the Sinhala Nation? *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42(4), 781-795,785-789.

<sup>51</sup> Witharana, Ravana's Sri Lanka, 781, 782.

<sup>52</sup> He also refers to the recent emergence of interest in Ravana among Sinhalese as a movement. In my view, the interest in Ravana is too heterogenous, bottom-up, and fragmented to consider it (already) a movement.

### Reclaiming Ravana in Sri Lanka: Ravana's Sinhala Buddhist Apotheosis and Tamil Responses (by Pathmanesan Sanmugeswaran, Krishantha Fedricks, and Justin Henry)

In the final article, 'Reclaiming Ravana in Sri Lanka: Ravana's Sinhala Buddhist Apotheosis and Tamil Responses,' Pathmanesan Sanmugeswaran, Krishantha Fedricks, and Justin Henry present two different data sets.<sup>53</sup>

In the first part of the article the authors present '[...] aspects of the twenty-first-century elevation of Ravana to the status of a Sinhala cultural hero, including two examples in which Ravana has achieved semi-divine status in ritual contexts at Buddhist temples.'<sup>54</sup> The temple sites with Ravana shrines that they mention are the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (which I discuss in detail in Chapter 6)<sup>55</sup> and the Bolthumbe Viharaya (see Section 5.3.1). Their observations are based on single visits on days that the shrines were closed, which makes me wonder what the implied 'ritual context' is.<sup>56</sup> After the description of the two sites, they mention the complexity of Ravana representations: for the deification of Ravana he is presented as a non-human, and the idea of Ravana as ancestor of the Sinhala people requires a human representation (this point is made mainly with reference to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and the Bolthumbe Viharaya adds nothing to their argumentation).<sup>57</sup> As my thesis shows, multiple and contradictory Ravana representations co-exist in post-war Sri Lanka on a grassroots level. Further, I discuss how people relate to Ravana both as deity and king with reference to some general principles from the Buddhist pantheon.

The second part of the article is a very thorough investigation of '[...] recent Tamil responses to the Buddhist appropriation of Ravana as a distant ancestor of the Sinhala people [...]'.<sup>58</sup> The authors mention the interest in Ravana within the Dravidian movement in India as well as a recent example of ethnic identification with Ravana among the Sri Lankan Tamils. As they mention: '[t]he leading voice for the Tamil reclamation of Ravana is Trincomalee native N. K. S. Thiruchelvam, an amateur historian and president of the Sri Lankan chapter of the Vishva Hindu Parishad.'<sup>59</sup> The authors then mainly present

<sup>53</sup> Pathmanesan Sanmugeswaran was, at the time of publication, a PhD candidate in cultural anthropology and lecturer in the Department of Social Studies at the Open University of Sri Lanka. Krishantha Fedricks was, at the time of publication, a PhD candidate at the University of Texas in Austin.

<sup>54</sup> Sanmugeswaran, P., Fedricks, K., & Henry, J. (2019), Reclaiming Ravana in Sri Lanka: Ravana's Sinhala Buddhist Apotheosis and Tamil Responses, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42(4), 796-812, 797. DOI: 10.1080/00856401.2019.1631900

<sup>55</sup> In Chapter 6, I rectify some of the mistakes mentioned in this article about the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Pannipitiya.

<sup>56</sup> This especially holds for the Ravana shrine at the Bolthumbe Viharaya (see Chapter 5) where no visitors were around at the time that Fedricks and I visited (May 6, 2016). The authors are more open about the limitations of their single visit to the Ravana shrine in Pannipitiya (see for this temple site Chapter 6).

<sup>57</sup> For the 'human representation' of Ravana the authors refer to the statue of Ravana that is taken around in the annual procession (of which a picture is included in the article). I have never seen this statue in his shrine – when I was there conducting research, it was in a museum.

<sup>58</sup> Sanmugeswaran, Fedricks, & Henry, Reclaiming Ravana in Sri Lanka, 797.

<sup>59</sup> Sanmugeswaran, Fedricks, & Henry, Reclaiming Ravana in Sri Lanka, 806.

how Thiruchelvam has claimed Ravana as Tamil ancestor against Mirando Obeyesekere – a famous Sinhalese Buddhist author who has published articles in Sinhala newspapers in which he claims Ravana to be the ancestor of the Sinhalese (see Box 4.1). In addition to this debate, the authors provide some examples of religious art among Tamils that show their interest in Ravana. This second section provides us with the insight that despite '[...] simultaneous claims to Ravana ancestry on the part of the Sinhalese and Tamils converge towards impressions of a shared heritage, [...]' this has not been the outcome.<sup>60</sup>

I have paid extensive attention to the special section on the literary history of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka as my research relates to the articles in multiple ways. The articles contain valuable and in-depth contributions to the relevance of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka, including the employment of some of its characters in diverse and changing (political) contexts. The identification of Sri Lanka with Ravana's Lanka is a starting point to understand how specific fragments from the *Ramayana* became elaborated upon by both Tamils and Sinhalese and how certain characters were related to several sites, areas, and communities in the country. These insights serve as a historical backdrop to my own research: an interest in Ravana has been present in Sri Lanka among Tamils and Sinhalese. The ethnic identification of Sinhalese with Ravana in the past was often limited as he was still typically presented as a cruel king and as opposed to Buddhism. My thesis illustrates how this has changed in the post-war period. Some of the contributors to this special section mention that their studies of the recent appropriation of Ravana need more in-depth research, and with my thesis I hope to contribute to that. In the final two articles, in which the authors explore the present-day interest in Ravana, the main focus was on the narrative and discursive sides of this phenomenon whereas I investigate manifestations of this phenomenon among people at a local (community) level, not limited to the narrative and discursive dimensions. The ritual, spatial, and material manifestations of the interest in Ravana should be valued on its own (and not just as means to tell a narrative).

Also, as one of the authors – and I myself in 2018 – argued: Sinhalese Buddhists have increasingly distanced Ravana from the Hindu/*Ramayana* context. Accordingly, I focus less on the Hindu/*Ramayana* context because a constant evaluating of recent Sinhalese Buddhist representations of Ravana against a Hindu background exalts certain Hindu representations of Ravana as normative. I am of the opinion that we should focus not only on how contemporary representations of Ravana in Sri Lanka differ from the Hindu/*Ramayana* context but also on how these representations and ideas are embedded within the mythistorical imagination, culture, and traditions of Sinhalese Buddhists past and present. Before discussing my research question in more detail and outlining the structure of the book, I should note here that there is one master's thesis that includes some remarks about the interest in Ravana from a Sinhalese Buddhist perspective not framed in a *Ramayana* context. Myra Sivaloganathan explores in her thesis the discourses of victimhood, victory, and xenophobia in Sri Lanka in order to examine the rationale

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<sup>60</sup> Sanmugeswaran, Fedricks, & Henry, *Reclaiming Ravana in Sri Lanka*, 811.

and underpinnings of nationalist and religious fundamentalist movements.<sup>61</sup> In the second chapter of her thesis she mentions what she calls ‘the politicization of the Ravana Epic.’ She explains that while an ethnic identification with Ravana was present among Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka in the past, Ravana has been increasingly appropriated in the political discourse in post-war Sri Lanka. As example of the latter, she mentions the *Ravana Balaya*, a Buddhist nationalist movement established in 2012 (see Box 2.5): ‘[t]he appropriation of the figure of Rāvaṇa serves to legitimate Rāvaṇa Balaya’s claims to unique ethnic privileges and entitlements, due to notions of an ancient Sinhalese heritage and persistent legacy.’<sup>62</sup> Sivaloganathan does not explain how Sinhalese Buddhist claims of ethnic superiority are related to Ravana. While I do not focus on the appropriation of Ravana in the political sphere, I address this question in my thesis.

### 1.1.2 Research Question and Structure of the Book

This thesis investigates how Ravana is framed in post-war (after 2009) Sri Lanka and what the multiple representations of Ravana indicate about the increased interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka’s post-war period. The central question of my research is:

*What kinds of representations of Ravana have emerged among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka (2009 onwards), how do they take shape on local levels, and how does the interest in Ravana – including these Ravana representations – relate to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country?*

Since, to my knowledge, no extensive research on the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists has been published, I also present some general insight into this phenomenon based on existing literature and popular Ravana publications. My research, however, concentrates on developments and manifestations of the increased interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists at two specific locations in the country. I refer to these two locations in my research question as ‘local levels’ to point out that I focus on specific sites as places where an intensification of this recent phenomenon has taken place.

My investigation of the post-war interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists includes a focus on:

- The spatial dimensions
- The material and ritual dimensions
- The preoccupation with (ancient) records and traditions

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<sup>61</sup> Sivaloganathan, M. (2017), *Sri Lankan Discourses of Ethno-Nationalism and Religious Fundamentalism* [Master’s thesis, McMaster University, Hamilton], 2. [https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/22270/2/Sivaloganathan\\_Myra\\_S\\_FinalSubmission2017June\\_MasterOfArts.pdf](https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/22270/2/Sivaloganathan_Myra_S_FinalSubmission2017June_MasterOfArts.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Sivaloganathan, *Sri Lankan Discourses of Ethno-Nationalism and Religious Fundamentalism*, 42.

- The representation of the past
- The dynamics with and within lore

That I do not include, for instance, pseudo-archaeology, politics, and news media in the above list does not mean that these are not important. However, a detailed discussion of, for example, the interest in Ravana in the political sphere asks for a different (discursive) approach. My specific research foci continue to build on my expertise as a religious studies scholar.

This thesis consists of three parts. Part I (Introduction; contains Chapters 1, 2, and 3) includes in addition to this chapter (Chapter 1), a general chapter on Sri Lanka (Chapter 2), and a chapter on theories and concepts (Chapter 3). As previously mentioned, I include my section on methodology in this introduction chapter (Section 1.2). In Chapter 2, I introduce Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious diversity. I primarily focus on multiple patterns of interaction between Buddhists and Hindus, and the appropriation of mythologies in Sri Lanka to frame the past and the present, including ethnic conflicts. This chapter provides, especially for western academics with no particular expertise on Sri Lanka, a broader framework of why there happens to be a fertile breeding ground for an interest in Ravana in the present. Chapter 3 introduces some of the theories and concepts that are central to my investigation of the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. In addition to several general concepts that I use, I mainly present concepts that are introduced by scholars to describe phenomena in a Sri Lankan or broader South Asian context to stay close to the specific cultural-religious and political context of my research. In the final section of Chapter 3, I provide an overview of concepts that fit some of my specific research foci.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 together constitute the second part of this thesis (Introduction to *Ravanisation*; see on *Ravanisation* Section 1.1.3). This part provides a general introduction to the key themes of the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists as based on my fieldwork. I consider it necessary to include these chapters since, to my knowledge, no extensive work has been published in academia on the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. Chapter 4 introduces some concepts that are central to the recent interest in Ravana, mainly related to the narrative and discursive dimension of this phenomenon. In Chapter 5, I introduce the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation*. Both chapters introduce ideas that are central to the recent interest in Ravana and how existing concepts, ideas, chronicles, representations, and territory are dealt with. These chapters provide a broader context to the case studies that I discuss in detail in the final part of this thesis.

The third part of this thesis consists of the Chapters 6, 7, and 8. This part includes a detailed discussion of how the recent interest in Ravana takes shape at two localities in the country. In Chapter 6, I concentrate on the ritualising and materialising of multiple (emerging) representations of Ravana at a Buddhist site in Pannipitiya, a suburb of Colombo. Chapter 7 discusses (emerging) representations pertaining to Ravana related to Lakegala, a triangle-shaped mountain. And in the concluding chapter (Chapter 8), I summarise the relevance of the materialising, ritualising, and spatialising of multiple Ravana

representations for the post-war interest in Ravana. I subsequently evaluate how the Hela-Ravana representation of the past relates to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country. In addition, I reflect on the limitations of certain concepts that I have employed, and my research in general, and provide some suggestions for further research.

A common thread running through the chapters in the second and third part of my thesis are the representations of Ravana that have emerged in post-war Sri Lanka. That I use 'emerging' does not mean that these representations are all recent inventions. Some, or even most of them, were present prior to 2009, but several of them have different functions in the post-war period, and some previously insignificant representations have now risen into prominence and gained a broader interest. In the following section, I set out some of the delimitations of my research.

### 1.1.3 *Ravanisation*

At the initial stage of my research, I decided to coin a term to denote the recent interest in Ravana that I encountered in Sri Lanka, *Ravanisation*. By *Ravanisation* I mean the revitalisation of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war (after 2009) Sri Lanka. I mention here only some of the delimitations of my research with regard to this specific definition. Section 3.1.1 further discusses what I mean by revitalisation, and in my concluding chapter I critically reflect on the choice of this concept and consider in retrospect whether revitalisation is a useful concept to describe this phenomenon.

- *Post-war Sri Lanka* (after 2009): this thesis proposes that the recent interest in Ravana on the part of Sinhalese Buddhists emerged after roughly the end of the civil war (2009). In my view, as well as that of several other scholars, the end of the civil war was a watershed for the ethnic self-awareness of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority. I see a connection between post-war triumphalism among Sinhalese Buddhists, and ideas of ethnic superiority that have taken shape in the post-war interest in Ravana. My research, therefore, focusses primarily on the post-war period.

- *Revitalisation*: this thesis addresses two levels of revitalisation that are related to the post-war interest in Ravana among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority. The first is the resurgence or revitalisation of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism in the post-war period and how the representation of the past that is central to *Ravanisation* relates to this. I discuss this level of ethno-nationalist revitalisation in detail in Chapter 3. The second level of revitalisation relates to the fact that *Ravanisation* continues to build on certain ideas that can be traced back to earlier movements, texts, and people. Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana devote considerable time and effort to show with reference to allegedly ancient sources, earlier movements, and people, that their interest in Ravana is a continuum. I also look into more detail into this dynamic of *Ravanisation*.

- *Sinhalese Buddhists*: I limit myself to the majority population of Sri Lanka in my investigation of the recent interest in Ravana. Sinhalese Buddhists constitute between 70

and 75 percent of the population in Sri Lanka.<sup>63</sup> As I would like to stress here, only a small number of Sinhalese Buddhists shows a passionate interest in Ravana. However, I frequently encountered the basic idea of Ravana as the ancient king of Sri Lanka indicating that Ravana has attained status in the popular mythistorical imagination of Sinhalese Buddhists.

Among the largest minority in Sri Lanka (the Tamils, see Section 2.2.1), there is a longstanding tradition of positive portrayals and identification with Ravana. The recent interest in Ravana among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority, as the authors of the fifth article of the *Ramayana* section have shown, is looked upon with suspicion by some of the Sri Lankan Tamils living in the North. In my research, Sinhalese Buddhists referred to the *Ramayana* and to India, but they only mentioned a few times that Tamils in the North identify themselves with Ravana as well. They do not seem very interested in how the Sri Lankan Tamils frame Ravana. For this reason, I do not consider Sri Lankan Tamil interest in Ravana in this thesis.

## 1.2 Methodology

In this section, I introduce the steps that I have undertaken to design and conduct my research and analyse the data. I start with the nature of my research and initial outline of the research. This is followed by a section on my research approach and a brief reflection on my ontological and epistemological position and position as a researcher in the field. I then introduce the methodological toolkit that I used and explain why I selected some methods in certain contexts and at certain stages of my research and others not. In the penultimate section, I focus on the data-analyses although I point out that the whole research process was a dialectical process between data selection and analysis. I conclude with a brief reflection on several of the problems that I faced in the process of data collection and analysis – based on cultural diversity – with regard to some ethical issues.

### 1.2.1 Nature and (Initial) Outline of the Research

As I explained in Section 1.1, my research interest in Sri Lanka emerged from my interest in Hinduism and its manifestations outside India. Approximately one and a half years before I officially started my PhD trajectory in October 2015, I searched on the internet to see to what extent the *Ramayana* – the Hindu epic that I was very familiar with – was relevant in Sri Lanka, and I immediately encountered *Ramayana* tourism. This type of special interest tourism aims to attract Hindus from India to visit several sites in Sri Lanka where events of the *Ramayana* allegedly took place.<sup>64</sup> I was interested in how and

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<sup>63</sup> A small percentage of the Sinhalese are Christians. I have never investigated whether and to what extent Ravana appeals to them.

<sup>64</sup> De Koning, D. D. C., & Henry J. W. (under publication), Ravana and Rama in Sri Lanka: Ramayana Tourism, Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism, and Competing Historical Imaginaries in Post-War Sri Lanka.

why this type of special interest tourism developed in Sri Lanka's post-war period, and if its development affected Hindu-Buddhist relations. Webpages of tour operators showed me dozens of locations in Sri Lanka allegedly related to the *Ramayana*. Some of these were Buddhist sites. In 2015, my husband and I went on a holiday to Sri Lanka, and part of our holiday was a private *Ramayana* tour.<sup>65</sup> This tour further engendered my enthusiasm, and with these explorative data I finalised my research proposal. Soon after, I received a NWO grant for the research proposal 'The Invention of a Shared Past? Hindu-Buddhist Encounters within the Formation and Use of *Ramayana*-sites in post-war Sri Lanka.' In this research proposal, I proposed to visit Sri Lanka three times to conduct research: the first time to explore the topic further by traveling around and visiting the between 50 and 60 *Ramayana* sites in Sri Lanka, and the second and third time to conduct in-depth research on the dynamics between Hindus and Buddhists at selected *Ramayana* sites and the development of *Ramayana* tourism on a macro level. Prior to the first fieldwork period, I prepared multiple documents in preparation for the course Selected Qualitative Methods and thought about sensitising concepts (concepts that function as interpretive devices and as starting points for qualitative studies, or lay the foundation for the analysis of research data).<sup>66</sup> What remained after the first official explorative research period (from February 2016 until May 2016) was the qualitative nature of my research and a focus on the contemporary use of characters from the *Ramayana*. Besides that, most of my initial ideas turned out to be irrelevant or unfeasible. I noticed that the impact of *Ramayana* tourism on encounters between Hindus and Buddhists at actual sites was limited. Also, it was too expensive and time-consuming for me to catch up with Hindus during their holidays or pilgrimages in Sri Lanka. My mainly deductive approach of how certain theories of shared religious sites would provide insight into some of the processes of interaction between Hindus and Buddhists related to the development of *Ramayana* tourism in Sri Lanka, was turned upside down. But I learned that some Sinhalese Buddhists were eager to talk about Ravana, how important and famous he was for Sri Lankan history, why this legitimised their involvement in *Ramayana* tourism, and so on. My new research topic – the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists – was inductively selected out of the data that I gathered in the explorative phase of my PhD research on *Ramayana* tourism.

In addition to an inductive and deductive research approach, there is what Jennifer Mason introduces as a third option whereby data analysis and data generation are dialectically produced.<sup>67</sup> My back-and-forth fieldwork methodology – '[...] whereby researchers make repeated short visits to a field site for a month or so at a time, often over many years [...]'<sup>68</sup> fits this position. This type of ethnography was originally embedded

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<sup>65</sup> My first stay in Sri Lanka was from January 23, 2015, until February 16, 2015, during which I visited several Hindu and Buddhist sites. Part of this holiday was a tailor-made *Ramayana* tour with a guide.

<sup>66</sup> Bowen, G. (2006), Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), 12-23, 13-14.

<sup>67</sup> Mason, J. (2002), *Qualitative Researching*, London: Sage Publications, 180.

<sup>68</sup> Brković, C., & Hodges, A. (2015), Rethinking World Anthropologies Through Fieldwork: Perspectives on "Extended Stay" and "Back-and-Forth" Methodologies, *Anthropological Notebooks*, 21(1), 107-12, 106.



in studies of nationalism, the industrialisation of ‘peasant societies,’ and groups of people who were perceived as ‘the embodiment of the nation,’ but nowadays it is often used as a method of critical reflection of nationalist and ethnocentric ideas about the country one studies.<sup>69</sup> After my explorative fieldwork period in 2016, on the basis of which I selected my research topic in an inductive way, I continued to (re)design and conduct my research in a dialectical way: I started from what I encountered in the field, reflected on my data, and developed out of my data several topics (topic lists) and foci that I then returned to in subsequent fieldwork. To prepare for fieldwork, I wrote a research design and introduced some sensitising concepts and methods. Among the sensitising concepts that I introduced at this early stage were revitalising, ritualising, and (re)storying. I still employ some of these concepts here and remain faithful to my case study approach, but my initial ideas on ‘lived religion’ and ‘vernacular religion’ have since faded into the background. I mention here some of the initial ideas from this research design that stood the test of time, combined with the insights I gained while I conducted research in Sri Lanka from March 2017 until June 2017 and February 2018 until May 2018.<sup>70</sup>

Although some Sinhalese Buddhists were eager to talk about Ravana, this research topic was at the time of my fieldwork – and up till now – not extensively studied within academia. My research turned out to be exploratory in nature: I had to explore and describe how this interest in Ravana emerged but also interrogate why Ravana has become so popular among Sinhalese Buddhists in the last decade (explanatory). People often asked me how many Sinhalese Buddhists actually have an interest in Ravana, and it is still impossible to answer this question since my research is qualitative in nature. Despite this, I make several remarks here that would address some of the methodological issues related to this question.

First, I would like to stress that I was not intentionally looking for what became my research topic: the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. At the initial phase of my research, I actually found it sometimes distracting that people were talking about Ravana whereas I was interested in *Ramayana* tourism (although there is, of course, some overlap). What became evident to me over the years is that there was a group of Sinhalese Buddhists actively involved in promoting Ravana, a group of Sinhalese Buddhists who were clearly opposed to this, and a large group of Sinhalese Buddhists who have taken notice of the Ravana interest via multiple media. In 2017 and 2018, I reached out to those people who were actively involved in promoting Ravana. What I present in this thesis thus does not represent the entire Sinhalese Buddhist population in Sri Lanka. My findings are, however, not limited to my case studies: my case studies are placed in a larger context and reveal processes and ideas that are presently going on in the Sri Lankan society.<sup>71</sup> During my periods of fieldwork, I continued to investigate this larger context: I initiated several interviews at different places in Sri Lanka with people that I selected

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<sup>69</sup> Brković & Hodges, *Rethinking World Anthropologies Through Fieldwork*, 111-112.

<sup>70</sup> In 2017, I was in Sri Lanka from March 9 until June 13, and in 2018 from February 24 until May 16.

<sup>71</sup> Blommaert, J., & Jie, D. (2010), *Ethnographic Fieldwork: A Beginner's Guide*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 3.

‘[...] on the basis of their relevance to [my initial] research questions [...]’<sup>72</sup> The strategy of visiting other places in the country and conducting interviews with diverse people who expressed an interest in Ravana helped me to avoid a narrow focus on my case studies. Moreover, I often detached myself from the Ravana-bubble by traveling around alone, having random chats with people I met on the streets and in shops, and by visiting other Buddhist sites in the country. I did my best to ‘check’ in a natural way if and which Ravana ideas were taken over and which media were important for that. It turned out that a large group of Sinhalese Buddhists (including monks) seemed to increasingly accept the idea that Ravana was the ancient king of Lanka. In addition to a continuous back-and-forth between my case studies and the broader context of my research, I also spent considerable time discussing my ideas with people who were at the localities where I conducted in-depth research but who were not themselves involved in promoting Ravana. I deliberately integrate their ideas into the chapters that deal with my case studies: Chapter 6 provides an extensive overview of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and this description includes the other activities organised at this site that are not related to Ravana. In Chapter 7, I integrate the local critique on and the limitations of the promoting of Ravana that took place in Lakegala area. I hope the reader will keep in mind that I include these sections to provide a more balanced overview of the multiple dynamics and different interests at and around these places. I now further explain how and why I have selected the case study approach.

## 1.2.2 The Case Study Approach and Selection of Case Studies

To gain a detailed insight into why the interest in Ravana among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority increased in recent times, I felt that I had to do more than just randomly talk with people. In my initial research plan on *Ramayana* tourism, I proposed to conduct in-depth research at selected *Ramayana* sites. I remained loyal to my site-based approach as I learned that this was also a fruitful approach for my ‘new’ research. I thus selected two sites to investigate *Ravanisation* in detail. Throughout my thesis, these sites are called case studies. I briefly introduce here why and how I selected these case studies.

The two case studies that I have selected are Lakegala – a mountain located in the central highlands of Sri Lanka – and the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya – a Buddhist site located in a suburb (Pannipitiya) of the capital city of Sri Lanka. I selected both sites in an inductive way. I learned about the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya from Achinthya Bandara, a lecturer at the Sinhala department of Colombo University, who taught me Sinhala in 2016 and also graciously discussed my initial research ideas. He happened to live close to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Pannipitiya, and he explained me that some Ravana rituals took place at this Buddhist site. When I found out about the weekly

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<sup>72</sup> Mason mentions that many qualitative researchers employ a version of theoretical or purposive sampling: ‘[i]n its more general form, theoretical sampling means selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position and analytical framework, your analytical practice, and most importantly the argument or explanation that you are developing.’ See: Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 124.

Ravana *puja* and the annual Ravana *perahera* (procession) organised at this Buddhist site, I started to visit the site on a regular basis. I noticed that the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya attracted people with an interest in Ravana from all over the country. Also, it was a safe research environment, relatively easy to reach, and I could conduct most of my research there without research assistants. The secretary of the chief incumbent – who functioned for me as a gate-keeper – previously lived abroad and was fluent in English. Though he was not very interested in Ravana, we became friends, and in 2017 and 2018 I volunteered at the site. I joined in the preparatory meetings for the annual festival week in which the chief incumbent of the temple and several dozens of volunteers participated. In 2018, I spent almost one month repairing the Ravana *ratha* (chariot) used in the annual procession (the picture on the cover of this thesis shows the result of my hard work).<sup>73</sup> The chariot was parked next to the entrance (see Figure 6.7), and I patched broken parts of the chariot and painted it. I always kept my recorder and notebook with me, of course, and as a research strategy I made print outs of some of the pictures I used for photo elicitation (see Section 1.2.4.4). People stopped by to see what I was doing. I sometimes simply pointed to the multiple headed Ravana, whose broken fingers I was fixing, and asked in a casual way who he was. By doing this, I found out if they had a particular interest in Ravana.

With the largest newly constructed Ravana temple and extensive Ravana rituals, the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya stood out as an obvious case study. This site drew my attention to something about Ravana in Sri Lanka that I considered worth investigating: the materialising and ritualising of Ravana in a Buddhist context. I felt the need to add another site to counterbalance the recent character of the activities organised at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. As mentioned earlier, I was traveling around during my explorative research period in 2016 to visit sites that were promoted by *Ramayana* tour operators. Some of the sites were difficult to reach, so I occasionally got support from the tourism board. Together with a tour guide, Mr. Seelan, I visited several of the difficult to access *Ramayana* sites. This tour guide happened to be from Mathale, a district where several important sites are located (see Section 5.2) according to people with an interest in Ravana. Mr. Seelan recalled that he once read an article about Ravana written by someone from Lakegala area. Mr. Seelan kept asking around for this person. And when we arrived in Ranamure, a village located on Lakegala mountain, we found the person who wrote the article (or was interviewed for the article; see also Section 7.1.3). He was actively involved in promoting the alleged connection of Ravana to his area.<sup>74</sup> Although Laggala (the area in which Lakegala mountain is located) was pointed out as an important area for *Ramayana* events in the context of *Ramayana* tourism, this particular village was incidentally introduced to me by this tour guide.

Lakegala (or the villages located in its surroundings) was initially one of the multiple sites related to Ravana that I have visited. After my explorative research period in 2016,

<sup>73</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Ratha,' 526.

<sup>74</sup> I was taken to Ranamure on April 27, 2016, by Mr. Seelan, a tour guide recommended to me by the director of the Sri Lankan Tourism board.

I had a wide spectrum of sites to select a case study from. My selection criteria were that my second case study should be a site comparable in nature with the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in the sense that some Ravana materialising and/or ritual events happened there. This was also to make sure that I could interview people who were involved in either the organising of or participating in certain Ravana events. Archaeological sites and nature sites thus dropped out, and sites with Ravana shrines and statues remained. Two other sites where some Ravana rituals were regularly conducted were Bolthumbe (see Section 1.1.1 and Section 5.3.1) and Katuwana (Section 5.3.1). The former, like Lakegala, also has a connection to local narratives of the past, but I had visited this site with another researcher and this shared interest would likely have resulted in an academic conflict of interest. I learned about Katuwana only at the end of my third fieldwork period. I thus selected Lakegala since it was both comparable – there is an alleged Ravana shrine, an annual ritual, and people involved in organising this – and complementary to Pannipitiya. My initial reason to select Lakegala area was that it counterbalanced the recent interest in Ravana in an urban setting.<sup>75</sup> As a rural and isolated area with alleged Ravana lore, including poetry, rituals, and a small village shrine, Lakegala area seemed an excellent choice. The idea of something ‘ancient’ or ‘authentic’ appealed to me. Also, this site was difficult to reach and far too expensive to stay for a long period, thus an excellent choice to avoid other researchers. In addition, I noticed that the mountain was referred to by authors and people with an interest in Ravana as part of the alleged ancient kingdom of Ravana (which was not the case with Pannipitiya). In retrospect, Lakegala did not provide exactly what I was looking for. However, this case study provided me with deeper insights in the relevance of sites and lore for the present-day interest in Ravana. In this way, the selection of a second case study served its purpose: it provided me with additional insights into several of the dynamics at work in the process of *Ravani-sation*, insights I would not have had were I to have focused only on the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya.<sup>76</sup>

In an extensive book on case study research, Robert. K. Yin mentions that case studies are often employed by researchers to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within real-life contexts.<sup>77</sup> The case study approach is frequently used to answer *how* and *why* questions about that phenomenon – thus serving an explanatory purpose – and to provide researchers with the opportunity to focus on the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the phenomenon.<sup>78</sup> I employ the case study approach to describe how the recent interest in Ravana takes shape at and around two specific sites and to explain which elements of the recent interest in Ravana relate to post-war Sinhalese Buddhist self-awareness.

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<sup>75</sup> For my definition of Lakegala area, see Section 7.1.

<sup>76</sup> De Vaus, D. A. (2001), *Research Design in Social Research*, London: Sage Publications, 227.

<sup>77</sup> Yin, R. K. (2003), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Yin, *Case Study Research*, 2, 9.

My research was designed as an embedded, multiple case design.<sup>79</sup> I did not aim to study the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya or Lakegala area in detail, but rather to focus on those processes that were related to Ravana. I developed so called ‘units of analysis.’ I focused, for instance, on ‘annual Ravana rituals’ and ‘Ravana shrines.’ These were shared units of analyses between the two case studies, whereas ‘lore’ or ‘*angampora*’ were units of analysis relevant to only one of the case studies. In addition to these units of analysis, I developed what John Gerring defines as ‘informal units’ – all other units that are brought into the analysis in a peripheral way.<sup>80</sup> I do not intensively analyse, for example, the representation of Ravana as belonging to the sun dynasty – an idea sometimes referred to at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya – but merely mention it as one of the multiple representations that I have encountered.

The boundaries between my case studies and their broader context were not always clear-cut – especially at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. Some people were volunteers, but others were frequent visitors – or just happened to visit the site merely once. Since the phenomenon of *Ravanisation* is not limited to my two case studies, I often transgressed the boundaries between the case studies and the broader context to keep my general knowledge on *Ravanisation* updated and to discuss my findings with other people who helped me to look at it from different perspectives.

One of the distinguishing features of the case study approach is that multiple methods of data selection are employed. At my two main sites, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for which I used multiple methods to describe and explain the complexity of *Ravanisation* at those particular sites. Central to ethnographic fieldwork is also the immersion of the researcher into a particular setting (and a reflection on that position).<sup>81</sup> I reflect here on my own position before I introduce the multiple methods of data collection and analyses that I employed.

### 1.2.3 Ontological and Epistemological Position and Reflexivity of the Researcher

To define my research topic, I coined the concept *Ravanisation*: the revitalisation of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka. The revitalisation part of this definition – as I further discuss in Section 3.1.1 – implies that people as social actors are central to this. My fieldwork approach is based on an interpretivist research position that focusses on ‘[...] meanings, symbols, beliefs, ideas, and feelings given or attached to objects, events, activities, and others by participants in the setting.’<sup>82</sup> I could not just study ‘Ravana in Sri Lanka’ but focused on ‘[...] people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data sources.’<sup>83</sup> I learned that I often even

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<sup>79</sup> For more on the different types of case study research designs, see: Yin, *Case Study Research*, 39-53.

<sup>80</sup> Gerring, J. (2004), What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for? *American Political Science Review*, 98(2), 341-354, 346.

<sup>81</sup> Blommaert & Jie, *Ethnographic Fieldwork*, 10-12.

<sup>82</sup> Bailey, C. A. (2007), *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research*, London: Pine Forge, 53.

<sup>83</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 56.

needed to be with people and look at things from their perspectives – as, for instance, mentioned in Box 1.1 on the connection between the archaeological building and Ravana – to understand what was at stake. I visited several places with people interested in Ravana, and I would not have noticed any of the relevance of these sites for *Ravanisation* without their stories, experiences, and interpretations.

Since I had almost no social network when I arrived in Sri Lanka in 2016, I often went out with the intention to meet people. I took walks in busy shopping centres, parks, museums, bookshops, and multiple Buddhist sites to deepen my general understanding of day-to-day life in Sri Lanka and Buddhism in general. As a white female in my late-twenties, I was constantly questioned by men, not about my research, of course, at least not initially. I made use of the interest they took in me. They offered me rides in areas where there was no public transport and helped me find certain places and people. In the explorative phase of my research, I had to trust them because I had no network, contacts, and means to travel independently. Some of these young men were very helpful, others happily misused my naivety and eagerness to find certain details for my project, and I could have written a separate book about sexual harassment. I was most often in the company of men: men were simply more around in the public places, travelled by bus, and were my taxi-drivers. Most of my informants are thus men between 25 and 60 years old. This male dominance was also caused by my own gender: men openly expressed their interest in me, much more than women. In several of the rare conversations that I had with women of my age, they explained that they were not allowed to travel independently or casually hang around with men, and I felt that I embodied the freedom that some of them were longing for.

I mention some of the problems that I faced as a white female researcher in the following sections as integral part of the multiple methods that I used. Also, I point out how I addressed them. For some situations I thought of solutions to these problems, others not. I should mention here also the language barrier. As I mentioned previously, I had a Sinhala language teacher in Sri Lanka at the time I conducted fieldwork research in Sri Lanka in 2016. While I was getting myself used to a different culture, setting up my research, traveling around, and establishing contacts, I found it too time-consuming (and expensive) to learn Sinhala as well. When I was in my apartment or in my hotel room, I was busy with writing down my experiences in my digital logbook and thinking about the next steps that I had to take in order to conduct my research. Also, back home in the Netherlands there was no one to practice my Sinhala with and no classes or teachers around. For translation and safety reasons, I thus worked with several research assistants in my second and third periods of fieldwork research. I received additional funding for research assistants from the J. Gonda Fund Foundation (KNAW).<sup>84</sup> These research assistants not only helped me with translations, but also provided me insight in their lives as young females who studied at or graduated from university. Part of my data is thus data translated *ad hoc* in the field (interviews and conversations). These translations were sometimes condensed as many of my respondents could not stop talking – and it was

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<sup>84</sup> I am very grateful for this additional funding of 4,000 euro.

often inappropriate to interrupt them. Sections quoted from these *ad hoc* translations have been double checked by another research assistant, whom I have also asked to include some key-concepts in Sinhala as I noticed that several concepts could be translated in a variety of ways. As I read through several Sinhala books about Ravana back in the Netherlands, I asked my research assistants to translate specific sections from them. Sections from Sinhala books and documents that I refer to in this thesis were translated on my request at later stages of my research. Other data that I present in this thesis are English spoken conversations and interviews that I conducted myself and documents written in English. I indicate throughout this thesis if the quotes from books or conversations are translated or not.

### 1.2.4 Diverse Data and Multiple Methods

Since I had almost no experience in conducting fieldwork prior to my PhD trajectory, let alone in Asia, I learned almost everything by a process of trial-and-error. In retrospect, I definitely should have done things differently, especially in the initial phase of my research. During the process of data analysis, the unstructured way of conducting research at the initial phase of my research, even made me sometimes skip certain interviews and conversations that were conducted in 2016 (and some in 2017), since they were either highly biased or the translation was provided by someone who was not qualified (and my own knowledge of Sinhala was not sufficient to conduct the interviews myself).

In the explorative phase of my research, I often let people talk without much interruption. At a later stage, when I was looking for more detailed and in-depth insights, I became less interested in general stories at the sites. There, my research sometimes became what Holstein and Gubrium refer to as a collaborative construction<sup>85</sup> between researcher and informant: I asked the informant about specific details, sometimes I explained to them the context of the picture that I showed them (as part of the method of photo-elicitation; see Section 1.2.4.4), we looked together at pictures, and we mutually informed each other. I probed and prodded to find out details and started to use additional research methods.

Based on the data that I collected, I constantly redefined what I was looking for and no formal standardisation took place. Sometimes I learned about something in the morning and tried to verify what I just learned already in the afternoon – and if I had known about that particular topic earlier, I would have asked people about it in an earlier phase of my research as well. This is why Blommaert and Jie call ethnographic fieldwork not just ‘data collection’ but also a learning process in which the researcher arrives as an outsider and gradually familiarises with the environment.<sup>86</sup> This ‘*verstehen*’ from within

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<sup>85</sup> Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1997), *The Active Interview*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 59.

<sup>86</sup> Blommaert & Jie, *Ethnographic Fieldwork*, 27.

and the employment of qualitative research methods are key to the case study approach.<sup>87</sup> Also, the data of ethnographic fieldwork research are diverse.<sup>88</sup> In the following subsection I start with the diversity of data, move on to introduce my main methods, and finally explain when and how I used these methods both at the localities of my case studies and the broader context of my research.

#### 1.2.4.1 Primary and Secondary Data

As I previously mentioned, an interpretivist research position regards people and their interpretations, perceptions, and understandings as primary data sources. In Section 1.2.2, I pointed out that I conducted ethnographic fieldwork research at the two sites that I selected as case studies. As, to my knowledge, no in-depth research about these sites has been conducted by others, I present in this thesis mostly data that I 'generated' myself in the field. I consider the conversations of any kind (in which I was involved) as primary data. I also count my observations, pictures, and (audio and video) recordings of (ritual) events<sup>89</sup> and conversations, as primary data. These primary data constitute the core of my thesis. In addition, I also quote in this thesis – not limited to my case studies – from popular Ravana books, websites, and online publications (also Facebook posts) about Ravana, and very specific documentation about Lakegala area. I consider these also primary data since these were explicitly published to promote Ravana or the area. I include this type of primary data because I find it important to illustrate that certain Ravana ideas and representations were formulated in a context in which I was not involved.<sup>90</sup>

I use secondary data mostly as complementary data. I often needed context, clarification, or some historical background of ideas and concepts that I encountered in the field. I looked up these concepts and ideas in academic books, books in local libraries in Sri Lanka, articles, dictionaries, or books and webpages that were not written with the intention to promote Ravana or Lakegala. I consider these my secondary data.

In the Netherlands, Facebook remained an important medium for me to follow what happened at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. The volunteers and monks regularly updated posts about their activities and livestreamed some of the events. Media items about Lakegala were rare and I refrained from travelling in 2019, 2020, and 2021 due to pregnancy and COVID restrictions, so I could not stay up to date from the Netherlands.

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<sup>87</sup> J. Beuving and G. C. de Vries mention 'verstehen' and actors' perspective in: Beuving, J., & De Vries, G. C. (2015), *Doing Qualitative Research: The Craft of Naturalistic Inquiry*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 30.

<sup>88</sup> Blommaert & Jie, *Ethnographic Fieldwork*, 60.

<sup>89</sup> These also include speeches and chants that would have been delivered and chanted in my absence. I still categorise them as primary data because I recorded them at that particular moment to use for research purposes.

<sup>90</sup> In my bibliography, I make a division between primary and secondary data as well. There is, of course, a grey area. Several chronicles and historical records to be mentioned in Chapter 4 are classified as 'primary data' because my respondents employed them to make specific points about Ravana and his kingdom. I should note here that I do not discuss the details of these chronicles and records in this thesis. I am interested instead in how these works are employed in the process of *Ravanisation*.



#### 1.2.4.2 Participation and Observation

I started this chapter with the performance of the *surya namaskar* by members of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi*. I observed this performance, if only to take a picture. In the ritual that followed, I participated (and I could thus not properly document it).

Observation and participation are key to the ethnographic approach (in interaction with other qualitative research methods). I mainly used participant observation at the sites of my two case studies. Though I tried to conduct ethnographic fieldwork at both sites, it turned out to be much more successful at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya than in Lakegala area.

At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, I immersed myself as researcher into the research setting in a classic ethnographic way. I was often around, especially during the month prior to the annual festival in 2017 and 2018. In 2018, I was around almost every day to help in the kitchen, cut the trees, sweep the floors, and repair the procession chariot. I joined in the preparatory meetings and made it my task to repair and paint the procession chariot. I was the most frequent visitor of the Ravana *puja* at Sunday evenings, helped in preparing the offerings, even bought the required ingredients several times, and cleaned up afterwards. As a woman, however, I could not fully participate in every part of the Ravana ritual or in several of the other activities. For that reason, I once sponsored an extensive *puja* on a day my husband came to visit me. He went into the inner sanctum and shared with me the details of what happened in the inner shrine – some things I would never have found out by asking.

Since plenty of activities were organised at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, it was easy for me to volunteer and participate in the rituals. Other people also came to the site to do something: to pray, perform rituals, ask the monks for advice, or volunteer. Since I was around so often, and the only white-skinned person, I sometimes got privileges. I got a special parking spot for my scooter, I was invited for special gatherings, and was allowed to enter some of the inner rooms or participate in rituals with limited room for people. Also, I was ‘offered’ to join in the annual procession. This was considered a meritorious act provided to me by the chief incumbent that I could not refuse. Since women were not allowed in the part of the procession that was devoted to Ravana, I joined in 2017 in another section of the annual procession. In 2018, I was not willing to join again and told to the organisers that I only was interested in participating in the Ravana procession. As a result, the chief incumbent ‘changed’ the tradition on my request and in 2018 I joined (with some Sri Lankan girls) in the Ravana section of the annual procession.

All the people who regularly visited the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya knew that I came from the Netherlands and that I only had one interest: Ravana. The chief incumbent of the site often mentioned me as model figure. In the meetings he pointed out in front of all the other volunteers that I came from far to study ‘Sri Lankan history’ and called on the others to do the same. He and other leaders mentioned me as evidence that there is something special about Buddhism and Sri Lankan culture and history since I came all the way from the Netherlands to study their culture, religion, and history. This position also caused some problems every now and then. When I was invited in 2018 to write a

contribution to the festival magazine, for example, I wrote a dry and boring piece. The organising committee returned my article and encouraged me to 'share my research findings' and praise Ravana in my contribution. I compromised by eulogising Ravana and Sri Lankan history in my contribution, hoping that it would not get reproduced elsewhere.

My second case study has a different status – the data I gathered there were less rich and diverse than I initially hoped. Most villagers from Lakegala area quickly noticed my presence, since I was the only white person who repeatedly visited the area. I started to feel at home, but I was never immersed in village life.<sup>91</sup>

It turned out that there were no Ravana related rituals held at the time I became interested in Lakegala. Except for daily activities such as working in the paddy fields or washing and bathing in the river, there was not much for me as researcher with an interest in Ravana to participate in or to observe. Even the one time I went to the annual village ritual, I noticed that the villagers passively watched the ritual, and it turned out that it was very exceptional that I had participated in the morning part of the ritual.

Whereas my research at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya was a classic example of ethnographic fieldwork, including the extensive immersion of the researcher through participant observation, my second case study was a site of different nature: the rituals I came for did not take place anymore, so the data I collected were more retrospective than I had hoped. My main research methods at both sites were conversations, but as I mention in the following section, I also integrated some other research methods.

For the broader context of my research – not limited to Ravana – I employed a participant-observation strategy as well, mainly to broaden and deepen my knowledge of Sri Lankan Buddhism. During my fieldwork, I visited plenty of Hindu and Buddhist sites, some to find out if there were Ravana statues and shrines and others to broaden my knowledge. As I was used to participating in Hindu rituals, I felt a personal need in Sri Lanka to participate, to pay respect, and to bring offerings to the Buddha at Buddhist sites as well. When I arrived at a Hindu or Buddhist site I often first participated – to get people used to me and to show my intentions – and observed afterwards. I took the time to observe what other people did, and they often started talking to me. Conducting rituals was not necessary for my research, but it came up from my personality – a drive to keep myself constantly busy – combined with my personal and academic interest in religion.

#### **1.2.4.3 Conversations and Interviews**

As I have previously mentioned, my fieldwork approach has a fundamental interpretivist component. To find out why people have an interest in Ravana—why they write books or participate in or organise Ravana events, for instance—I had to ask them. I often

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<sup>91</sup> Also, my level of Sinhala was not sufficient to conduct research in this rural area without the help of a research assistant – the Sinhala spoken there was different from the Sinhala spoken in Colombo. In addition to this language barrier, I considered it much safer to stay in Lakegala area with a research assistant since there were no accommodations and we stayed overnight in houses with people we barely knew.

asked people to reflect on the intentions and meanings behind activities they participated in, for example, or articles or books they wrote. In this way, people's experiences and ideas were often reconstructed. The interview method, as Mason points out, heavily depends on people's capacities to verbalise, interact, conceptualise, and remember, and this is also one of the pitfalls of interviews. Despite this, I often had to ask people, since the data I was looking for were not (sufficiently) available in other forms.<sup>92</sup>

Most conversations in the field took place *ad hoc*. I ran into people, or I was introduced to someone out of the blue, I had a chat while volunteering at a ritual. I always kept a small hardcover notebook with me, and when people seemed interested to talk with me for a longer time, I often took the notebook from my bag. I had to keep my notebook in one hand and to write with the other hand. The more I was immersed, the less I could make use of my notebook: while waiting in line to enter a shrine with a plate or hand full of offerings, sitting in a bus or car, painting the chariot, or preparing or distributing food that was used in the offerings, I simply switched on my recorder because there was no opportunity to take notes. Also, at religious sites there were often no places to sit or write; once, when I sat down someone pointed out that it is considered highly inappropriate to use a chair in the presence of a deity. Since these situations – and, for instance, the loud drumming or ringing of bells during rituals – made it very difficult to have a conversation, I initially tried to share contact details to talk with people in more detail at a later moment and in a more convenient place. I soon found out, however, that it was better to take advantage of the momentum: it rarely happened that people actually took time to meet me again – and if that happened, I often had to travel for several hours (and faced difficulties with finding the right place). I thus often just talked to people, while walking, traveling, shopping, eating, or as participants in the same ritual. These informal conversations constitute the central basis of my fieldwork research and thus my entire thesis.

I conducted only a limited amount of semi-structured interviews. These interviews took place with, for instance, authors of Ravana books, presidents of popular Ravana research groups, and some academics. Most of these interviews were initiated by me and took place at the home or workplace of the interviewee. Also, the interviewees had a clear idea before the interview of who I was and why I wanted to talk with them. I received filled out consent forms from these men, who often could be easily identified. But if I had written this thesis on the basis of these interviews alone, there would only be a few pages. Informal conversations were of relevance to understand the interest in Ravana of people on a grassroots level.

Henk Driessen and Willy Jansen point out the central importance of small talk for ethnographic research. As they argue:

[small talk] belongs to the systematic “hanging around” which still is the core of fieldwork in spite of recent changes in fieldwork practices (Geertz 1998). Making small talk is in our view and experience far more important in terms of the

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<sup>92</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 64-66.

production of field notes than doing interviews, although there is a thin and fluid boundary between open and informal interviews and small talk.<sup>93</sup>

At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, I was continuously involved in small talk – several people knew English there, and I was able to have very basic conversations in Sinhala. I did plenty of things that were not related to Ravana. Sometimes I spent the whole day there but only collected 5 or 10 minutes of information that was directly related to my research. However, these days were very important for my research: sometimes someone mentioned that he read an article on Ravana a day before, and small talk was extremely important to expand my network. Volunteers who expressed no specific interest in Ravana sometimes brought me books that they got from friends in their hometown or called their friends in my presence – handed over their phones to me – to ‘discuss Ravana.’ By ‘hanging around’ with the volunteers I expanded my network by snowball effect. I also went to some of their houses and joined them for activities not related to Ravana. These experiences and the informal conversations were essential to my research, although they are not directly visible in my thesis. Driessen and Jansen argue that a prerequisite for small talk is that one knows the language, and they lament that researchers now often use interpreters.<sup>94</sup> For this latter reason, I was not able to participate in small talk in Lakegala area, and I consider that one of the shortcomings of my research.

Some of the interactions I call ‘conversations’ in the present work could have been labelled as semi-structured or informal interviews when we look at the duration of the conversation and my preparation. Especially in Lakegala area, I often noted the topics I wanted to discuss with the villagers, and we sat down together for an hour (I filled several notebooks there). The people were not ‘prepared,’ however, and with most villagers my research assistants and I did not use the consent papers there (for several reasons that I discuss in Section 1.2.6). It is only for the conversations for which I got written consent that I employ the term ‘interview’: I also use personal names when permission was given to do so after they were informed in detail about my position as researcher through my project information sheet. Other conversations of significant length conducted with people who were not easily recognisable I have called ‘conversations.’ I refer to remarks made in small talk, brief chats, and other conversations as ‘informal conversations.’ The boundaries are blurry, of course, but for both ‘conversations’ and ‘informal conversations’ I have anonymised the names unless people explicitly asked me to mention their names.

#### 1.2.4.4 Photo-Elicitation

“Photo elicitation” involves using images to invoke comments and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview. The images used within the interview

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<sup>93</sup> Driessen, H. G. G. M., & Jansen, W. H. M. (2013), The Hard Work of Small Talk in Ethnographic Fieldwork, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 69(2), 249-263, 249.

<sup>94</sup> Driessen & Jansen, The Hard Work of Small Talk in Ethnographic Fieldwork, 252.

can come from various sources. For example, with an archive of photographs provided by the researcher, the interviewee looks through images and talks about them or answers questions about them.<sup>95</sup>

In the first and second fieldwork periods, I used visual data in conversations – not limited to semi-structured interviews as mentioned in the quotation. I used them mostly *ad hoc*: when I was on the way somewhere, for instance, I showed people pictures that I had taken earlier with my phone to explore if they knew about a certain site, statue, or object. Also, I showed parts of videos that I had made of Ravana rituals at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya to people who participated in those rituals and asked them to comment on the rituals.<sup>96</sup>

Photographs are the primary form of visual data that researchers employ in social science.<sup>97</sup> I also mainly used pictures (sometimes printed) and videos, visual data that I generated myself on my phone. Such data were easy to carry with me. I used the method of photo-elicitation in a more structural way in my third period of fieldwork for two reasons: first to see if people in a broader context knew about certain Ravana rituals, authors, objects, and places (exploratory, related to the broader process of *Ravanisation*), and second, to find out about certain details of places and objects related to the sites of my case studies (in-depth, related to the sites of my research). One of the pictures that I used for photo-elicitation was a picture of the main statue of Ravana at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (see Figure 6.16). The statue itself can be seen as a visual datum as it is a phenomenon located in the visual and spatial. I employed a picture of the statue as a visual research method.<sup>98</sup> At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, and sometimes at other places, I asked people about the statue, what the objects that Ravana kept in his hands were, what they symbolised, and so on. In Lakegala area, in addition to a picture of a local shrine (Figure 7.8) and objects from the shrine (Figure 7.19), I used pictures of the surroundings in the conversations with villagers. These included several spots on Lakegala Mountain (e.g., Figure 7.15). The actual rocks or trees were not what I wanted to discuss with the villagers: what I showed was ‘visual,’ of course, but I used it to explore the mythistorical connection (thus the invisible dimension). By showing pictures of visual objects such as statues, weaponry, and the landscape, I was looking for interpretations, perceptions, and the meanings that people attributed to them.

In Lakegala area, photo-elicitation helped me to change the typical researcher-interviewee relationship and to make the people feel less uncomfortable about my presence.

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<sup>95</sup> Dunlop, S. (2011), *Visual Methods in the Study of Religion*, *University of Kent: Research Methods for the Study of Religion*. <https://www.kent.ac.uk/religionmethods/documents/Visual%20approaches.pdf>

<sup>96</sup> In my research, I primarily used researcher-produced images. An important exception was the official video recording of the procession that was organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in 2017. I watched it together with one of the commentators in 2018. The volunteers who were involved in organising the procession in 2018 also watched the video recording of 2017 collectively during a meeting in order to improve the procession in 2018.

<sup>97</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 104.

<sup>98</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 104.

Photo-elicitation was useful to direct the attention of people towards something other than the white researcher and the research assistant. This dynamic is described in the article 'Photo Elicitation and the Visual Sociology of Religion:' '[w]here standard interview techniques tend to be face-to-face, the researcher and participant tend to be shoulder-to-shoulder focused on the image before them. Likewise, photo elicitation is known to shift the researcher-participant power dynamic.'<sup>99</sup> The villagers' position changed while they were explaining what they saw to me: with their knowledge about the objects and areas in the photographs, they became the authorities.

### 1.2.5 Data Analysis

During the three periods of fieldwork in Sri Lanka I filled approximately twenty notebooks. My notebooks included notes of conversations and interviews as well as things like phone numbers and contact details of people whom I met on the way (not always relevant to my research); notes of my own observations; descriptions of rituals and sculptures I observed in temples (which were extensive when I was not allowed to take photographs); routes to certain sites; simplified self-made maps of Buddhist sites, GPS coordinates; subjective descriptions (in my native language) of people whose names I could not remember; and titles of books that I wanted to find or look up in a library. I made it my habit to write down all the material from my notebooks together with my experiences on my laptop when I was in my apartment. While at my apartment, I also searched on the internet for additional information—about some of the phenomena that I had encountered in the field, for example, or names mentioned to me—and added these data by including the URLs in my digital logbook. Also, I noted down how the weather, power cuts, public transport, dehydration, skin inflammation, my second-hand scooter (which was broken more often than not), and young men obstructed my research progress in the field.<sup>100</sup> After three fieldwork periods, my three digital logbooks comprised together around 650 pages. In addition to my digital logbooks, I had over ten thousand visual files (mostly photographs) and hundreds of audio recordings of conversations and interviews. I used my digital logbooks as starting points to categorise and arrange my data.

As the first fieldwork period was exploratory in nature – and I mainly focused on *Ramayana* tourism – I arranged my data after that fieldwork period mainly along sites and characters from the *Ramayana*. I made a color-coded excel document that included a Sri Lankan map with all the sites marked as well as separate sheets for each site that included my observations, fragments from conversations, and important photos. In the overall document, I noticed that Ravana was connected to more sites in Sri Lanka than any other character in the *Ramayana*, and this abundance of Ravana coincided with the

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<sup>99</sup> Williams, R. R., & Whitehouse, K. (2015), Photo Elicitation and the Visual Sociology of Religion, *Review of Religious Research: The Official Journal of the Religious Research Association*, 57(2), 303-318, 306.

<sup>100</sup> I only learned about keeping separate diaries of personal experiences in the field at a later stage in my PhD trajectory, so my digital logbooks contain private problems that I faced in Sri Lanka in addition to diverse data.

interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists that I noticed. Because I switched on my recorder in this explorative fieldwork period only in official interview settings, I had a limited amount of audio files. I wrote all of them out in a later stage of my research (not an exact transcription). I also started to explore ATLAS.ti, but I soon learned that it was very time consuming to resize my visual data to make it work.

For the second and third fieldwork periods I selected – out of the massive amount of data that I collected – which data I would include for the purpose of analysis and which data I would leave aside (e.g., selfies and photographs taken at parties). As I mentioned, I hung around at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya a lot, and only a part of the data was about Ravana. On one of the recordings, I found myself singing a Dutch lullaby, and this has absolutely no relevance to Ravana. I gathered too much data and plenty of garbage since I switched on my recorder too often while I was volunteering. I decided to compile all the data about my case studies (Lakegala [mainly 2018] and the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya [2017 and 2018]) and used them as separate data sets for in-depth analyses. I transcribed recordings if they contained information about the sites. These were most often recorded at the sites themselves, but some were recorded elsewhere (e.g., at arranged dinners) with people who were attached to the site in one way or another. For the other data collected in 2017 and 2018, I used my digital logbooks as a starting point and checked additional files (recordings and photographs) only if I wanted to write something about a particular topic that was according to my logbook available at that site or discussed in a specific recording.

Ethnographic researchers look at their data from a certain perspective. As previously mentioned, it is interpretive. In the analysis the researcher takes a middle way between what is called a ‘suspicious’ and an ‘empathic’ interpretive position. Researchers with a suspicious interpretive position often aim to bring out a latent meaning that is not immediately obvious. Researchers with an empathic interpretive position, by contrast, try to understand the data on their own terms rather than to explain why something occurs or to look for underlying processes of the phenomena.<sup>101</sup>

The overall method of analysis that I used was thematic analysis. ‘Thematic analysis is a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set.’<sup>102</sup> This approach helped me to condense and compare my data, identify patterns, and notice meta-level patterns between and beyond my case studies. In 2019, I went through all the primary data related to my two case studies (including videos, photos, notes, observations, conversations, and interviews). Before I conducted my in-depth research at the sites in 2017 (for the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya) and 2018 (for both case studies; the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and Lakegala area), I prepared myself with topic lists. For both data sets, I started my analysis with some sensitising concepts

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<sup>101</sup> Willig, C. (2014), Interpretation and Analysis, in U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, Los Angeles, Sage Publications, 136-149, 137-138.

<sup>102</sup> Ayres, L. (2008), Thematic Coding and Analyses, in L. M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, California: Sage Publications, 867-868, 867.

(related to the specific cases).<sup>103</sup> At a later stage, I added subcategories and topics, and categories as general information and demographics since the sites of my in-depth research were not discussed elsewhere in detail. I retrieved segments from my data and grouped them together (some segments, of course, fit in multiple groups). To avoid de-contextualisation, I always noted who, where, and when the segment was said/produced. It was only at a latter phase that I coded the (mainly textual) data of my case studies. I had already written some papers before I analysed all my data.<sup>104</sup> As I mentioned earlier with reference to Mason, theory, data analysis, and data generation were produced dialectically. The idea of first collecting data and then analysing the data, did not fit my back-and-forth fieldwork methodology or my time schedule. I had to write articles and draft versions of chapters before I collected and analysed all my data.

That I analysed my data at a late phase of my research does not imply that I never thought of themes and patterns while going through the data. But as I began to get immersed with my data for a longer period, I noticed that I wanted to step beyond the level of categorical description and develop meta-level themes that were not case specific anymore. I thus went again more systematically through my data sets and looked for meta-level patterns and additional/alternative interpretations within and across my case studies. At the same time, I continued to keep a flexible approach to theme development that was based on an inductive approach over a rigid and structured reliability.<sup>105</sup> I developed patterns out of this analysis in a later phase of my research that helped me compare the insights that I gained from my two case studies.

I, as a researcher, have made choices not only within the process of ‘generating’ data, but also in the selection of data to employ for thematic analysis. Limitations of time and space necessitated that I excluded some data, as did the scope of my questions. In the body chapters below, I specify which data are included, which are excluded, and my criteria for this decision. This thesis is thus also partly based on my own interpretation of the data and what I think they represent. As Blommaert and Jie mention:

Your data are a complex of widely divergent scientific objects. Together they offer a subjective representation of facts and events ‘out there,’ and the analysis of such data is an interpretive analysis that necessarily draws on an interdisciplinary set

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<sup>103</sup> Willig mentions that: ‘[e]thnography’s theoretical base directs the researcher’s attention to certain aspects of the data and it supplies the researcher with sensitizing concepts [...]’ in Willig, *Interpretation and Analysis*, 145.

<sup>104</sup> De Koning, *The Ritualizing of the Martial and Benevolent Side of Ravana*; De Koning, D. D. C. (2017), *De revitalisering van Ravana: een verkennend onderzoek naar hedendaagse voorstellingen van Ravana onder Sinhalezen in Sri Lanka* [Revitalising Ravana: An Exploration of Contemporary Representations of Ravana Among Sinhalese in Sri Lanka], *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion*, 71(3), 257-276, In addition to these articles, I have delivered some papers at conferences for instance: De Koning, D. D. C. (2018, July 6), *The Multiple Storied Lakegala and Emerging Imaginations of Alternative Pasts and Genealogies* [Conference paper], AAS-in ASIA Conference, Delhi.

<sup>105</sup> Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017), *Thematic Analysis*, in C. Willig (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, London: Sage Publications, 17-37, 19.



of methods [...]. Every available method can be used to make sense of your data, and your prior training will be your main toolkit.<sup>106</sup>

As I had no prior training in conducting extensive fieldwork or in data analysis, it was a process of trial-and-error. In Chapter 8, I reflect on the limitations of my research – both its scope and its methodologies. In the final section of this introductory chapter, I address matters of research ethics and cultural differences.

### 1.2.6 Research Ethics and Cultural Differences

Prior to every fieldwork period, I handed in the required forms to the Research Ethics Committee of the Tilburg School of Humanities.<sup>107</sup> I prepared consent forms, a project information sheet, and debriefing forms. I received ethical clearance to conduct my research, but in the field, I realised that this whole procedure was created with an ideal (and western) research setting in mind. It was not always (or even often) possible, however, for me to contact interviewees beforehand in order to explain the research to them and subsequently set a date for an interview. Most of the conversations I had took place more or less spontaneously in the open air without proper setting to write or sit down. Such conversations thus often began without my ‘informant’ knowing beforehand that he probably would be part of my research. Men (and sometimes women) often started asking me ‘where are you from?’ and after I answered that question, I asked a similar question back. We then started to discuss why we came to a certain place and what we were doing. If I was at a site related to Ravana they often were eager to introduce me to what they knew expecting that I knew nothing about it (which I often pretended, of course, to see what they would bring up). When we were in a context that was not related to Ravana, I often explained that I was from the Netherlands, that I worked at the university, and that I conducted research on Ravana. I noticed that ‘PhD’ did not ring a bell in most regular conversations, so I often used ‘lecturer’ (although I was not involved in teaching at all). In any case, I tried to point out that I was more than a ‘student’ as the whole process of someone from the Netherlands coming to study Ravana in Sri Lanka was often too far removed from their own personal lives.

Since English was the official language in Sri Lanka until 1956 and Sri Lanka had a very flourishing tourist industry at the time in which I conducted my research, I had expected English to be a dominant language in day-to-day life. This turned out to be only partially true. Even if people were able to talk with me in English, most were not used to reading forms in academic English on academic procedures. For this reason, I often asked

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<sup>106</sup> Blommaert & Jie, *Ethnographic Fieldwork*, 63, 67.

<sup>107</sup> At present, the department is called the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences, but at the time of conducting the research it was called the Tilburg School of Humanities. The ethical clearance identification code of my fieldwork in 2017 was REC#2017/10 and in 2018 REC#2018/3. In 2016, the letter did not include an identification code. Because my research project started in 2015, rules and regulations about ethics were in progress. My fieldwork took place prior to May 25, 2018, the day the general data protection regulation became enforceable.

if they agreed with me to use what they said in my research and my research assistant filled out the most important items of the consent form (especially dealing with their personal details so that at least their privacy was protected). In my first fieldwork period, I sometimes scared people off by trying to put them in the official research structure and make them read all the forms in English – which they could not (fully) understand. In the second and third fieldwork periods, I often used consent forms that were translated in Sinhala and allowed my research assistants to introduce me and my project (without technical jargon from the project information sheet). In a latter phase of my research, I sometimes misjudged people the other way around: some of them would probably have understood much more of the procedures than I thought. Knowledge of English is, of course, not all that counted.

Cultural diversity affected the way the interviewee dealt with the consent forms. For example, there was an interview with an *angampora* (martial arts) teacher who also practiced *vedakama* ('traditional' medicine) in Katuwana. I asked my research assistant to make a phone call to this *angampora* teacher after I noticed on Facebook that he was involved in organising a Ravana procession. My research assistant set an interview with this *angampora* teacher. When we arrived, she introduced me. He was very suspicious. He repeatedly asked me what my intentions were, and it took him a while to open up. After several hours, he invited us to see the Ravana statue and to have lunch at his home. Before we left, he filled out the consent forms, and he handed the forms over in a remarkable way. He invited me to stand next to him and handed back my own consent forms in a very formal way: he wanted us to be photographed by one of his students while he handed back the consent form as if it were an official certificate.

As I explained earlier, I decided to anonymise as much as possible since several people with whom I conducted informal conversations were not informed in detail about my research. When they filled out consent forms, I used their names and/or positions only if they allowed me to do so. In Lakegala area – as I describe in more detail in Chapter 7 – my research assistant never used 'Ravana' when she introduced me. Not introducing the research topic right away was part of the research strategy to find out to what extent and if Ravana played a role in the mythistorical imagination of the villagers (she used, for instance, 'history of the area'). I almost never used consent forms there because there was a high level of illiteracy. Some people who knew how to write their names were not able to read due to a lack of eye treatments and spectacles. I also had no consent forms translated in Sinhala when I came to Lakegala area in 2017 (and this was the reason I used Sinhala forms in 2018, see the section appendices).<sup>108</sup> Chapter 7 explains in more detail how I refer to the specific conversations conducted in Lakegala area.

Because I was interested in interpretations and meanings, I often asked people why they considered something important. Most often people were very willing to share their ideas with me. But when it came to very detailed questions at the sites, I noticed that they were not used to posing 'why-questions' about, for instance, their rituals. When I asked

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<sup>108</sup> Transcripts of several conversations and details about consent can be requested from Tilburg University Dataverse (restricted access).

the lay custodian of the Ravana shrine at Pannipitiya why the weekly offering to Ravana took place after six in the evening, he answered: 'you have to ask from *mahamaha Thero* [the chief incumbent] why [...] because we normally not asking why. We are not used to that word.'<sup>109</sup> This answer made me think about some of the answers given to me by respondents who from time to time were hoping to impress me by providing answers to questions nobody else would normally bring up.<sup>110</sup> This was, of course, one of my key concerns when I reflected upon my position as a researcher in Sri Lanka. Ethnographic fieldwork involves the researcher: '[...] it [is] interpretive research in a situated, real environment, based on interaction between the researcher and the subject(s), hence, fundamentally subjective in nature, aimed at demonstrating complexity, and yielding hypotheses that can be replicated and tested in similar, not identical circumstances.'<sup>111</sup> My involvement in the research has extensively shaped the research. As I already mentioned, I was often treated differently (often better) than Sri Lankans, and I call this 'white privilege.' I was frequently offered a special seat in the front during cultural and religious events (unless I was at a tourist spot), people prepared and fed me a lot of special foods and drinks (which I did not always consider a privilege), and I felt people made time to talk to me when I visited them since they assumed or knew that I came from far. This, of course, raises the question how this thesis would have looked if it had been conducted by a Sri Lankan.

To conclude this section, I would like to reflect on three challenging experiences: how several Sri Lankans dealt with appointments, how my informants were not used to 'interviews,' and how I faced difficulties with various social hierarchies. It often happened that appointments were not kept in one way or another. Sometimes I had to wait for several hours, other times I would receive phone calls that our appointment was cancelled (which was particularly frustrating when I was already on the way). Most people were not used to interviews, but they were eager to talk. As a result, my research assistant often provided me with a condensed version of what the informant said, after which the interviewee often immediately started talking again instead of allowing me the opportunity to ask a follow-up question. This problem was even more complex when people held a certain position. They were not used to being 'questioned' – and I suppose especially not by two young women. The cultural difference was most prominent in conversations with monks. Here, hierarchy was a key issue. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, this remained a problem throughout my entire research period. The chief incumbent holds a highly elevated position, and it was considered generous if he took time to talk with laypeople. This happened only as he wished and when his secretary approved it. Also, it happened a couple of times that I was asked to hand in my questions before meeting him and he decided not to meet with me. Instead, his secretary wrote down the

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<sup>109</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, April 23, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> Blommaert and Jie mention: '[...] the researcher tends to ask questions that normally no one would ask.' See: Blommaert & Jie, *Ethnographic Fieldwork*, 41-42. In the introduction of the book, they thus write that asking is often the worst possible way to find out things. See: Blommaert & Jie, *Ethnographic*, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Blommaert & Jie, *Ethnographic Fieldwork*, 17.

monks' opinions, which they considered sufficient for me. In other contexts, mostly with monks, I noticed that my research assistant had difficulties with approaching monks to ask questions.

### 1.3 Notes on Translation and Transcription

In 2015 and 2016, I learned Sinhala mainly through self-study. I found learning this language very time consuming and I noticed at the time of my fieldwork research that a very specific (and invented) vocabulary was part of my research. Even if I had given the study of Sinhala another try in a latter phase of my PhD trajectory, I still would not have been able to conduct several of the interviews myself for various reasons: part of the interest in Ravana and the alleged ancient Hela inhabitation in Sri Lanka is the invention of an indigenous *yaksha* language. The monk who published about the *Vargapurnikava* (see Section 1.1.1) explained that his investigation of this palm leaf manuscript mainly deals with the *yaksha bhasava* or *yaksha* language.<sup>112</sup> Some of these ideas (and concepts) are reproduced by others with an interest in Ravana. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, many of the stone slabs and signboards included words derived from Pali and Sanskrit written in Sinhala script. Different spellings of the same words could be found on different stone slabs, and words were often written in a very formal way to give them an aura of esteem and antiquity. Also, though uncommon for several consonants in modern spoken Sinhala, aspirate consonants were used due to their presence in Pali and Sanskrit, and archaic conjunctions were constructed. In other contexts, Pali and Sanskrit words were Sinhalesed and/or simplified, which made it very hard for me to decide how to transcribe them. The official Sinhala way of writing Ravana should be transcribed – similar to Sanskrit – as *Rāvaṇa*, but the use of the *ṇ* instead of the *n* does not make any difference in spoken Sinhala (it was part of the Elu or Hela language; see Section 4.2.1). Also, I never came across the transcription *Rāvaṇa* in recent English-language publications written by Sinhalese scholars (but they do sometimes write *Rawana*). I therefore use 'Ravana' in this thesis. In general, I use the most simplified transcription of Sinhala words and do not use any diacritics because Sinhalese also do not use them in popular English publications (about Ravana). I use, for instance, *devalaya* instead of *dēvālaya* for shrine and *maha* instead of *mahā* for great. As this thesis is not a philological study but aims to investigate the significance of a phenomenon in everyday life, a precise transcription of Sinhala words is not central to my thesis. I do, however, transcribe Sinhala words that are key to understanding *Ravanisation*. The glossary (see the appendices) provides an overview of the Sinhala concepts (some of them derived from Pali or Sanskrit) that I use in this thesis. The first column gives my transcription, and the second column gives the basic meaning or explanation of the concept (including the titles of some chronicles,

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Manawe Wimalaratana *Thero*, monk at Galgamuwa and author of books on the *yaksha* language, Galgamuwa, April 25, 2017. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Bhāshā,' 441; Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'Bhāshā,' 755.

epics, and manuscripts). One of the appendices gives an overview of abbreviations used in this thesis.

In general, I follow how people pronounced words to me in our conversations and how they – if available – transcribed it: I use, for instance, *yaksha* instead of *yakka* or *yakṣa*. However, I sometimes noticed that people pronounced shorter versions of words that had over five syllables. In such cases, I use the words in their official (written) length. This was especially the case when it came to very specific terminology used for certain rituals, and I use then the official spelling to maintain academic consistency. Also, I transcribe the ‘v’ as ‘v’ and not as ‘w’ as some Sinhalese do with the exception of place and personal names that include a ‘v’ and are transcribed/pronounced predominantly with a ‘w’ (e.g., Manawe Wimalarathana, the monk who allegedly owns the *Vargapunikava*). Also, some exceptions to my general rule of using a plain transcription are made when I use quotations, when very established Sanskrit or Pali words are used, or when not using diacritics considerably changes the meaning of a word.<sup>113</sup> In addition, although not always clearly audible, I included the ‘h’ when the ‘d’ and ‘t’ were aspirated since this division is central to the Sinhala language system and it would result in different meanings if the ‘h’ was not included. However, when it came to certain local words or names (of deities and *yakshas*, for instance) in Lakegala area (and few written accounts were available), I transcribed them to the best of my knowledge.

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<sup>113</sup> At the time I conducted my research in Sri Lanka, there were no up-to-date comprehensive and authoritative dictionaries (Sinhala-English and English-Sinhala) available. Throughout my thesis I refer to Clough, B. (1892), *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, Kollupitiya: Wesleyan Mission Press. In addition, I refer sometimes to Sanskrit or Pali dictionaries as, especially when it comes to matters of religion, loanwords from these languages are used in Sinhala.



## CHAPTER 2

# Sri Lanka's Ethnic and Religious Diversity

In this chapter, I focus on the country where *Ravanisation* takes place: Sri Lanka. This chapter aims not to give a general introduction of Sri Lanka but to provide a specific backdrop to understand some of the dynamics of the phenomenon of *Ravanisation* to be discussed in the coming chapters.

In the first section (Section 2.1), I briefly introduce the diversity of Sri Lanka's population with a special focus on the recent civil war. For the two case studies of my research, I investigate some of the processes of *Ravanisation* at and around two Buddhist sites. Therefore, I discuss several aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the second part of this chapter. I introduce in Section 2.2.1 the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon. I pay special attention to Vibhishana and Natha *bodhisatta* because their positions in the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon illustrate the interactions of Sri Lankan Buddhism with respectively (Vaishnava) Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism. In Section 2.2.2, I discuss some of the lay practices of Sri Lankan Buddhists, and Section 2.2.3 explores some of the key developments and key persons of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka.

As I focus in this thesis on the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists, I introduce in the final section (Section 2.3) a selection of developments that haven taken place among this majority population in the twentieth and twenty-first century: Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism (Section 2.3.1), the twentieth-century popularity of the chronicle the *Mahavamsa* (Section 2.3.1.1), and political Buddhism (Section 2.3.2).

## 2.1 Diversity and Conflict in the Recent Past: The Civil War

Although Sri Lanka is a rather small island of only 65,610 square kilometres, it is renowned for its immense diversity. The tourism industry touts Sri Lanka's cultural diversity, rich biodiversity, and varieties in climate and landscape to sell the country as a perfect holiday destination. A flipside of Sri Lanka's population diversity is the civil war. Officially, the civil war took place between 1983 and 2009. However, tensions between diverse communities are not limited to that specific time period. In the run-up to the civil war, intercommunal violence evolved gradually, with as climax 'the outburst' of 1983. The killing of thirteen soldiers in July 1983 by the Liberation of Tigers of Tamil Eelam

(LTTE), led to the worst ever anti-Tamil pogrom.<sup>114</sup> The 'outburst' of 1983 became known as the official start of the civil war. The civil war has often been reduced to a war between the Sri Lankan Tamils who wanted to establish an independent state in the North of Sri Lanka, and the Sinhalese majority (approximately 75 percent of the population) who opposed this. The situation was, of course, far more complicated.<sup>115</sup>

Other countries intervened in the conflict. One serious attempt already took place in 1987 by the neighbouring country India. India stationed an Indian Peace Keeping Force in the North of Sri Lanka, but they ended up fighting with the LTTE. Their presence not only complicated the relationship between India and Sri Lanka but also internationalised the war.<sup>116</sup>

In 1999, the former Sri Lankan president Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (1994-2005) requested international intervention. She officially recognised Norway's intervention in the facilitation of peace efforts. In 2003, the LTTE withdrew from the peace talks, which made negotiation hardly possible after that. The peace process came to an end in 2008 when the government broke the ceasefire agreement.<sup>117</sup> Under former president Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005-2015; presently holding the position of prime minister) the leader of the Tamil Tigers was killed in 2009.

Although Sri Lanka is an island, its history is one of extensive and diverse interactions with other countries through, for instance, trade, invasions, and colonial rule. In the following section I explore the interactions of Sri Lanka's dominant religion (Theravada Buddhism) with other traditions that have extensively shaped present-day practices and beliefs among the majority population.

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<sup>114</sup> DeVotta, N. (2017), *Majoritarian Politics in Sri Lanka: The Roots of Pluralism Breakdown*, Ottawa: Global Centre For Pluralism, 13. [https://www.pluralism.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/SriLanka\\_EN.pdf](https://www.pluralism.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/SriLanka_EN.pdf)

<sup>115</sup> In the census report of 2012, an ethnic division of Sri Lanka's population is made between the Sinhalese (74.9 percent), the Sri Lankan Tamils (11.2 percent), Indian Tamils (4.1 percent), and Muslims (9.3 percent). See: DeVotta, *Engaging Sinhalese Buddhist Majoritarianism*, 76. A minor part of the Sinhalese are Christians. The Sri Lankan Tamils mainly reside in the northern and eastern coastal areas of Sri Lanka. Although the Sri Lankan Tamils share a geographical area, they do not constitute a homogeneous community. Sivathamby points out that they have different economic organisations, social structures, and historical and religious backgrounds. For a detailed description of the Sri Lankan Tamils, see: Sivathamby, K. (1985), *Some Aspects of the Social Composition of the Tamils in Sri Lanka*, in *Social Scientist Association (Ed.), Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka: Papers Presented at a Seminar Organised by the Social Scientists Association, December 1979*, Dehiwala: Navamaga Printers, 175-199, 178; and the chapter *Social Structures and Ethnography of Sri Lankan Tamils* in: Wilson, A. J., & Chandrakanthan, A. J. V. (2001), *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 13-26.

<sup>116</sup> DeVotta, *Majoritarian Politics in Sri Lanka*, 15-16.

<sup>117</sup> Hoglund, K, & Svensson, I. (2009), *Mediating between Tigers and Lions: Norwegian Peace Diplomacy in Sri Lanka's Civil War*, *Contemporary South Asia*, 17(2), 175-191, 183.



## 2.2 Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka

The dominant religion of Sri Lanka is Buddhism. More specifically, it is called Theravada Buddhism or 'Doctrine of the Elders.' This term implies conservatism, and most of the Buddhists in Sri Lanka also regard themselves as the upholders of the practically and doctrinally purest form of Buddhism.<sup>118</sup> They argue that there is an unbroken continuity with the past, going back to the time of Gautama Buddha. Gautama Buddha, who is considered the twenty-fifth Buddha in the line of twenty-six Buddhas, was born early in the fifth century B.C. in India. He was born and raised in a royal family but renounced his comfortable life at the age of twenty-six. Spending a few years as an ascetic, he realised that the ascetic lifestyle was dissatisfying. While meditating he gained insight into his past and present lives and into the origins of suffering. Understanding the truth, he reached *nirvana* (enlightenment), and although he was at first instance reluctant to share his insights with others, Brahma begged him to share his insights. Buddha allegedly delivered his first sermon to his five disciples in the Deer Park in Benares.<sup>119</sup> By preaching his insights he found an order (*sangha*) for people who wanted to devote their lives to reach *nirvana*.<sup>120</sup> The three ideals of Buddhism, the *Buddha*, *dhamma*, and *sangha* are called the triple gem. In present-day Sri Lanka, Buddhists chant – prior to rituals and ceremonies, for instance – that they take refuge in the *Buddha*, *dhamma*, and *sangha*.<sup>121</sup> Also, they often greet each other with *theruwan saranai*, by which they bless each other with the triple gem.<sup>122</sup>

Because Buddhism flourished in India, the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka sent his son Mahinda to Sri Lanka. According to the *Mahavamsa* (see Section 2.3.1.1), Mahinda converted Devanampiya Tissa (250-201 BCE) to Buddhism. By the conversion of this king, Buddhism became the established religion of the Anuradhapura kingdom – that is, it became formalised and institutionalised.<sup>123</sup> Before the conversion of Devanampiya Tissa to Buddhism, (Hindu) Brahmanism was one of the main religions in Sri Lanka. Despite the establishment of a 'new' religion (Buddhism), traces of Brahmanism and indigenous beliefs remained present in Sri Lanka.<sup>124</sup>

Two times a significant split occurred in the early phase of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. These splits were caused by gifts (monasteries) given by kings to monks. The monks of the *maha viharaya* (great monastery) in Anuradhapura expelled the monks who accepted

<sup>118</sup> Gombrich, R. F. (2006), *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (2nd ed.), London: Routledge, 2-3. (Original work published in 1988); Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 3.

<sup>119</sup> Gombrich, R. F. (2009), *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Rev. ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 95-106. (Original work published in 1971).

The first- or second-century *Buddhavamsa* mentions three more Buddhas which brings the actual number (including Gautama Buddha and Maitreya) at 29.

<sup>120</sup> Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 2. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Nirwāna,' 292, 'Sangha,' 644. Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'nibbāna,' 405.

<sup>121</sup> Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 1.

<sup>122</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Teruwan,' 792.

<sup>123</sup> De Silva, K. M. (2005), *A History of Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 9, 60.

<sup>124</sup> De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 58.

these personal gifts.<sup>125</sup> The expelled monks started respectively the Abhayagiri *nikaya* (fraternity) and Jetavana *nikaya*.<sup>126</sup> The form of Buddhism related to the *maha viharaya* later became known as the Theravada fraternity. They upheld a conservative vision of Buddhism that opposed, for instance, Mahayana Buddhist influences in Sri Lanka (see section *The Presence of Mahayana Buddhism in Sri Lanka*).<sup>127</sup>

The dominant Theravada school of Buddhism claims that their ideas and practices go straight back to Buddha's time. George Bond, a religious studies scholar who is specialized in Buddhist studies, challenges this claim of unbroken continuity. He argues that Buddhism should be regarded as a cumulative religious tradition, always developing and containing ambiguities.<sup>128</sup> John Holt, professor in religion and Asian studies, also stresses that trade, geography, and population mobility have contributed to the formation of Sri Lanka's religious diversity and that the socio-cosmic structures of Theravada Buddhist soteriology and the genuine receptivity of part of the Sinhalese Buddhists have extensively shaped the specific form of Sri Lankan Buddhism.<sup>129</sup>

In this section, I do not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, nor do I aim to give a full description of contemporary Buddhism. Instead, I discuss specific practices and beliefs that provide a fruitful background for the understanding of the two case studies of my research. As my focus is on *Ravani-sation* at the local (grassroots) level, I mainly pay attention to the perspectives and practices of lay people. The anthropologist Deborah Winslow argues that Sinhalese Buddhism has two major components: monastic Buddhism and theistic Buddhism. She further states:

They are served by different specialists - monks (*bhikkhu*) and priests (*kapurāla*) - housed in different structures - temples (*vihāraya*) and shrines (*dēvāla*) - and monastic Buddhism is widely accorded a higher social status than theistic Buddhism. There are many recent scholarly works on Buddhism and politics in Sri Lanka (including Gunawardana 1979, Malalgoda 1976, Phadnis 1976, Seneviratne 1978,

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<sup>125</sup> In Pali *vihara* stands for a dwelling, habitation or lodging of a Buddhist monk. Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Vihāra,' 712. In Sri Lanka, the term Maha Viharaya is associated with the monastery '[...] that was the seat of the ancestral branch for present-day Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka.' By this is meant the monastery in Anuradhapura founded by king Devanampiya Tissa (the first Sri Lankan king who converted to Buddhism; see Section 2.2). See: Damen, K. (2003), *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 'Mahāvihāra,' 167. *Viharaya* means Buddhist monastery. See: Clough, Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Mahā,' 472, 'Vihāra,' 'Vihāraya,' 608. Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'Mahā,' 794.

<sup>126</sup> Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Nikāya,' 394; Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Nikāya,' 287.

<sup>127</sup> Berkwitz, S. C. (2012), *South Asian Buddhism: A Survey*, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 142-143. Gombrich, R. F. (1988), *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, London: Routledge, 116-117.

<sup>128</sup> Bond, G. D. (1988), *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, Colombia: University of South Carolina, 22-23. Bond refers here to the work of Tambiah.

<sup>129</sup> Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 12.

and Smith 1977), but for the most part they emphasize monastic Buddhism – to the relative neglect of the political import of the theistic component.<sup>130</sup>

The following section (Section 2.2.1), first introduces different Indian migration waves to Sri Lanka that have contributed to the knowledge about Ravana and Vibhishana (Ravana's brother, see also Section 1.1.1) in Sri Lanka. My focus is on the interactions of Sri Lankan Buddhists with other traditions that have extensively shaped contemporary Sinhalese Buddhism.

### **2.2.1 Presences of Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism in Sri Lanka: Vibhishana and Natha *Bodhisatta* in the Sri Lankan Buddhist Pantheon**

The Buddha is by Sri Lankan Buddhists often considered so pure that he does not intervene in worldly affairs. Therefore, as is explained in the *Mahavamsa* (see also Section 2.3.1.1), the Buddha delegated the overlordship of Sri Lanka to four deities.

According to Richard Gombrich (Indologist and Sanskrit, Pali, and Buddhist studies scholar) and the anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere, the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon shows close similarities to the medieval political system with a division between the village, the province, and the state.<sup>131</sup> In this description of the pantheon, modelled on the structure of the Kandyan kingdom, the four guardian deities are on top. These four guardian deities allegedly oversee the whole country, each of them having their own territory.<sup>132</sup> The composition of the four guardian deities has changed over time. Vishnu has more or less secured his position (probably because his position is mentioned in the *Mahavamsa*; see Section 2.3.1.1), but the other three are taken from a list of five: Natha, Paththini, Saman, Vibhishana, and Kataragama.<sup>133</sup> Below these guardian deities are twelve deified local lords (*bandaras*). These are followed by still lower deities as well as demons. Both high- and low-level deities and demons are believed to be closely involved in worldly matters and to belong to the ever-changing cosmos. Like humans, they are subject to decay, death, and re-becoming.<sup>134</sup>

In the following sections, I introduce the presence of Hindu and Mahayana Buddhist elements in Sri Lankan Buddhism with a specific focus on Ravana, Vibhishana, and Natha *bodhisatta* as they exemplify these presences in Sri Lankan Buddhism.

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<sup>130</sup> Winslow, D. (1984), A Political Geography of Deities: Space and the Pantheon in Sinhalese Buddhism, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 43(2), 273-291, 274.

<sup>131</sup> Winslow, A Political Geography of Deities, 274.

<sup>132</sup> In Sinhala, the four guardian deities are collectively referred to as *hatara* or *satara varan deviyo*, the four warrant gods, Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, 19.

<sup>133</sup> Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, 30.

<sup>134</sup> Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, 17, 19.

### The Presence of Shaivism and Vaishnavism in Sri Lankan Buddhism

In sixth-century South India, a division between Vaishnava and Shaiva communities started to emerge among Hindus who advocated more or less exclusive devotion (*bhakti*) to Vishnu and Shiva (respectively).<sup>135</sup> Vaishnava and Shaiva Hinduism came to Sri Lanka through different waves of Indian migration waves. As John Holt suggests:

While it is impossible to determine with any great degree of accuracy, I would speculate that much of the Hindu Saiva presence in Sri Lanka originated with the Tamil Colas from the tenth and eleventh centuries, and much of the Hindu Vaisnava presence with the Keralas from the thirteenth and fourteenth.<sup>136</sup>

Most of the kings of the South Indian Chola empire – which flourished from the mid-ninth century until the latter half of the thirteenth century in India – favoured Shiva over Vishnu. The Chola kingdom expanded also to Sri Lanka.<sup>137</sup> In the tenth century, the Chola ruler Rajaraja I conquered part of Sri Lanka and established his kingdom in Polonnaruwa.<sup>138</sup> There, and at other places in the country, the Cholas constructed shrines for Shiva and his son Murugan (who was known by locals under the name Kataragama).<sup>139</sup>

The presence of the Cholas in Sri Lanka has significantly contributed to the connection of Ravana to Sri Lanka.<sup>140</sup> According to Justin Henry (see also Section 1.1.1), it was the Cholas who first identified Sri Lanka as the Lanka of the *Ramayana*. In addition, the Cholas hailed Ravana as a devotee of Shiva. This idea rose into prominence in first-millennium South Indian temple literature and iconography.<sup>141</sup> The Tamils who came to Sri Lanka elaborated upon these ideas. The Sri Lankan Tamils also hailed Ravana as the founder of several temples in Sri Lanka, due to his ancient presence in the country.<sup>142</sup> The temple history of the Konesvaram Temple in Trincomalee is an example of this (see Box 2.1). In Section 1.1.1, I mentioned that according to Henry the apotheosis of Ravana by Sri Lankan Tamils has most probably influenced the Sinhalese perceptions of Ravana's connection to their country. Here I continue with the Vaishnava presence and the cult of

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<sup>135</sup> Younger, P., & Ramanathapillai, R. (2009), Sri Lanka, in K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, & V. Narayanan (Eds.), *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (Vol. 1.). Leiden: Brill, 321-335, 325, 334. Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'Bhakti,' 743. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Bhakti,' 436.

<sup>136</sup> Holt, J. C. (2004), *The Buddhist Visnu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 57.

<sup>137</sup> Karashima, N. (2017), *A Concise History of South India: Issues and Interpretations*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 144-145.

<sup>138</sup> Younger & Ramanathapillai, Sri Lanka, 324.

<sup>139</sup> Younger & Ramanathapillai, Sri Lanka, 324. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 105-106.

<sup>140</sup> For details of the representations of Ravana among the Cholas and their role on Sinhalese Buddhist mythistorical imaginations, see Henry's PhD thesis: Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*.

<sup>141</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 147. As Henry points out with reference to Goldman and Goldman, there is no indication that the Lanka of Valmiki's epic was intended to correspond with the island of Sri Lanka. Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 157.

<sup>142</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 157.

Ravana's brother Vibhishana in Sri Lanka. This cult is also discussed in one of the articles of the special section on the literary history of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka (see Section 1.1.1).

### Box 2.1: Ravana and the Shiva Temple at Trincomalee

The Konesvaram temple in Trincomalee, a port city located on the north-eastern coast of Sri Lanka, is one of the oldest continuous places of worship in Sri Lanka.<sup>143</sup> There was already a Shiva shrine at Trincomalee prior to the advent of the Cholas to Sri Lanka. According to Justin Henry, this shrine is mentioned in a fifth-century text. It says that a shrine dedicated to Shiva was located at 'Gokarna' – which is present day Trincomalee.<sup>144</sup>

Today, the Konesvaram temple at Trincomalee is one of the four most famous Shiva temples in northern Sri Lanka. It is also a popular tourist attraction and often included in *Ramayana* tours (see on *Ramayana* tourism Section 1.2.1).<sup>145</sup> According to the religious studies scholar Paul Younger and Rajmohan Ramanathapillai (scholar in the fields of philosophy, peace, and justice studies), there are multiple legends of the construction of the Konesvaram temple. One legend holds that the original temple was built in 2591 BCE as a southern residence for Shiva (in addition to his northern residence at mount Kailash). Another legend explains that Ravana's mother worshipped daily at the temple and that she was unable to do so one day due to an illness. Ravana tried to cut the lingam – to which a tall cut in the rock on the cliff today bears witness – to take it to his mother, but Shiva pinned Ravana to the rock.<sup>146</sup>

At present, the temple iconography shows multiple local Ravana legends: the story that Ravana sang and played songs in praise of Shiva appears several times in the temple iconography. This legend is recounted in the *Taksina Kailaca Purana* – a text most probably composed before 1622-1624 as it does not mention the devastation of the temple under the Portuguese.<sup>147</sup> Outside the temple on a lower segment of the cliff a Ravana statue contrasts with the clear blue waters (Figure 2.1). This statue faces a small Shiva lingam.

A lengthy description of Ravana's connection to the temple is given at the place of the tall cut in the cliff on which the temple is located. The story displayed on the signboard combines several of the earlier mentioned Ravana legends:

King Ravana came to Thirukoneswaram [...] and prayed that he be bestowed with a Sivalingam. Since there was no immediate response from Lord Koneswara, Ravana got frustrated and attempted to cut the mountain with his sword. He was punished by the Lord for his wrongdoing. Ravana, an ardent devotee of Lord Koneswara, made and improvised veena instrument with one of his ten heads, muscles and hands and sang "Sama Vetha" hymns and appeased for Lord's pardon. Lord Koneswara pardoned him and offered a Sival-

<sup>143</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 1.

<sup>144</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 90. Trincomalee was also known at the time when the first version of the *Mahavamsa* was written (around the sixth century). According to the *Mahavamsa*, Vijaya invited his younger brother to come to Sri Lanka. Reluctant to come himself, the younger brother sent his son (Panduvāsudeva) who arrived at Gokarna. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 7.

<sup>145</sup> See also the article: De Koning & Henry, Ravana and Rama in Sri Lanka.

<sup>146</sup> Younger & Ramanathapillai, Sri Lanka, 333.

<sup>147</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 91-94.

ingam. Era of great Lanka King Ravana was believed to be during the 'Ramayana period,' Before Christ. The Konesar rock that was cut by Ravana is still popularly known as RAVANA-CUT.<sup>148</sup>

Despite the impatience of Ravana that is mentioned here, the story mainly aims to portray him in a favourable way: he is a devotee of Shiva, Shiva pardons him, and it is mentioned that Ravana was a great king of Lanka.



**Figure 2.1:** Statue of Ravana on a lower segment of the cliff facing a Shiva lingam that is located on the temple premises of the Konesvaram temple. Picture taken by author, Trincomalee, March 23, 2016.

According to John Holt, the presence of Vaishnava elements in Sri Lankan Buddhism was mainly the result of the coming of Keralas to Sri Lanka in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. With reference to several authors, Holt mentions that those people who originated from Kerala have settled in the upcountry and coastal regions of Sri Lanka as mercenaries and traders.<sup>149</sup> At the time of their settlement, the residential cities of the Sinhalese rulers were also located in the south (Gampola and Kotte) due to the southward expansion of the (Tamil) Jaffna kingdom.<sup>150</sup> During the Gampola kingdom (1341-1406) and under the Kotte court of Parakrabanu VI (1410-1467), the southwest of Sri Lanka was dominated by two merchant families stemming from Kerala: the Alakeshvaras and the Mehenavara.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>148</sup> I only noticed this signboard when I visited the Koneswaram temple on May 8, 2017. I did not see this signboard in 2015 and 2016.

<sup>149</sup> Holt, *The Buddhist Visnu*, 57.

<sup>150</sup> De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 114.

<sup>151</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 29-30, 38-39.

In contrast to the Chola settlers in the north, who retained their ethnocultural identity, these merchants and traders from Kerala were largely absorbed into the Sinhalese Buddhist caste structure and embraced Buddhism.<sup>152</sup> As a result, they left a long-lasting imprint on Buddhism in Sri Lanka.<sup>153</sup> It was when these merchants from India established their power in the south of Sri Lanka that Vibhishana was mentioned for the first time in Sri Lanka as one of the four guardian deities.<sup>154</sup>



**Figure 2.2:** Laypeople waiting for the Vibhishana *puja* to start in the Vibhishana shrine at the Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya. Picture taken by author, Kelaniya, February 27, 2016.

According to poetic literature composed at the time of the Gampola kingdom, there was an established Vibhishana cult at Kelaniya in the fifteenth century.<sup>155</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere and Sree Padma (see Section 1.1.1 and on the present-day cult Box 2.2) argue that

<sup>152</sup> Dharmadasa, K. N. O. (1992), *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 14; Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 30.

<sup>153</sup> De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 123, 137, 138.

<sup>154</sup> Together with Saman, Ganesha, and Skanda, Vibhishana is mentioned in a 1344 inscription at a Buddhist temple in Gampola. Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 151; Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, 176. In both publications, the authors refer to the work of others (Paranavitana and Gunasekera) with regard to this Lankatilaka inscription.

<sup>155</sup> Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 131.



Vibhishana underwent a transition in the Buddhist pantheon from demon to deity. As Obeyesekere specifies: ‘Vibisana clearly was a demon at one time, being the brother of Ravana, the demon king of the *Ramayana*.’<sup>156</sup> When it comes to interactions between Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Jonathan Walter contends that the Vibhishana cult cannot be considered syncretic as Vibhishana is not deified anywhere outside Sri Lanka. He further argues that there is nothing Hindu about Vibhishana as we encounter him today in Sri Lanka, and that his cult is a *sui generis* phenomenon, although he was indeed part of a complex meeting of Buddhists and Hindus during the Gampola period.<sup>157</sup>

Several of the post-war representations of Ravana discussed in this thesis indicate that Ravana, like Vibhishana, is increasingly distanced from the Hindu/*Ramayana* context. I discuss this process in detail in Chapter 6 where I focus on the ritualising and materialising of several Ravana representations at a Buddhist temple site in Colombo. In the following section I pay attention to the presence of Mahayana Buddhist ideas in Sri Lanka with a special focus on the *bodhisatta* ideal.

### Box 2.2: Present-day Connections of Vibhishana to Kelaniya

In 2015 and 2016, I visited the Buddhist temple complex Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya several times. The Vibhishana shrine located on the temple premises is taken care of by a lay custodian. He performs congregational Vibhishana offerings in which Buddhist lay people participate (see Figure 2.2). As I was told, the Vibhishana cult also attracts a very specific group of people: women who want to have a child.<sup>158</sup>

In 2016, I discussed the presence of the Vibhishana shrine with the chief incumbent of the Kelaniya temple. According to him Lanka was once ruled by king Ravana, who had two brothers: Vibhishana and Kumbakarna. The *Ramayana* explains, he pointed out, that Rama came to Lanka in search for his abducted wife Sita. In reward for helping Rama to defeat Ravana, Vibhishana gained the power to rule over Lanka. People in Sri Lanka started to venerate Vibhishana. At present, they consider him a guardian deity of the area.<sup>159</sup> In the context of *Ravanisation*, Vibhishana’s connection to the Kelaniya area is also mentioned. However, the focus is not on Vibhishana’s kingship but on his ‘tribal’ connection to the area as a *naga*. His blue skin probably contributes to his connection to the *naagas*, who are mythical snakes connected to the water (see Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 on *Ravanisation* and the *naagas*).

Recently a blue statue of a multiple headed Ravana seated on a peacock was placed in the central niche of one of the temple entrance pandals.<sup>160</sup> It is my tentative opinion that this statue – in addition to the extensive elaboration on the *naga* connection to Kelaniya – is an

<sup>156</sup> Obeyesekere, G. (1984), *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 67.

<sup>157</sup> Walters, J. S. (1995), Multireligion on the Bus: Beyond ‘Influence’ and ‘Syncretism’ in the Study of Religious Meetings, in P. Jeganathan & Q. Ismail (Eds.), *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists’ Association, 25-54, 39.

<sup>158</sup> The connection of Vibhishana with fertility is also mentioned in the article of Sree Padma (see Section 1.1.1).

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Kollupitiya Mahinda Sangharakkitha, the chief incumbent of the Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya, Kelaniya, February 27, 2016.

<sup>160</sup> I only noticed the presence of this statue in the pandal on Facebook (January 1, 2020) and have never seen it myself.



indication of the efforts to give prominence to Ravana over Vibhishana in the process of *Ravanisation* and to integrate Vibhishana's alleged connection to Kelaniya into the Hela-Ravana representation of the past.

### The Presence of Mahayana Buddhism in Sri Lanka

Approximately 100 years prior to the reign of Ashoka (circa 250 BCE) in India, a council took place in which a split within Buddhism occurred. During the reign of Ashoka, a third council took place in which the Sthaviras emerged as the Theravada school. The Theravada school tried to restore 'orthodox Buddhism.' Later, the others became known as the Mahayana school. It has been argued (but recently also criticised by some scholars) that the ideal of the *bodhisatta* (Buddha to be) is central to Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>161</sup>

Mahayana Buddhist doctrine also spread to Sri Lanka. One of the rivalling (to Theravada doctrine) independent Buddhist schools in Sri Lanka (the Abhayagiri fraternity; see Section 2.2) shared some things in common with Mahayana Buddhism. In the third century, the Theravada school in Sri Lanka urged the ruler to establish orthodoxy, but he was unable to ban certain Mahayana doctrines. A century later King Mahasena even became a partisan of Mahayana Buddhism and suppressed Theravada Buddhism.<sup>162</sup> Under his successor it was the other way around: Theravada Buddhism was favoured again. As the historian De Silva argues about the presence of Mahayana Buddhism in Sri Lanka:

Though it was never able to displace Theravada Buddhism from its position of primacy, Mahayanism had a profound influence on Sri Lankan Buddhism. This is achieved by the response it evoked among the people, in the shift of emphasis from the ethical to the devotional aspect of religion. To the lay Buddhist, Mahayanist ritual and ceremonies had a compelling attraction, and they became a vital part of worship [...]. The Mahayanist influence was also seen in the increasing popularity of images of the Buddha and of bodhisattvas in Buddhist worship.<sup>163</sup>

Because I discuss some devotional activities of lay people in the next section, I focus here on the *bodhisatta* ideal in Sri Lanka. The *bodhisatta* concept is according to Holt primarily employed in Sri Lanka to refer to the previous lives of Gautama Buddha.<sup>164</sup> But this concept of a 'Buddha-to-be' applies to others as well. An example is Avalokiteshvara, the

<sup>161</sup> It is contested whether the third council took place under the reign of Ashoka. Also, it is unclear when the Mahayana fraternity exactly became a tradition. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 11, 62. This is a very simplified account. For a critical reflection on nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of the origin of Mahayana Buddhism, see: Drewes, D. (2010), Early Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism I: Recent Scholarship, *Religion Compass*, 4(2), 55-65.

<sup>162</sup> Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 116.

<sup>163</sup> De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 65.

<sup>164</sup> Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 53. At present, the *bodhisatta* ideal is primarily employed in Sri Lanka to refer to the previous lives of Gautama Buddha. See also: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Bódhisatwayó,' 433; Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'bodhisatta,' 546.

most well-known *bodhisatta* in Sri Lanka – especially since he became equated with Natha, who was a guardian deity (see the introductory part of this section) and Maitreya (who is considered the future Buddha).<sup>165</sup> This complex relationship is extensively described by John Holt.

The earliest reference to Avalokiteshvara in Sri Lanka was found in an inscription from the Tiriya hermitage, along with several bronze images of Avalokiteshvara and Tara, stemming from the seventh or eighth century.<sup>166</sup> Later statues of Avalokiteshvara as Natha began to appear in halls of worship at Buddhist sites among the other guardian deities. Thus, some Sinhalese Buddhists regarded the *bodhisatta* Avalokiteshvara as a protective deity. Although still respecting his *bodhisatta* ideal, they increasingly started to emphasize his ‘worldly involvement’ over his ‘transcendent’ side. His representations in Sri Lanka over the centuries show shifts in the iconic representation of asceticism to royal power, indicating the transformation of Avalokiteshvara from a Mahayana *bodhisatta* to a Sinhalese national guardian deity.<sup>167</sup> From the Gampola era (1341-1415) onwards, Avalokiteshvara became known as the protective deity Natha.<sup>168</sup> Natha, considered a protective deity in the Kandyan era, got his own shrine in Kandy opposite the Temple of the Tooth. This reflected his historical intimacy with religiopolitical power.<sup>169</sup> In the middle of the eighteenth century he started to be considered one of the four guardian deities, replacing Vibhishana.<sup>170</sup>

Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicles relate the *bodhisatta* ideal to kingship: kings were often regarded as *bodhisattas*. It is mentioned in a tenth-century inscription that only *bodhisattas* can become kings of Sri Lanka, indicating that the main task of the king was to provide welfare to others.<sup>171</sup> In Chapter 6, I discuss how the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, a Buddhist site, also depicts Ravana as an ancient king and *bodhisatta*. It is for this reason that I have mentioned the *bodhisatta* ideal in the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon.

### 2.2.2 Rituals in the Sri Lankan Buddhist Pantheon

In Chapters 6 and 7, I discuss several representations of Ravana that have emerged in post-war Sri Lanka that relate him to the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon. In this section, I therefore briefly introduce some (mostly lay) rituals centring on the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon.<sup>172</sup> Some of the examples of lay rituals given here are very specific because they are based on my fieldwork research.

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<sup>165</sup> Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 10, 11; Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, 64, 65.

<sup>166</sup> Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 68.

<sup>167</sup> Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 75-76.

<sup>168</sup> Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 81, 98.

<sup>169</sup> Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 126.

<sup>170</sup> Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 171-172.

<sup>171</sup> Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 118.

<sup>172</sup> For the rituals of lay people to the Buddha, relics are of central importance. These rituals produce sensory experiences. See: Trainor, K. (2007), *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism: Rematerialising the Sri Lankan Theravada tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 152-188.

*Puja* can be translated as 'offering' or 'rite of worship'.<sup>173</sup> In the context of Sri Lankan Buddhism, Gombrich and Obeyesekere describe *puja* as 'the formal act of worship carried out before a god or a Buddha image'.<sup>174</sup> *Puja* involves bowing, making offerings of flowers, candles, incense, etc., and chanting, and can be conducted at home or at the temple site.<sup>175</sup> As the definition indicates, *puja* can be directed to the Buddha and to deities. The Buddha *puja* is performed to a Buddha image, the *stupa* (reliquary), or the Bodhi tree, the latter two considered to be representations of Buddha.<sup>176</sup> The Bodhi *puja* centres on the Bodhi tree itself and includes the offering of flowers, lamps, incense, etc., circumambulation, and ritual watering.<sup>177</sup> Most Buddhists in Sri Lanka daily offer a flower and/or oil lamp to the Buddha.

Wickremaratne mentions that the so-called *deva puja*, or offering to deities, in Sri Lankan Buddhism includes the offering of flowers, trays of fruits, milk rice, or money.<sup>178</sup> At Buddhist temple sites, these offering plates are taken by a lay priest (*kapurala*) – who is believed to function as an intermediary between lay people and the deity/demon – in the inner sanctum and presented to the deity (or demon). In addition to shrines that are located at Buddhist temple sites, there are village shrines. These are also taken care of by *kapuralas*. I briefly introduce here two rituals (one in an urban context and one in a rural context) and discuss with reference to other authors how the deities and demons addressed in these rituals saw their positions in the pantheon consolidated and why they are addressed by laity. These two examples set a background for my discussion in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of Ravana and the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon.

### **Huniyam puja: A private thanksgiving offering to Huniyam at an urban shrine**

According to Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, in 1950s an unorthodox monk opened a Huniyam shrine in Colombo. For the monk, the deity Kataragama was too exalted to be involved in worldly matters. Huniyam, by contrast, was an excellent substitute because he was as demon closely associated with the human sphere. The monk

<sup>173</sup> Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'pūj,' 641.

<sup>174</sup> Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, xvi. *Puja* is translated by Holt as 'rite of worship.' See Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 16. In the glossary of *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, *puja* is referred to as offering: Obeyesekere, G. (2018), *The Buddha in Sri Lanka: Histories and Stories*, New York: Routledge, 310.

<sup>175</sup> Harvey, P. (2013), *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (2nd ed.), New York: Cambridge University Press, 240.

<sup>176</sup> Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 240. *Stupa* means heap. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Stūpa,' 717. A *stupa* functions in Buddhism as a reliquary.

<sup>177</sup> According to several Sri Lankan chronicles (such as the *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*; see Section 2.3.1.1), a branch of the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha allegedly attained enlightenment in India was brought to Anuradhapura in the third century B.C. Soon after, rituals to the Bodhi tree were developed at this site. See: Siriweera, W. I. (1996), *The Sacred Precincts of the Sri Maha Bodhi Tree in Anuradhapura*, in H. S. S. Nissanka (Ed.), *Maha Bodhi Tree in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka: The Oldest Historical Tree in the World*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1-18, 3-9. Congregational Buddha *pujas*, often led by a monk, take place at Buddhist temples. In the evening time, offerings to the Buddha include trays with flowers, incense sticks, beverages, and medicinal herbs. Wickremaratne, S. (2006), *Buddha in Sri Lanka: Remembered Yesterdays*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 50.

<sup>178</sup> Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'devāpūjā,' 492-493.

enshrined two statues of Huniyam to show his malevolent and benevolent sides: one displayed him as a demon (*yaksa*), the other as a deity. These different representations related to the idea that Huniyam is a deity during the waxing moon and a demon during the waning moon. In his benevolent form, people can address him for help, and in his malevolent form to curse.<sup>179</sup>

At the time of the research conducted by Gombrich and Obeyesekere, most of the visitors of the shrine referred to Huniyam as a deity. Since he was regarded in the past as a demon, Gombrich and Obeyesekere considered this a process of transformation. The popularity of Huniyam, whose name is derived from the word for sorcery, can still be attributed to his malevolent side, however, thus indicating that his original identity as a demon continued to play an important role. Before he became popular in an urban context, Huniyam was the personal guardian of exorcists and other ritual specialists.<sup>180</sup>

Huniyam, as already noticed by Gombrich and Obeyesekere, was also referred to by some devotees as *Gambara deviyo* (god).<sup>181</sup> It is in this fashion that I encountered him at many Buddhist temple sites in Colombo. One of the *Gambara deviyo* shrines is located at the famous Bellanvila Maharaja Viharaya. At this temple site, multiple shrines are located around the Bodhi tree – for example: the Dedimunda, Kataragama, Natha, Paththini, Vibhishana, Saman, and *Gambara* shrines. I once went there with a family who had made a vow (*baraya*) to Huniyam.<sup>182</sup> Since the wish of one of the family members was fulfilled – which he kept secret – the entire family went to the *devalaya* to conduct a Huniyam *puja*. We went to the Bellanvila Maharaja Viharaya on a Wednesday because they considered this day an auspicious day for Huniyam. The family bought an offering plate containing multiple fruits and decorated it with a white garland since, as they explained, ‘white is the colour of Huniyam.’ After paying respect to the Buddha, we went to the *Gambara deviyo* shrine. The offering plate was handed over (together with some money) to the *kapurala* who then took the offering plate behind the plastic screen that hid the statues from view. There, he muttered some words of thanks. The *puja* took only five minutes and was a private thanksgiving of this family to Huniyam mediated by the *kapurala*. The fruits were returned and distributed among the family members, me, and my research assistant.<sup>183</sup>

### **Adukku puja: An agricultural thanksgiving offering to village deities**

Because most of the villagers in rural areas subsist on paddy cultivation, several of the village rituals are related to their main source of income. One of these rituals is the *adukku*

<sup>179</sup> Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, 110, 122.

<sup>180</sup> Seth Fleisher criticises the observations of ‘the transformation of Huniyam’ by Gombrich and Obeyesekere. See: Fleisher, S. L. (1996), Rethinking Historical Change in Sri Lankan Ritual: Deities, Demons, Sorcery, and the Ritualization of Resistance in the Sinhala Traditions of Suniyam, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 52(1), 29-59.

<sup>181</sup> Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, xvi.

<sup>182</sup> For *baraya/bāra*, see: Obeyesekere, G. (1977), Social Change and the Deities: Rise of the Kataragama Cult in Modern Sri Lanka, *Man*, 12(3/4), 377-396, 378.

<sup>183</sup> I joined this family for the Huniyam *puja* at the Bellanvila Maharaja Viharaya on May 3, 2017.

*puja*: '[...] a ritual of thanksgiving for the first agricultural season and an offering to seek blessings for the new cultivation cycle ahead.'<sup>184</sup> The ritual consists of two parts: the *gedara adukkuva* and *kale adukkuva*. The latter takes place in the forest (*kale*) and only men are allowed to participate. They bring the requisite bit of the first harvest and select a spot to offer pots of rice to the local deities. The *gedara adukkuva* takes place at home on the same day. Here, too, food is prepared and the *kapurala* offers the food to the deities and asks them to protect the villagers and the harvest.<sup>185</sup>

### Box 2.3: Hiti Bandara, A Story of Post-mortem Deification of a Young Boy

Deborah Winslow provides a very localised story of post-mortem deification. The story is about the local deity Hiti *bandara*, attached to a shrine close to Hettipola. Hettipola is located close to Lakegala, the mountain to be discussed in detail in Chapter 7. The story of Hiti *bandara* is also known in the Lakegala-area.

The story of Hiti *bandara* as described by Winslow is about a young boy named Hiti Hami who fell very ill. His parents took him to a village to get him cured, but unfortunately, he died on the way. When they cremated him, a deity arose from the ashes. He told his family members that he was the deity Hiti *bandara* and that they should build him a shrine. He then possessed a family member, who ran into a river and emerged from the water with an enormous bracelet. This bracelet was later enshrined in the Hiti *bandara* shrine.<sup>186</sup>

This story exemplifies a pattern that applies to several rural village shrines. First, it is believed that the local deity was a human in his/her previous life and is deified after passing away (post-mortem deification).<sup>187</sup> The human often died an unfortunate death (a restless soul) or did something very beneficial for the village. Second, the deity is often believed to have lived or died near the location of the village, thus he/she is geographically bound to the particular area. As Winslow argues, '[t]he story accounts for a single shrine of the deity in a single place [...] without connection to another deity.'<sup>188</sup> Third, the deity him/herself points out that he/she should be venerated, and sometimes provides a commemorative object. Objects used in village shrines allegedly appeared miraculously, like the bracelet from the water.<sup>189</sup>

A villager from Lakegala area told me a story of why they offer the first rice to Vanniya *bandara deviyo*. He explained that Vanniya *bandara deviyo* was previously a farmer who owned a very large paddy field. At the time of harvesting, he gave betel to the villagers

<sup>184</sup> Ananda, T., & Nahallage, C. (2016), Unique Religious and Cultural Practices as Evident in the Kandyan Village of Meemure, *University of Sri Jayewardenepura Graduate Studies*, 73-82, 79. <http://dr.lib.sjp.ac.lk/handle/123456789/5951>. This article is written with the aim to preserve the ancient village traditions. See Section 7.3. *Adukkuva* means 'pile, heap of things placed one upon another; assortment of provisions ready dressed.' See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Adukkuva,' 15, 'Kelaya,' 141, 'Gedara,' 166.

<sup>185</sup> Ananda & Nahallage, Unique Religious and Cultural Practices, 79-80.

<sup>186</sup> Winslow, A Political Geography of Deities, 286.

<sup>187</sup> Winslow, A Political Geography of Deities, 286.

<sup>188</sup> Winslow, A Political Geography of Deities, 286.

<sup>189</sup> I was told several stories in the villages about how, for instance, conch shells miraculously emerged from the water.

and invited them to come and reap the harvest. He shot an animal and prepared a meal for the villagers, but no one came. After he died, none of the paddy fields prospered. Because of that, the villagers started to venerate this person as Vanniya *bandara deviyo* (see on post-mortem deification Box 2.3). The villager who told the story explained that his family annually gives the first rice in the *adukku puja* to Vanniya *bandara deviyo* as they consider him to be in charge of the paddy fields.<sup>190</sup>

The Huniyam *puja* provides an example of why lay people visit shrines at Buddhist temple sites: they make a vow and after their wish is fulfilled, they give a *deva puja* as thanksgiving. The specific example of Huniyam also illustrates that the positions of deities and demons in the pantheon are subject to change. The *adukku puja* illustrates the belief in the close involvement of deities in basic human needs: a prosperous harvest. In addition, this ritual illustrates the process of post-mortem deification in the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon. I discuss both ‘types of rituals’ and Ravana’s connection to the Sri Lanka Buddhist pantheon in more detail in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. In those chapters, I follow an emic perspective and explore at a micro level how Sinhalese Buddhists consider Ravana to be related to the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon by following specific dynamics that are inherent to Sri Lankan Buddhism.

### 2.2.3 The Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka

Some of the historical interactions of Buddhism with other traditions have resulted in reactionary responses. I discuss here the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka in which interactions with Christian missionaries played a central role.<sup>191</sup>

Prior to the Dutch takeover of parts of Sri Lanka from the Portuguese in 1658 – who both ruled only parts of the country – Buddhism faced some challenging times. King Rajasingha I (r. 1580-1591 in Sitawaka) converted to Shaivism, for instance, and persecuted Buddhism.<sup>192</sup> Buddhism was in such a weakened state in the sixteenth century that the indigenous ordination of monks was lost. The number of monks required to ordinate new monks was not available anymore in the entire country.<sup>193</sup> Under the rule of King Sri Vijaya Rajasingha, a monk called Saranankara persuaded the king to send a mission to Siam (Thailand) to re-establish the order of monks in Sri Lanka. The first mission failed, but under the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasingha (r. 1747-1782) Siamese monks were brought to Sri Lanka and Saranankara received higher ordination. With this mission the Siam *nikaya* was established in Sri Lanka.<sup>194</sup> With some exceptions, the Siam *nikaya*

<sup>190</sup> Conversation, 02-04-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.

<sup>191</sup> Early signs of Buddhist revivalism in Sri Lanka can be traced some centuries back. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 45.

<sup>192</sup> Ahir, D. C. (2000), *Glimpses of Sri Lankan Buddhism*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 81.

<sup>193</sup> Gombrich (2006), *Theravada Buddhism*, 139.

<sup>194</sup> Later, the Siam *nikaya* split into two chapters: the Asgiriya and Malwatta. Both sub denominations have their head monasteries in Kandy. Ahir, *Glimpses of Sri Lankan Buddhism*, 82, 83.

reserved ordination for people belonging to the landholding caste.<sup>195</sup> Due to the refusal to ordain monks from lower castes, two other fraternities emerged: the Amarapura *nikaya* in 1803 and the Ramanna *nikaya* in 1864. At present, these three *nikayas* are the main fraternities of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Though there are some differences in dress between the three *nikayas*, there is almost no difference when it comes to teachings.<sup>196</sup>

Meanwhile Christian missionaries strengthened their positions in Sri Lanka. They established some missionary organisations in Sri Lanka mainly between 1805 and 1818.<sup>197</sup> Whereas earlier British administrators had followed a policy of non-interference and had committed to protecting Buddhism, Christian missionaries convinced the administrators that 'Christianisation' would ensure social order. They started missionary campaigns in Sri Lanka for which they mainly used education, preaching, and pamphleteering.<sup>198</sup> Their activities met with resistance from Buddhist monks.<sup>199</sup> As pointed out by several scholars, the nineteenth-century Buddhist revival was both reactionary and modelled on the Christian missionary strategies.<sup>200</sup> It was Hikkaduve Sumangala (1826-1911), a monk from Galle, who wrote extensively against the anti-Buddhist propaganda of the Christian missionaries and established a printing press in Galle.<sup>201</sup> One of the central concerns expressed in his writings was that Buddhism would decline in Sri Lanka under the British rule. To strengthen the position of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, he sought the support of monks in other Buddhist countries.<sup>202</sup> In 1891 he became the president of the Maha Bodhi Society – a society launched by Dharmapala (see Section 2.3.1) to revive Buddhism in India and to win back the ownership of Bodhi Gaya, the place in India where Buddha allegedly reached *nirvana*.<sup>203</sup>

The activities of those monks were noticed by the founders of the Theosophical Society (1875), Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Olcott. Olcott played a significant role in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka, and he is mainly praised for the strengthening of the role of the laity and their perceptions of

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<sup>195</sup> Gombrich (2006), *Theravada Buddhism*, 166.

<sup>196</sup> For more on differences between the three fraternities, see: Ahir, *Glimpses of Sri Lankan Buddhism*, 82-84.

<sup>197</sup> Gombrich (2006), *Theravada Buddhism*, 175.

<sup>198</sup> Prothero, S. R. (2011), *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 85; Gombrich (2006), *Theravada Buddhism*, 176; Ahir, *Glimpses of Sri Lankan Buddhism*, 26.

<sup>199</sup> Two monks in the nineteenth century were very actively involved in resisting missionary activities: Migettuwatte Gunananda and Hikkaduve Sumangala. Tambiah, S. J. (1992), *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 5. See on Migettuwatte Gunananda: Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 47.

<sup>200</sup> Both the Tamil Shaivist revival and Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka were – similar to the Buddhist revival – reactive to proselytising Christian missionaries and their increased dominance in the Tamil dominated areas. See on Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879), the leading figure of the Tamil Shaivist revival: Wilson and Chandrakathan, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, 43, 88.

<sup>201</sup> Gombrich (2006), *Theravada Buddhism*, 179-180.

<sup>202</sup> Blackburn, A. M. (2011), 'Buddhist Revival' and the 'Work of Culture,' in G. Obeyesekere & H. L. Seneviratne (Eds.), *The Anthropologist and the Native: Essays for Gananath Obeyesekere*, London: Anthem Press, 221-246.

<sup>203</sup> Gombrich, (1988), *Theravada Buddhism*, 133, 139.

Buddhism.<sup>204</sup> Olcott supported the Buddhists in their fight against the missionaries. Also, like the missionaries, he established schools and societies to spread his ideas alongside Hikkaduve Sumangala.<sup>205</sup> He also founded seven lay branches and a monastic branch of the Buddhist Theosophical Society.<sup>206</sup>

One of the persons inspired by Olcott was Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933). Since Dharmapala's interpretations of specific concepts from the *Mahavamsa* have strongly influenced Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology in twentieth-century Sri Lanka, I discuss these interpretations and the function of the *Mahavamsa* in the following section.

## 2.3 Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism and Political Buddhism in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Sri Lanka

Scholars disagree about when exactly Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism emerged and when ethnicity and religion joined hands.<sup>207</sup> What is broadly agreed upon, however, is that Anagarika Dharmapala was behind the rise of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology in the twentieth century. According to the anthropologist Bruce Kapferer '[h]is teachings from the late-nineteenth century to the present have had crucial significance in Buddhist re-evaluations and in linking readings of the Buddha doctrine with a growing Sinhala ethnic awareness and, especially the interest of the Sinhala urban-based bourgeoisie.'<sup>208</sup> I discuss here Dharmapala's role in the development of a twentieth-century Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology in more detail.

### 2.3.1 Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Sri Lanka

Multiple factors have contributed to increased nationalist feelings and self-consciousness among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Missionaries, for instance, questioned the Buddhist identity (see Section 2.2.3). The presence of colonisers gave also rise to a new elite group in Sri Lanka.

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<sup>204</sup> Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 48.

<sup>205</sup> Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism* was reviewed by Hikkaduva Sumangala. This *Catechism* shows again how the Buddhist revival was shaped by the missionary didactic models: it was written in a similar 'question-answer' structure as the protestant catechism and aimed to explain the Buddhist fundamental principles to laity. Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, 101-102.

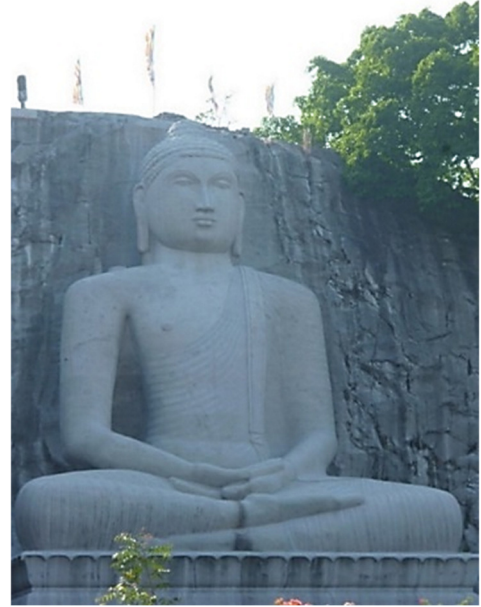
<sup>206</sup> Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, 97-98.

<sup>207</sup> DeVotta, N. (2007), *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*, Washington: East-West Center Washington, 10. <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/ps040.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=32212> DeVotta describes elsewhere that religious nationalism (in Sri Lanka) extends back to at least the sixteenth century, while linguistic nationalism is a recent phenomenon. DeVotta, N. (2004), *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 9.

<sup>208</sup> Kapferer, B. (2001), Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka, *Communal/Plural: Journal of Transnational & Cross-Cultural Studies*, 9(1), 33-67, 51.



The nascent middle and upper classes enjoyed the western and Christian school curriculum introduced by the colonisers, but they experienced discrimination at the same time. Lamenting their subordinate position, they started to investigate their own identity.<sup>209</sup> Among these middle- and upper-class Sri Lankans, ideas of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country emerged.<sup>210</sup> This idea also affected how the Sinhalese Buddhist majority viewed minorities.



**Figure 2.3:** The Buddhist site Rambodagalla is famous for the construction of a massive Buddha statue out of a rock of 67.5 feet in height. According to the chief incumbent of the Buddhist site, the construction of this Buddha statue began in 2002 after the blasting of the ancient sandstone statues in Afghanistan. In 2009, the statue was officially revealed (interview with chief incumbent of the Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya, Rambodagalla, March 2, 2016; see also Section 5.3.1). Picture taken by author, Rambodagalla, March 2, 2016.

Anti-minority sentiments among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority were present at the time of British colonial rule. The British had placed the Tamils in a position of power because they viewed the Sinhalese Buddhists as the largest potential threat. The Tamils were thus overrepresented in bureaucracy, civil service, and educational institutions. The 'divide-and-rule' practice of the British angered the underrepresented Sinhalese majority whose religion was also marginalised by the British.

In the political arena of post-independence Sri Lanka, ethnic discrimination of minorities to ensure the position of the majority was central to the competition between Sinhalese Buddhist parties. Ethnic outbidding, according to the South Asian Studies scholar P. Sahadevan and political scientist Neil DeVotta, caused the marginalised to lose confidence in the state's institutions, and promoted reactive nationalism.<sup>211</sup> Key legislative

<sup>209</sup> Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 17, 22.

<sup>210</sup> Dharmadasa mentions that in the nineteenth century the focus of Sinhalese Buddhist identity was on Buddhism (religion) and in the twentieth century on language. See: Dharmadasa, K. N. O. (2007), Sri Lanka, in A. Simpson (Ed.), *Language and National Identity in Asia*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 116-138, 118.

<sup>211</sup> Sahadevan, P., & DeVotta, N. (2006), *Politics of Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi: Manak, 4.

changes established Sinhala as the official language (1956) and recognised Buddhism as the foremost religion of the country (1972).<sup>212</sup>

In the years surrounding independence, language was a dominant theme in the political arena. Already in 1943, a resolution was introduced in which it was proposed to make Sinhala the only official language.<sup>213</sup> Language was a central issue in the election campaigns of 1956. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the leader of the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), foregrounded the language issue in his victorious election campaign. The United National Party (UNP) – the defeated party – promised prior to the election that Sinhala and Tamil would both be made official languages; Bandaranaike, by contrast, promised to make Sinhala the only official language. In June 1956, the House of Representatives passed a bill that made Sinhala the official language of the country.<sup>214</sup>

After winning the election, Bandaranaike afforded special privileges to Buddhism in public affairs.<sup>215</sup> In the constitution of 1972, Buddhism was given a special status: it was formulated that Buddhism should be protected and fostered by the state.<sup>216</sup> As Benjamin Schonthal (2016) discusses, an important change took place within this law in 1978.<sup>217</sup> Instead of ‘protecting Buddhism,’ the task of the government came to be expressed as protecting the Buddhist *sasana* (Buddha’s legacy).<sup>218</sup> This subtle shift in language reflected what Schonthal coins as ‘territorialized Buddhist nationalism.’ In addition to the Buddhist teachings, the state was now justified in protecting Buddhist properties, material objects such as shrines and statues, and geographical spaces.<sup>219</sup> Moreover, in the context of the civil war, Buddhist nationalists found ‘legal’ justification for the use violence in liberating Buddhist places and in striving for the unification of the country under a Buddhist flag (see also Box 2.4). Interpretations of the *Mahavamsa* served to justify Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists’ claims of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country.

<sup>212</sup> Aliff, S. M. (2015), Post-War Conflict in Sri Lanka: Violence against Sri Lankan Muslims and Buddhist Hegemony, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 59, 109-125, 114. <https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.59.109>

<sup>213</sup> DeVotta, *Blowback*, 48. It was also the time of the Swabasha movement, a movement that demanded to replace English with Sinhala and Tamil as official languages. English was the official language in the educational and governmental arenas. Due to missionary activities in northern Sri Lanka, the Tamils easily adopted English and were less represented in the Swabasha movement. DeVotta, *Blowback*, 29.

<sup>214</sup> DeVotta, N. (2005), From Ethnic Outbidding to Ethnic Conflict: The Institutional Bases for Sri Lanka’s Separatist War, *Nations and Nationalism*, 11(1), 141-159, 148-152.

<sup>215</sup> Kemper, S. (1991), *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 163, 169.

<sup>216</sup> DeVotta, Engaging Sinhalese Buddhist Majoritarianism, 77; Rampton, D. (2011), ‘Deeper Hegemony’: The Politics of Sinhala Nationalist Authenticity and the Failures of Power-Sharing in Sri Lanka, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 49(2), 245–273, 260-261.

<sup>217</sup> Schonthal, B. (2016), Securing the Sasana through Law: Buddhist Constitutionalism and Buddhist-interest Litigation in Sri Lanka, *Modern Asian Studies*, 50(6), 1966-2008, 1991, 1992, 1994.

<sup>218</sup> According to John Ross Carter *sasanaya* is an ambiguous concept. It is frequently met in conjunction with the term Buddha. The term means basically instruction (or association) but is now often employed as institution or dispensation (specifically the Buddhist institution, legacy, or dispensation). See: Carter, J. R. (1977), A History of Early Buddhism, *Religious Studies*, 13(3), 263–287; Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘*Sasanga*,’ 673.

<sup>219</sup> Schonthal, Securing the Sasana through Law, 1974-1992.

**Box 2.4: Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism, Statues, and Territory**

Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists have exploited the 'legal' justification of the special status of Buddhism, to justify their use of violence in liberating Buddhist places and in striving for the unification of the country under a Buddhist flag. This was made very explicit in one of the attacks on Muslim properties in post-war Sri Lanka. In April 2012, a monk incited to destroy a mosque in Dambulla because it was allegedly located at a Buddhist sacred site. The monks involved in this attack referred to the 1978 legislation to reinforce their claim that both the mosque and a nearby Hindu temple should be demolished because they were built on Buddhist sacred ground.<sup>220</sup>

Gananath Obeyesekere mentions that the presence of Buddha statues and other edifices in the public sphere in Sri Lanka are public symbols of Buddhist nationalism. As he argues about the construction of massive Buddha statues in Sri Lanka: '[...] the size of the edifices is an attempt to regain the self-esteem of Buddhists through overcompensation, manifest in spatial symbolism.'<sup>221</sup> Whereas the locations of most of the recently constructed Buddha statues do not relate to localised stories of Buddha's alleged visits to those specific localities, the construction of these statues relates to larger Sinhalese Buddhist ideological implications that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country.

**2.3.1.1 Interpretations of the *Mahavamsa* in Twentieth-Century Sri Lanka**

One of the persons who was inspired to re-appreciate Buddhism after intensive contacts with Western Christians was Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933). Dharmapala was born in a wealthy Buddhist family in Colombo and went to a Christian school. There he developed an aversion to Christianity, which led him to embrace ideas from the Buddhist revivalists.<sup>222</sup> More than his predecessors, he actively resisted foreign influences in the country and in Buddhism.<sup>223</sup> His most famous contributions to the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka and early twentieth-century manifestations of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism are his interpretations of specific sections of the *Mahavamsa*. I discuss here some of Dharmapala's interpretations of concepts from this chronicle that have been employed in the context of twentieth-century Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism.

The *Mahavamsa* is a chronicle that contains a mythistorical account of part of the history of Sri Lanka. The earliest sections of the *Mahavamsa* were written in the sixth century by the Buddhist monk Mahanama, and the work has been extended and rewritten several times since then: in the twelfth century, the fourteenth century, and the eighteenth

<sup>220</sup> Schonthal, *Securing the Sasana through Law*, 2007.

<sup>221</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 303, 304.

<sup>222</sup> Grant, P. (2009), *Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*, Albany: Suny Press, 68.

<sup>223</sup> Dharmapala joined the Theosophical Society but broke away from it in a latter phase of his life. After visiting Bodh Gaya, he felt a need to revive Buddhism and to restore the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. He broke away from the Theosophical Society since it favoured both Hinduism and Buddhism and his fight to restore Bodh Gaya was against local Hindus. For the revival of Bodh Gaya he founded the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 54.

century.<sup>224</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, the *Mahavamsa* was Sri Lanka's most famous chronicle. Until its discovery and translation in the 1930s by the British civil servant George Turnour (1779-1843), most Sri Lankans were not that familiar with the text, although parts of it circulated as oral tradition.<sup>225</sup> From the nineteenth century onwards, the *Mahavamsa* was believed to contain a historical account of Sri Lanka, and it was employed at an early stage by Sinhalese Buddhists to make claims for the protection of Buddhist sacred sites. In the 1890s, it was cited in a petition to protect a Bo tree (considered a sacred tree in Sri Lankan Buddhism).<sup>226</sup>

The most well-known narratives from the *Mahavamsa* among Sinhalese Buddhists are the alleged visits of Gautama Buddha and of Vijaya to Lanka. These narratives can be found in the first seven chapters of the *Mahavamsa* (which contains 37 chapters in total). The first chapter of the *Mahavamsa* recounts three visits of Gautama Buddha to Lanka. For the Sinhalese Buddhist perception of Sri Lanka as a Buddhist country, the first visit of Gautama Buddha to Lanka is important. I discuss the other two visits of Buddha to Lanka in Chapter 4 because they are less relevant to the envisioning of Sri Lanka as a Buddhist country as they are to *Ravanisation*.

On his first visit to Lanka, the Buddha is believed to have encountered non-human beings, the *yakshas* (for more on *yakshas*, see Section 4.2).<sup>227</sup> According to the *Mahavamsa*, the Buddha terrified the *yakshas* and sent them away.<sup>228</sup> After he had banished them, he preached his doctrine to other beings who accepted his doctrine. It is said that Buddha had known Lanka 'as a place where his doctrine should (thereafter) shine in glory.' In the original language (Pali) of the aforementioned quotation, the word *dipa* is used. The word *dipa*, as emeritus professor in the History of Religions Peter Schalk suggests, is open to multiple interpretations, for example 'light.'<sup>229</sup> Dharmapala interpreted the word *dipa* as a physical island (Sanskrit: *dvipa*), which allowed him to conceptualize Lanka as the

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<sup>224</sup> Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 4. Some refer to the extension of the *Mahavamsa* as the *Culavamsa*. Grant, *Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict*, 46.

<sup>225</sup> Wickramasinghe, N. (2014), *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 94.

<sup>226</sup> For the example of the Bo tree, Wickramasinghe refers to the work of John Rogers: Rogers, J. D. (1987), *Crime, Justice and Society in Colonial Sri Lanka*, London: Curzon, 100. Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 93.

<sup>227</sup> *Mahavamsa* 1:18-20. In: *The Mahavamsa* (W. Geiger, Trans.), (1908), London: Pali Text Society, 3.

<sup>228</sup> In the *Dipavamsa*, a Sri Lankan chronicle written one or two centuries prior to the *Mahavamsa*, the Buddha expelled the *yakshas* as well but in a more benevolent way. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 4. Another difference between the two chronicles is that in the *Dipavamsa* the encounter of Vijaya with the *yaksha* inhabitants of Lanka is absent. So, it is mentioned that the *Mahavamsa* is not consistent when it comes to the *yakshas*: in the first chapter they were sent away by Buddha, while Vijaya encounters them again in Lanka in the seventh chapter. Little, D. (1994), *Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 27; Strathern, A. (2009), The Vijaya Origin Myth of Sri Lanka and the Strangeness of Kingship, *Past and Present*, 203(1), 3-28, 22.

<sup>229</sup> Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Dīpa,' 362.

island of the *dhamma* (*dhammadipa*).<sup>230</sup> Consequently, in what became the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology, the Buddha designated the island as a repository for his doctrine (Buddhism).<sup>231</sup> This is also supported by the section from the *Mahavamsa* where the Buddha prophesies to Sakka (Indra) that his religion will be established in Lanka.<sup>232</sup>

In addition to the three visits of Buddha to Lanka, the *Mahavamsa* also narrates that Vijaya, a prince from north India, arrived with 700 followers in Lanka on the day Buddha took his last breath.<sup>233</sup> Due to his cruel deeds, Vijaya had been banished from India by his father.<sup>234</sup> According to the *Mahavamsa*, having prophesied to Sakka (Indra) on that day that his religion would be established in Lanka, the Buddha charged Sakka (Indra) with protecting the island, and Sakka in turn appointed Uppalavan (Vishnu) to protect Vijaya and Lanka.<sup>235</sup> Vijaya and his men were given a sacred thread that gave them protection against the evil deeds of the female *yakshas*. Vijaya saw through the tricks of the female *yaksha* Kuveni, whom he encountered upon arrival in Lanka. Kuveni became his wife. With the help of Kuveni, Vijaya dispelled the other *yakshas*. Kuveni was later banished by Vijaya, who went on to marry a Pandu (south Indian) princess. The community established in Sri Lanka under Vijaya's reign became considered the ancestors of the Sinhalese.

Vijaya allegedly descended from a north Indian princess who had been abducted by a lion. Dharmapala deemed Vijaya the ancestor of the Sinhalese, who are for this reason called 'people of the lion.'<sup>236</sup> Dharmapala argued that in addition to *dhammadipa*, Lanka was *sihaladipa* (island of the Sinhalese).<sup>237</sup> These interpretations have created a very specific vision of Sri Lanka's past and turned the *Mahavamsa* into a charter of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in the twentieth century.<sup>238</sup>

At the time of civil war, ethnic categories were projected onto some sections of the *Mahavamsa* in order to justify violence against minorities (see also Section 3.3.2). References were made, for example, to Chapter 25 of the *Mahavamsa* in which King Dutugemunu is depicted as successfully conquering the Tamil King Elara (for more on the Dutugemunu discourse, see Section 3.1.2). I discuss the connection between this narrative of Dutugemunu and twentieth-century Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in more detail in the following chapter. Here I briefly introduce the role of Buddhist monks for

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<sup>230</sup> Schalk, P. (2009), Semantic Transformations of the *dhammadipa*, in M. Deegalle (Ed.), *Buddhism, Conflict, and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, New York: Routledge, 86-92, 90-91. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Dīpaya,' 248; Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'dvīpā,' 507.

<sup>231</sup> DeVotta, N. (2018), Religious Intolerance in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka, *Asian Affairs*, 49(2), 278-300, 283.

<sup>232</sup> Gunawardana, R. A. L. H. (1990), The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography, in J. Spencer (Ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, London: Routledge, 45-86, 57.

<sup>233</sup> *Mahavamsa* 6: 39-47. In: *The Mahāvamsa*, 53-54.

<sup>234</sup> *Mahavamsa* 6: 39-47. In: *The Mahāvamsa*, 53-54.

<sup>235</sup> Gunawardana, The People of the Lion, 57.

<sup>236</sup> DeVotta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology*, 10.

<sup>237</sup> Schalk, Semantic Transformations, 91-92.

<sup>238</sup> Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 103-104; Wickramasinge, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 95. In this section, Nira Wickramasinghe introduces alternative perceptions of the past. I discuss some of them in Chapter 4.

Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in twentieth- and twenty-first century Sri Lanka and some (political) parties that are of relevance to *Ravanisation*.

### 2.3.2 Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism and Buddhist Monks

Buddhist monks entering the political fray in Sri Lanka – a phenomenon referred to by Stanley Tambiah as political Buddhism – emerged around the time of independence.<sup>239</sup> In 1946, Buddhist monks of the Vidyalankara Pirivena (educational institute), who were influenced by Dharmapala's anti-imperialist ideas, wrote the Declaration of the Vidyalankara Pirivena. This declaration defined the vocation of monks as social service.<sup>240</sup> Some of the left-oriented Buddhist monks entered the political scene by supporting leftist parties like the Lana Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which had split from the Communist Party in 1943.<sup>241</sup> Soon after, the political involvement of monks was further justified by the famous scholar monk Walpola Rahula, who was a member of the Vidyalankara group.<sup>242</sup> In 1946, he wrote *Bhiksuvaḡa Urumaya* (translated as *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu*).<sup>243</sup> According to Rahula, Sinhalese monks in the past were at the forefront of movements to provide for the welfare of the nation. It was only under foreign invaders that religion divorced from the nation. Prior to that, as he opined, the welfare of the nation and the welfare of religion were regarded as synonymous.<sup>244</sup>

In 1957, a Buddhist monk was elected for a village council for the first time.<sup>245</sup> This happened around the time that S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike won the election in 1956, having been inspired by Dharmapala and supported by Buddhist monks.<sup>246</sup> 1956 also marked the 2500 Buddha Jayanati, the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Buddha's entry into *parinirvana* (final release from rebirth) and the establishment of the Buddhist tradition in Sri Lanka.<sup>247</sup> The *Lanka Bauddha Mandalaya*, the Buddhist Council of Ceylon, took the lead in organising the festival, which was held nationwide on Vesak *poya* (full moon) in that year.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed*, 58.

<sup>240</sup> Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 212, 226.

<sup>241</sup> Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed*, 12, 15.

<sup>242</sup> Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed*, 23.

<sup>243</sup> DeVotta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology*, 2. Bhikkhu is Pali for almsman, a mendicant, a Buddhist monk or priest. See: Davids, T. W. R., & Stede W. (1921-1925), *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, London: Pali Text Society, 'bhikkhu,' 560. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Bhikshu,' 442. *Uruma* translates as inheritance. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Uruma,' 81.

<sup>244</sup> Rahula, W. (2011), Politically Engaged Militant Monks, in J. Holt (Ed.), *The Sri Lanka Reader*, London: Duke University Press, 380-382, 380-381. (Original work published 1974).

<sup>245</sup> Deegalle, M. (2004), Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 5(2), 83-103, 84. DOI:10.1080/1463994042000319816.

<sup>246</sup> Grant, *Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict*, 61-62.

<sup>247</sup> Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 11, 75. Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'parinibbāna,' 476.

<sup>248</sup> Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 75, 79. Until the 1970s Buddhist monks were not actively involved in parliamentary elections. In the 1970s several monks supported the radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Weiberg-Salzmann, M. (2014), The Radicalisation of Buddhism in the Twentieth and

As candidates in parliamentary elections, monks were only successful after the year 2000 (for more on their role in general pro-Sinhalese Buddhist groups, see Box 2.5). The first political party to be discussed here is the Sinhala Urumaya (Sinhala Heritage Party, SU). Launched in 2000, it was the first exclusive Sinhalese Buddhist political party.

To protect the Sinhalese Buddhist majority, the SU argued that Buddhism should be made the official state religion.<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, they proposed that Sri Lanka should be based on the ten virtuous deeds of the righteous kings (as found in the Pali canon) and that Sri Lanka should celebrate the past glory of the 'unique' Sinhala civilisation that flourished in the Anuradhapura period.<sup>250</sup>

The SU won only one seat in the election of 2000.<sup>251</sup> Despite this disappointing election outcome, the party was important because it gave legal validation to the Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party). The JHU is unique in that it is managed exclusively by monks. This monks' party won nine out of 225 seats in the parliamentary election of 2004.<sup>252</sup> One monk, who was at that time an election candidate of the JHU, is the chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, the Buddhist site discussed in Chapter 6.

The most famous election candidate of the JHU was Gangodavila Soma (1948–2003). Gangodavila Soma was a populist preacher who unfortunately died prior to the election. According to the religious studies scholar and monk Mahinda Deegalle, the party '[...] has effectively exploited Soma's death for its own advantage by using rumours surrounding his death.'<sup>253</sup> In the song of the party written to commemorate Soma's death, he is portrayed like a martyr for the Sinhalese Buddhist cause:

Venerable Sir, Buddha's teaching that you preached became an animosity  
Sacrificing a life, you made the entire country cry  
Our *Sri Saddharma* is, indeed the most supreme teaching in the world  
Because of those teachings, in future, wrong beliefs disappear  
The heart of those, who cannot bear it, is cruel  
Indeed the bullet is aimed at the Buddha's *dhmma*  
Venerable Sri Sumangala with Venerable Uduve, Venerable Ellavala with the  
*mahasangha*,  
Come Forward. May you save our *sasana*!<sup>254</sup>

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Twenty-first Centuries: The Buddhist Sangha in Sri Lanka, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 15(2), 283-307, 292. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Póya,' 381.

<sup>249</sup> Nuhman, M. A. (2016), Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism and Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka: One Hundred Years of Conflict and Coexistence, in J. Holt (Ed.), *Buddhist Extremists and Muslim Minorities: Religious Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 18-53, 38-39.

<sup>250</sup> Deegalle, Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks, 88.

<sup>251</sup> Nuhman, Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism and Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka, 39.

<sup>252</sup> DeVotta, N., & Stone, J. (2008), Jathika Hela Urumaya and Ethno-Religious Politics in Sri Lanka, *Pacific Affairs*, 81(1), 31-51, 32, 50. doi:10.5509/200881131.

<sup>253</sup> Deegalle, Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks, 88.

<sup>254</sup> Deegalle, Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks, 92.

This song also mentions three other election candidates of the JHU. Among them is Sumangala Thero, the chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. During his brief period of involvement in the JHU he got seriously injured due to a physical assault in the parliament.<sup>255</sup> Some people have interpreted this as a plot to assassinate him.

The JHU included in its manifesto that the national heritage of a country belongs to the ethnic group that made the country into a habitable civilisation. Like the SU, heritage and civilisation are presented in a way that legitimises the domination of the Sinhalese Buddhists in the present.<sup>256</sup> Examples of Sinhalese Buddhist hegemony based on the representation of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country in post-war Sri Lanka are discussed in Section 3.3.4 where I look closely at the concept hegemony in the context of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism.

### Box 2.5: Buddhist Monks and Pro-Sinhalese Buddhist Groups

Buddhist monks not only entered the national political scene. They also play a leading role in some recent movements active in the propagation of a Sinhalese Buddhist identity. Some of these groups openly spread anti-minority sentiments. According to the political scientist S. M. Aliff, the most prominent of these groups – Neil DeVotta calls them pro-Sinhalese Buddhist groups<sup>257</sup> – are the *Bodu Bala Sena* (Sinhala Power Force, BBS) and the *Ravana Balaya* (Ravana Force, Power, RB).<sup>258</sup> The *Bodu Bala Sena* was founded in 2012 by two monks, Kirama Wimalajoti and Galagoda Atte Gnanasara,<sup>259</sup> out of the JHU.<sup>260</sup> The BBS is known for its anti-Muslim, anti-Christian, and anti-Western sentiments with Muslims as their main target.<sup>261</sup> One of their anti-Muslim campaigns in 2012 was an anti-Halal campaign. This campaign was based on the idea that they must counteract the Muslim fundamentalists who allegedly are going to make Sri Lanka a Muslim country.<sup>262</sup> They argued that cultural practices of the Muslims have an inverse effect on the Sinhalese. The BBS managed to banish the use of halal certificates by food-producing companies. The BBS is also famous for their attacks on Muslim places of worship and organised calls to boycott Muslim companies.<sup>263</sup>

The *Ravana Balaya* is a Buddhist nationalist organisation established in 2012. Both laity and monks participate in this organisation. This group is named after Ravana.<sup>264</sup> My informants often explained to me that Ravana's name is mainly a label. Nonetheless, it shows the importance of a mythistorical awareness.

<sup>255</sup> Deegalle, Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks, 98.

<sup>256</sup> Deegalle, Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya monks, 95.

<sup>257</sup> DeVotta, Religious Intolerance in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka, 289.

<sup>258</sup> Aliff, Post-War Conflict in Sri Lanka, 113. *Balaya* translates as power. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Balaya,' 414.

<sup>259</sup> Stewart, J. J. (2014), Muslim-Buddhist Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka, *South Asia Research*, 34(3), 241-260, 245.

<sup>260</sup> DeVotta, N. (2016a), A Win for Democracy in Sri Lanka, *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 152-166, 157.

<sup>261</sup> Nuhman, Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism and Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka, 39-40.

<sup>262</sup> DeVotta, Engaging Sinhalese Buddhist Majoritarianism, 79.

<sup>263</sup> Centre for Policy Alternatives (2013), *Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka*, 64. <https://www.cpalanka.org/attacks-on-places-of-religious-worship-in-post-war-sri-lanka/>

<sup>264</sup> Razick, A. S., Gafoordeen, N., & Mazahir, S. M. (2018), Hate Campaigns and Attacks against the Muslims in Recent Sri Lanka, *European Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 6(1), 43-58, 45.



In addition to anti-Muslim sentiments, this organisation expresses anti-India sentiments. Members of this group have thrown eggs at Sri Lankan cricket players playing in India and demanded the banning of Tamil films from India in Sri Lanka. Also, this group opposed the construction of a shrine for Sita at the Buddhist temple site Divurumpola.<sup>265</sup> The founder of the organisation, a monk named Saddhathissa, said that '[n]o one can neglect the glory of Ravana. We don't oppose any move to build a shrine in memory of Sita but that should only be done after erecting a statue of Ravana. If that does not happen we will not [*sic*] the building of any other shrine.'<sup>266</sup> This protest, he stressed, was not born out of extremism or racism but out of a concern to protect the national heritage of the country.<sup>267</sup> The anti-India sentiments within the context of *Ravanisation* are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

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<sup>265</sup> See: De Koning & Henry, Ravana and Rama in Sri Lanka.

<sup>266</sup> Farisz, H. (2013, June 4), No Sita before Ravana: Ravana Balaya, *Daily Mirror Online*, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/no-sita-before-ravana-ravana-balaya-30372.html> (retrieved August 24, 2020).

<sup>267</sup> Farisz, No Sita before Ravana.



## CHAPTER 3

# Conceptual Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical and conceptual insights that I – initially – found useful in understanding the process of *Ravanisation* in Sri Lanka. I pay considerable attention to the socio-historical context in which *Ravanisation* takes place among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka. Whenever possible I have integrated concepts employed by other scholars to denote certain developments or phenomena in Sri Lanka – or in other South Asian countries. For my conceptual framework I thus mainly build on the academic endeavours of scholars who have studied phenomena and developments in South Asian contexts that show patterns and dynamics similar to *Ravanisation*. For concepts or theories that are not specifically related to a South Asian context, I explain to what extent these concepts fit or why I use them to shed fuller light on the dynamics of *Ravanisation*.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In Section 3.1, I elaborate on the concepts that I have coined to describe the phenomenon that I investigate: *Ravanisation* (as revitalisation; in Section 3.1.1) and Ravana discourse (in Section 3.1.2). Both concepts function to describe the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists.

Section 3.2 introduces concepts more specific to my approach to *Ravanisation*. A central concept in my research question is representation. I elaborate on that concept and how it relates to discourse and to my methodology in Section 3.2.1. Also, I look at how materialising and ritualising relate to representation (Section 3.2.2).

In Section 3.3, I discuss concepts that relate to the meta-level perspective of *Ravanisation*. The concepts that I introduce in this section – for instance, ethno-nationalism (Section 3.3.1) and remythologising (Section 3.3.2) – provide a broader insight in how representations of the past are employed for ethno-nationalist purposes in South Asia. I also briefly introduce why I use the concept mythistory (Section 3.3.3). In addition, I introduce the concept hegemony in Section 3.3.4. In that section, I pay close attention to how this concept is employed by other scholars to disclose patterns of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism in Sri Lanka in the past century.

Lastly, Section 3.4 introduces two concepts related to the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation*. First, I introduce the concept imagined landscape (in Section 3.4.1). This concept senses the intimate connection between mythistory and territory. In Section 3.4.2, I introduce the concept religious landscape and explain how this concept relates to my particular focus on ritualising and materialising.

### 3.1 *Ravanisation* and Ravana Discourse

In this section, I introduce the concept revitalisation as an aspect of *Ravanisation*. I point out why revitalisation is a valuable conceptual tool that illuminates several of the characteristics and dynamics of *Ravanisation*. In addition, I discuss the concept discourse and offer a definition of Ravana discourse for use in the coming chapters.

#### 3.1.1 *Ravanisation* as Revitalisation

In Chapter 1, I defined *Ravanisation* as the revitalisation of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka and subsequently specified two 'levels' of revitalisation. My introduction of the concept revitalisation in this section mainly relates to the first level of revitalisation: the resurgence of ethno-nationalism.

In 1956, the anthropologist Anthony Wallace wrote an article on revitalisation movements. At that time, as Wallace indicated, scholars employed various concepts – such as religious revival and social movement – to label the same phenomenon: cultural-system innovation. Cultural-system innovation is characterised by a uniform process that Wallace called 'revitalisation.'<sup>268</sup> The revitalisation process consists of five stages: steady state, period of individual stress, period of cultural distortion, period of revitalisation, and the new steady state.<sup>269</sup> The common core in all cultural-system innovations is dissatisfaction with the actual cultural system. The collectively experienced stress results in renewal of the cultural system. In contrast to gradual processes of change and adaptation, revitalisation is actively undertaken to purposely and often radically change the system.

Patterns of 'revitalisation' figure into studies on (ethno-)nationalism, as well. Most theorists on nationalism argue that nations do not emerge *ex nihilo*.<sup>270</sup> Revival or revitalisation is one of the key characteristics for ethno-symbolist theorists. Anthony Smith and John Hutchinson, the leading voices in this field, challenge (modernist) views that nations are modern inventions and that nation states are homogenous entities. They propose to look at nationalism from within and take the vitality and heterogeneity of a nation into consideration.<sup>271</sup> Also, ethno-symbolists focus on the mythic, symbolic, and cultural aspects as the core of ethnicity and nationality. They argue that nationalists employ pre-existing myth-symbol complexes.<sup>272</sup> As Hutchinson states:

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<sup>268</sup> Wallace, A. F. C. (1956), Revitalization Movements, *American Anthropologist: Journal of the American Anthropological Association*, 58, 264-281, 264.

<sup>269</sup> Wallace, Revitalization Movements, 268-269.

<sup>270</sup> Özkirimli, U. (2003), The Nation as an Artichoke? A critique of Ethnosymbolist Interpretations of Nationalism, *Nations and Nationalism* 9(3), 339-355, 342. Özkirimli for instance mentions that Hobsbawm also referred to proto-national bonds.

<sup>271</sup> See for an overview of ethno-symbolism: Smith, A. D. (2009), *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, London: Routledge. He discusses the ethno-symbolist perspective especially in Chapter 2 'Basic Themes of Ethno-symbolism,' 24-40.

<sup>272</sup> Hutchinson, J. (2000), Ethnicity and Modern Nations, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23(4), 651-669, 660.

Ethnic communities have preserved their identity and asserted their political autonomy for centuries on the strength of myths of predestination and the idea of a historic mission. Ethnic groups endowed with such a repertoire of myths are easily turned into nations if they perceive a threat to their communal dignity or cultural survival. Nationalists only reconstruct a cohesive ideological whole out of a pre-existing fund of ethnic myths and legends.<sup>273</sup>

And as the sociologist and political philosopher Andreas Wimmer summarises Smith's ideas:

More recently Smith (1992) also held that the 'power of ideology' plays a central role in explaining ethnonationalist mobilisation: thanks to myths of chosen people and visions of an historical mission, ethnic communities can withstand pressure to assimilate for centuries. According to Smith, this explains the ease with which ethnic groups can be mobilised politically if they perceive the honour of the community or even its cultural survival to be at risk. Ethnonationalists thus reconstruct a coherent new set of ideas from existing myths and histories. They do not invent traditions – as instrumentalists would have it – but revive them through their reinterpretations (Smith 1995).<sup>274</sup>

According to ethno-symbolists, (ethno-)nationalists thus employ pre-existing cultural resources to build their present-day ideologies on. Smith further argues that nations and nationalism are not the sole constructions of the elite but collective constructions between elites and the people. He proposes to pay attention to the '[...] significance of public culture and its symbols for understanding the reciprocal influence of elites and non-elites on the shaping of the nation [...]'<sup>275</sup> over a focus on elites, politics, and ideology.

For my purposes, revitalisation denotes the process of re-interpretation of pre-existing ideas within a new context. Smith has been accused of romanticism and nostalgia because he tends to focus on past ideas and alleged premodern myths.<sup>276</sup> I do not argue that pre-existing ideas are passed down from generation to generation without change since time immemorial just waiting to be '(re-)discovered.' While I stay away from normative judgements and do not wish to suggest that premodern ideas have to be rediscovered – as some Ravana enthusiasts try to make us believe – the ethno-symbolist paradigm provides a useful research angle to look at how people themselves in their efforts to promote Ravana look out for (allegedly pre-)existing ideas and how they revitalise and refashion them at the same time. This looking from within, a focus on the non-elite, and the focus on the mythic, symbolic, and cultural aspects as the core of

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<sup>273</sup> Hutchinson, *Ethnicity and Modern Nations*, 661.

<sup>274</sup> Wimmer, A. (2002), *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, 101.

<sup>275</sup> Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism*, 32.

<sup>276</sup> See for instance the critique expressed by: Özkirimli, *The Nation as an Artichoke?*

ethnicity and identity, is central to the ethno-symbolic paradigm, and I consider these useful conceptual and methodological angles to investigate several of the dynamics of *Ravanisation* in post-war Sri Lanka.

I do, however, agree with the political scientist Umut Özkirimli's critique of the ethno-symbolists that '[...] what matters is not the presence of premodern cultural materials, but the selection process [...].'<sup>277</sup> Why and how are certain narratives and ideas selected and promoted over others at this moment? Here, is where disruption comes in. The anthropologist Wallace has argued that revitalisation takes place when there has been a period of stress. Hutchinson includes warfare, immigration, religious and cultural competition, and economic disruptions as triggers of ethno-nationalist revivals.<sup>278</sup> Smith mentions that conflicts are critical for reassertions of identities and that ethnic myths and memories develop from both national cultural wars and internal cultural rivalries. I show throughout this thesis (especially in Chapter 4) that Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana selectively appropriate ideas from diverse sources to base their ideas on and refashion them for present-day purposes. Moreover, I explain why these ideas have risen into prominence in the post-war period. In Section 3.3, I discuss in more detail the relevance of perceptions of the past for (ethno-)nationalist purposes. Here I focus on 'discourse' as part of my definition of Ravana discourse.

### 3.1.2 *Ravanisation* and Ravana Discourse

Ever since Foucault introduced the concept discourse in his writings, it has been employed by scholars from diverse disciplines in a variety of senses and for a variety of ends.<sup>279</sup> In his publications, Foucault himself also defined and used discourse in multiple ways.<sup>280</sup> The linguist Sara Mills provides the following definition of Foucault's ideas of a discourse:

A discourse is a regulated set of statements which combine with others in predictable ways. Discourse is regulated by a set of rules which lead to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements. Some statements are circulated widely and others have restricted circulation.<sup>281</sup>

Mills mentions the Bible as an example of a discourse in Western society. The Bible, as she points out, is available in the West in printed edition; it is studied in theology departments; politicians illustrate their speeches with references to the Bible; it has been subject to countless re-interpretations. Altogether – the Bible and the statements about it – constitute a discourse. Other texts – to stay with the example of the Bible – are given less priority in Western societies; here the notion of exclusion occurs. This aspect of

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<sup>277</sup> Özkirimli, *The Nation as an Artichoke*, 347.

<sup>278</sup> Hutchinson, *Ethnicity and Modern Nations*, 658.

<sup>279</sup> Brown, G., & Yule, G. (2003), *Discourse Analysis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, viii.

<sup>280</sup> Mills, S. (2003), *Michel Foucault*, London: Routledge, 53.

<sup>281</sup> Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 54.

exclusion in discourses is paid considerable attention to in Marxist theories.<sup>282</sup> In *Text, Discourse and Ideology* Foucault argued that:

[...] in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its power and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.<sup>283</sup>

In several Marxist theories, the power of a dominant discourse and its ability to exclude are interpreted in a negative way – a discourse as oppressive – although Foucault has also paid attention to discourse as means of resistance.<sup>284</sup> The ‘anti-Ramayana discourse,’ an example of a discourse that emerged out of resistance,<sup>285</sup> emerged as a critique of North Indian dominance over South Indian regions in the context of Dravidian nationalism (see Box 3.1).

### Box 3.1: The Anti-Ramayana Discourse

In the context of twentieth-century Hindu nationalism – which found its verbal expression in the concept *Hindutva* introduced by Savarkar in 1924 – the *Ramayana* became subject to political interpretations and readings. One of these readings was that the *Ramayana* was a story of North Indian imperialism over South India. This specific reading or critique occurred in the context of an increased nationalist awareness among the Dravidians (those living in South India and speaking a language belonging to the Dravidian language family). According to Velcheru Narayana Rao, it was the play *Suta Puranam* (1924, the same year that the concept *Hindutva* was coined) that set the agenda for what he refers to as the South Indian anti-Ramayana discourse. In this play Tripuraneni Ramasvami Chaudari contested the characterisation of Rama’s rule as compassionate and instead interpreted the *Ramayana* as an immoral and cruel text that favoured the position of North Indians. The play showed that, in the time of Rama, the *brahmins* (the highest caste of priests in India, associated with North Indians) feared the rebellion of the Dravidians and wanted to safeguard their positions by killing a low-caste Dravidian sage. In Chaudari’s plays Ravana was displayed as a noble and righteous ruler and peace-loving king. After Chaudari’s ground-breaking work other Telegu authors started to criticise the *Ramayana* as well. Rao points out that:

[...] authors rewrote many *Ramayana* themes, reflecting the new trend of interrogating the conventional *Ramayana*: they produced plays, poems, essays, books and at least two full-length retellings of the *Ramayana*. Together these constitute what can be seen as an anti-Ramayana discourse.<sup>286</sup>

<sup>282</sup> Mills, Michel Foucault, 54.

<sup>283</sup> Foucault, M. (1990), The Order of Discourse, in R. Young (Ed.), *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, London: Routledge, 48-78, 52.

<sup>284</sup> Mills, Michel Foucault, 55.

<sup>285</sup> ‘Anti-Ramayana discourse’ was coined by Narayana Rao in 2001. Narayana Rao, V. (2001), The Politics of Telegu *Ramayanas*, in P. Richman (Ed.), *Questioning Ramayanas, A South Asian Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 159-186.

<sup>286</sup> Narayana Rao, The Politics of Telegu *Ramayanas*, 162.

The anti-*Ramayana* discourse aimed to criticise and challenge the dominant *Ramayana* discourse of the North Indians. I have mentioned the anti-*Ramayana* discourse to illustrate the function of the *Ramayana* in a political context: its characters are subject to historicisation and ethnicisation and are employed to interpret recent tensions between (ethnic) groups and (political) dynamics within a country.

In *Dealing with Diversity: Sri Lankan Discourses on Peace and Conflict* (2005), the sociologists Bart Klem and Georg Frerks mention nine discourses related to several conflict and peace situations in Sri Lanka, especially the civil war. One of the discourses that they describe, is named after a king mentioned in the *Mahavamsa* (see Section 2.3.1.1): Dutugemunu. I discuss the Dutugemunu discourse here because it helps to explain why I introduce Ravana discourse in this thesis.

Frerks and Klem elaborate on a development of Foucault's concept of 'discourse' provided by Bart Pijnenburg: a discourse is not merely text or speech but rather a system of representation.<sup>287</sup> Elsewhere Frerks makes this more specific:

Discourse, as a system of representation, attributes meaning and frames of how actors understand and relate to the world around them. Actors in Sri Lanka – or if you want – 'discursive communities' manufactured representations of 'reality' and used discourse in the articulation of political grievances, for mobilizing support for armed struggles or counterinsurgency or for legitimizing them. Through discourse, they have interpreted and reinterpreted the past, defined the image of the enemy, and reshaped social identities and boundaries.<sup>288</sup>

This definition highlights the relevance of a discourse as system of representation (see also Section 3.2.1) to frame and interpret present-day situations. One of the discourses that Frerks and Klem mention is the Dutugemunu discourse, which was employed during the period of civil war to interpret tensions between the Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. The narrative of Dutugemunu can be found in Chapter 25 of the *Mahavamsa* (see Section 2.3.1.1). Dutugemunu is presented in the *Mahavamsa* as a warrior king who successfully resisted the invasion of the Tamil King Elara from South India (on Chola invasions, see Section 2.2.1).<sup>289</sup> Frerks and Klem argue with reference to this particular narrative:

These events, that occurred over one-and-a-half thousand years ago, are not only commemorated in modern times, they have a large influence on contemporary Sri Lankan politics in general and on the conflict in particular. In this

<sup>287</sup> Frerks, G., & Klem, B. (2005), *Dealing with Diversity: Sri Lankan Discourses on Peace and Conflict*, The Hague: Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 3.

<sup>288</sup> Frerks, G. E. (2013), Sri Lanka Studies: A Discursive Approach to Development and Conflict, *Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, 3(3), 1-13, 10.

<sup>289</sup> Frerks, Sri Lanka Studies, 7. For more on the elaborative story of Dutugemunu, see also: Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 76-108.



historic perspective, the Tamils – mostly Hindu and to a lesser extent Christian – are perceived as a threat. They are the contemporary equivalent of the Chola invasions and thus require Buddhist leaders to assume their role of protector.<sup>290</sup>

In the Dutugemunu discourse, the tensions between Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamils are presented as a continuum from the past to the present. During the recent civil war, for example, Dutugemunu's heroic stance against the Tamil King Elara was praised by Prime Minister Premadasa in 1986 (for more on Premadasa, see Section 5.3.1).<sup>291</sup> According to Gananath Obeyesekere, versions of the Dutugemunu narrative were constantly employed in debates of politicians, in newspapers, and by ordinary citizens at the time of the inter-ethnic conflict.<sup>292</sup> After the military success against the LTTE, former president Mahinda Rajapaksha was compared to King Dutugemunu. As was written on a billboard in Colombo: 'Our President, Our Leader, He is next to King Dutugemunu.'<sup>293</sup>



**Figure 3.1:** Statue of Queen Viharamahadevi (the mother of King Dutugemunu) on the left side and statue of King Dutugemunu on the right side. The statues are located at the Sri Vivekaramaya Buddhist site at Rumassala (see also Section 5.3.1). Picture taken by author, Rumassala, April 4, 2016.

Frerks and Klem argue that the Dutugemunu discourse provided a self-assigned historical role for Sinhalese Buddhists in their conflict with the Tamils to protect Sri Lanka as a sovereign Buddhist state from external invasions.<sup>294</sup> References to Dutugemunu have not decreased after the civil war. According to the historian Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, historical consciousness – which includes the Dutugemunu story – has acquired new significance for Sinhalese Buddhists.<sup>295</sup> Instead of evoking remorse, Sinhalese Buddhists

<sup>290</sup> Frerks & Klem, *Dealing with Diversity*, 9.

<sup>291</sup> Kapferer, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka*, 34, 38.

<sup>292</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 98.

<sup>293</sup> DeVotta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology*, 9.

<sup>294</sup> Frerks & Klem, *Dealing with Diversity*, 30-31.

<sup>295</sup> Dewasiri, N. R. (2013), *'History' after the War: Historical Consciousness in the Collective Sinhala-Buddhist Psyche in Post-War Sri Lanka*, Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 4.

have continued to employ the Dutugemunu story to popularise a ‘just war’ ideology and political hegemonism in the post-war context. According to Dewasiri, the popular novel *Maharaja Gamunu* (2011) marked the culmination of Sinhalese Buddhist intellectual preoccupation with Dutugemunu. *Maharaja Gamunu* was serialised in newspaper articles, which made the story available to a broader audience.<sup>296</sup> In this novel, King Dutugemunu is accorded high moral status and is exalted as the ultimate hero of the Sinhalese Buddhists – fitting the post-war Sinhalese Buddhist mind-set of just war ideology. The movie *Maharaja Gemunu* (2015), the teledrama *Gemunu Maharaja* with 31 episodes in 2016 and 2017, and the teledrama *Gemunu MahaRaja 2* with 58 episodes in 2020, further demonstrate the ongoing popularity of King Dutugemunu.<sup>297</sup> In addition to popular media, King Dutugemunu is materialised in statues. Because it was the capital city at the time of King Dutugemunu’s reign, Anuradhapura has been associated with Dutugemunu for a long time. The Ruwanwelisaya *stupa*, located in the famous city of Anuradhapura, is equated with one of the *stupas* that, according to the *Mahavamsa*, was built by King Dutugemunu. Today one can find on the premises a recently built and enshrined statue of Dutugemunu as well as a building with a three-dimensional representation of the fight between Elara and Dutugemunu.<sup>298</sup> Gotabaya Rajapaksa, elected the seventh executive president of Sri Lanka in 2019, took his oaths at the Ruwanwelisaya *stupa* right next to the statue of King Dutugemunu.<sup>299</sup> I also encountered recent statues of Dutugemunu at other Buddhist sites in the country.<sup>300</sup> These recent statues of Dutugemunu illustrate not only that contemporary Sinhalese Buddhists are interested in this particular ancient king but also that some Buddhist monks are actively involved in this trend insofar as they give this king a (prominent) place at their temple sites.

The anti-*Ramayana* discourse and the Dutugemunu discourse have functioned as systems of representations to interpret twenty- and twenty-first-century political situations related to ethnic tensions. The examples of these discourses given above illustrate the ongoing relevance of representations of the past, including heroic kings, to interpret present-day situations. The general relevance of mythistorical perceptions of the past in the context of (ethno-)nationalism in Sri Lanka is further discussed in Section 3.2.2. Here I conclude by mentioning how I employ Ravana discourse in this thesis.

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<sup>296</sup> Dewasiri, ‘History’ after the War, 9, 12.

<sup>297</sup> *Maharaja Gemunu* (2015), [Film], IMDb, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3471472/> (retrieved July 23, 2020). *Gemunu Maharaja*, [Teledrama], Hiru TV, <http://col3negtelevision.com/hiru-tv/gemunu-maharaja-teledrama.html> (retrieved July 23, 2020); *Gemunu Maharaja*. [Teledrama]. Hiru TV, <https://varunamulti.com/videos/btv/vmtube2/gamunu-maha-raja.html> (retrieved July 23, 2020).

<sup>298</sup> Fieldwork visit Ruwanwelisaya, Anuradhapura, April 21, 2018. The Ruwanwelisaya *stupa* is considered the great *stupa* mentioned in Chapter 27 of the *Mahavamsa*.

<sup>299</sup> Irugalbandara, R. (2019, November 18), Gotabaya Rajapaksa Sworn in as the 7th Executive President of Sri Lanka, *NewstFirst*, <https://www.newstfirst.lk/2019/11/18/gotabaya-rajapaksa-sworn-in-as-the-7th-executive-president-of-sri-lanka/> (retrieved July 23, 2020).

<sup>300</sup> I noticed Dutugemunu statues at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (see Chapter 6) and the Sri Vivekaramaya Viharaya located at Rumassala (see Section 5.3.1, and Figure 3.1).

As previously mentioned, Frerks defines discourse as a system of representation that attributes meaning to how people understand and interpret the world around them. Discourses actively construct a version of the world.<sup>301</sup> Though less systematic than the Dutugemunu discourse, the Ravana discourse is a recent and emerging phenomenon. It can be considered what Christiane Brosius in *Empowering Visions: The Politics of Representation in Hindu Nationalism* calls a 'field of discourse.' According to her, Hindu nationalism or *Hindutva* as a 'field of discourse' is:

[...] not a homogenous and enclosed entity, a symbolic system or order with a relatively stable centre and membership (even if spokespeople as well as many of its critics affirm this view). On the contrary, this study proposes that the idea and rhetoric of *Hindutva* nationalism, as well as the social agents involved in contesting and negotiating *Hindutva* as a 'way of life,' are characterized by a high degree of fluidity, diversity, conflict and ambiguity.<sup>302</sup>

Because Frerks gives centrality to representation(s) in his definition of a discourse, his definition informs my thinking on the Ravana discourse and what it entails. But because the Ravana discourse and the interest in Ravana is emerging, it is not yet a system. It is fluid and diverse; sometimes even contradictory representations co-exist within the Ravana discourse. I thus combine Frerks' and Brosius' insights by framing the Ravana discourse a field of (emerging) representations. I include in the Ravana discourse the representations that can be found in popular Ravana books and newspaper articles, YouTube channels, TV and radio programmes, activities (online and offline) initiated by popular Ravana research groups, public performances, rituals, (sports) activities, and the construction of shrines and statues at public sites. The common core is that the representations have broad support. I thus exclude from my definition of the Ravana discourse idiosyncratic references to Ravana made by individual people. The selection of what to include and exclude, however, is still a choice of the researcher and the field of representations is continuously on the move. Because representation is central to my definition of Ravana discourse and to my overarching research question, I now turn attention to the concept representation, how I employ it in my research, and how it interrelates with materialising and ritualising.

### 3.2 Representation, Materialising, and Ritualising

As mentioned in the first chapter, my thesis investigates Ravana representations as they have emerged in post-war Sri Lanka and how they take shape on a local level. In this section, I explain how I employ the concept representation. As I point out below, it

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<sup>301</sup> Frerks & Klem, *Dealing with Diversity*, 4.

<sup>302</sup> Brosius, C. (2005), *Empowering Visions: The Politics of Representation in Hindu Nationalism*, London: Anthem, 3.

is inextricably related to my ontological position and methodology. I therefore discuss in this section also the concepts materialising and ritualising as these are research foci that I have employed to investigate *Ravanisation* on local levels.

### 3.2.1 Representation

Stuart Hall (1932-2004) has had a significant influence on how the concept representation is employed in the fields of sociology and cultural studies. Born in Jamaica and spending most of his life in England, Hall's considerations of race representations – which in addition to gender representations were very central to his work – were also part of a journey of self-discovery.<sup>303</sup> In his publications, he often discussed the relevance of language for representations, but his ideas of representation also have a broader significance. I mention here some of his ideas that help to illustrate why I use the concept representation in this thesis.

In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Hall provides an explanation of what a discourse means:

Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practice: a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society.<sup>304</sup>

For Hall, language is key to discourse and representations. There is, first of all, a system of mental representations that exists in our minds as concepts. This system of mental representations helps us to organise the world around us and give meaning. Secondly, there is language as a system of representation that we need to communicate the meanings.<sup>305</sup> Language externalises the meanings we make of the world and of events and, in so doing, makes the meanings available and accessible.<sup>306</sup>

Sidestepping the complexity of representation as Hall discusses in his work, I mention here two characteristics of his conceptualisation of representation which are central to my research. I employ these assumptions about representation to explain how this concept works in my thesis as a conceptual lens and research angle to investigate *Ravanisation*.

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<sup>303</sup> Davis, H. (2004), *Understanding Stuart Hall*, London: Sage Publications, 1-4. For more on Hall's participation in and experiences with the Birmingham feminist network, see: Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall*, 124-130.

<sup>304</sup> Hall, S. (2003), Introduction, in S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage Publications, 1-12, 6. (Original work published in 1997).

<sup>305</sup> Hall, S. (2003), The Work of Representation, in S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage Publication, 13-74, 28-29. (Original work published in 1997).

<sup>306</sup> Hall, S., & Jhally, S. (1997), *Representation & The Media*, Northampton: Media Education Foundation Collection, 12.

Hall's discussion of the system of mental representations is important because it helps us to see that our concepts and ideas do not necessarily exist in the material world out there. As Hall mentions:

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer to* either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events.<sup>307</sup>

Hall adds that the process of representation is not limited to the material world. Representations can also pertain to deities and devils, or events that allegedly happened thousands of years ago, and we do not necessarily have similar ideas about objects or people that belong to the non-material world. This is an important insight for me because my thesis treats representations related to Ravana, a king who allegedly lived several thousand years ago.

According to Hall, there is a close connection between meaning, representation, and language: without language there is no representation, and without language there is no meaning. Language externalises and makes accessible the range of meanings humans ascribe to phenomena.<sup>308</sup> Language, however, is not limited to text and speech. Bodies and clothes can also communicate meaning (and thus function as language).<sup>309</sup> Language is one of the 'media' through which thoughts, ideas, and feelings are represented in a culture.<sup>310</sup>

We give things meaning by how we represent them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them.<sup>311</sup>

According to Hall, language does not *reflect* meaning. Rather, language (as well as other systems of communication) *conveys* meaning. Meaning is thus produced by people who employ representational systems.

In Chapter 1, I have mentioned that an interpretivist research position focusses on people and their perceptions, beliefs, and meanings. Since representations are constitutive in themselves, the meanings ascribed to Ravana lie in peoples' words, stories, images, and practices: these 'represent' Ravana.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Hall, *The Work of Representation*, 17.

<sup>308</sup> Hall, *Representation & The Media*, 12.

<sup>309</sup> Hall, *Representation & The Media*, 1.

<sup>310</sup> Hall, *Introduction*, 1.

<sup>311</sup> Hall, *Introduction*, 3.

<sup>312</sup> As Hall mentions: '[i]n a way, it doesn't exist meaningfully *until* it has been represented, and to put that in a more high-falutin way is to say that representation doesn't occur *after* the event; representation is *constitutive* of the event. It enters into the constitution of the object that we are talking about. It is part

### 3.2.2 Materialising and Ritualising

This subsection addresses why a material and ritual perspective is useful in investigating the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. I start with materialising and the function of rituals for representations. There is some overlap between materialising and ritualising (in a religious context). The ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes argues that there is an overlap between the material and the ritual dimension and that it is '[...] almost impossible to discover, or even imagine, a ritual without its attendant material culture.'<sup>313</sup> After a brief introduction of the concept materialising, I continue with a very specific characteristic of rituals central to my investigation of *Ravanisation*: the affective culture.

To attend to materialising means to investigate the physical aspects of a phenomenon.<sup>314</sup> As Castillo, DeMarrais, and Earle define in their article 'Ideology, Materialization and Power Strategies':

Materialization is the transformation of ideas, values, stories, myths, and the like into a physical reality that can take the form of ceremonial events, symbolic objects, monuments and writing systems.<sup>315</sup>

Materialisation can function as a system of representation, to speak with Hall, who would argue that materialising itself is constitutive of ideas and values. In addition to this 'function' of materialising, I mention here how materialising and ritualising serve multiple functions for emerging phenomena.

Because ideas take shape outside individual (or collective) minds and are externalised into physical form, materialising contributes to the wider circulation of 'mental representations.' According to the anthropologist Webb Keane, materialisation is fundamental for social circulation:

Materiality is a precondition for the social circulation and temporal persistence of experiences and ideas. This is true, of course, not just of ideas but of any materialization, including rituals, institutions, altars, icons, offerings, bodily habits, and so forth.<sup>316</sup>

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of the object itself; it is constitutive of it. It is one of its conditions of existence, and therefore representation is not *outside* the event, not *after* the event, but *within* the event itself; it is constitutive of it.' Hall, *Representation & The Media*, 7-8.

<sup>313</sup> Grimes, R. L. (2011), Ritual, *Material Religion*, 7(1), 76-83. DOI: 10.2752/175183411X12968355482097

<sup>314</sup> Castillo, DeMarrais and Earle refer to the processes in which ideologies become physical as materialisation of ideology. See: DeMarrais, E., Castillo, L. J., & Earle, T. K. (1996), Ideology, Materialization, and Power Strategies, *Current Anthropology*, 37, 15-31. [https://www.academia.edu/34246550/Ideology\\_Materialization\\_and\\_Power\\_Strategies](https://www.academia.edu/34246550/Ideology_Materialization_and_Power_Strategies). (Online revised edition). I cite in this chapter from this online revised version, 3.

<sup>315</sup> DeMarrais, Castillo, & Earle, Ideology, Materialization, and Power Strategies, 6.

<sup>316</sup> Keane, W. (2008), On the Materiality of Religion, *Material Religion*, 4(2), 230-231, 230 DOI: 10.2752/175183408X328343

Externalisation – for instance, through materialisation – is necessary for emerging ideas to become part of a shared or common culture.<sup>317</sup> As Castillo, DeMarais, and Earle explain:

Essentially, we are arguing for the fundamental materiality of human culture. How shared values and norms could be held leads to a consideration of the essence of culture; it must be given a form in daily practice and material representation outside of the individual's mind [...]. By using the term materialized (rather than materiality), we emphasize the continual process of creation and do not suppose the primacy of ideas.<sup>318</sup>

I follow Castillo, DeMarais, and Earle in using 'materialise' and 'materialising' over materialisation when discussing the creation of material representations of Ravana and the past in order to emphasize its ongoing processual nature. Whereas Castillo, DeMarais, and Earle primarily focus on the strategic materialising of ideologies as means of political and social power, I would also like to draw attention to the function of rituals and objects in religious contexts at the affective (individual) level.

The anthropologist Bruce Kapferer makes an accurate statement about the relationship of rituals and representations in *A Celebration of Demons*. In this publication on sorcery rites in Sri Lanka, he states:

Ritual performance, as a structure of practice, is not simply the vehicle of a "text," or a means for the expression of cultural and social meaning, or a way of communicating information which somehow lies outside it. I stress that ritual performance is itself constitutive of that which it intends, expresses, or communicates. Ritual as performance, therefore, is integral to any understanding of the ritual process and not just in the restricted senses of enactment or as the situated production of a "text," but as a structure of practice.<sup>319</sup>

This thesis discusses several Ravana rituals that have emerged in post-war Sri Lanka. I have selected these rituals because they are constitutive of certain Ravana representations and contribute to the circulation of these representations among a broader audience. In addition, owing to the multi-sensory (and often intersensory) nature of rituals, the Ravana representations central to rituals evoke emotions and experiences that significantly differ from Ravana representations found in the discursive or narrative sphere.<sup>320</sup> The objects employed in the rituals, as well as the sounds, colours, smells,

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<sup>317</sup> DeMarrais, Castillo, & Earle, *Ideology, Materialization, and Power Strategies*, 6.

<sup>318</sup> DeMarrais, Castillo, & Earle, *Ideology, Materialization, and Power Strategies*, 6.

<sup>319</sup> Kapferer, B. (1983), *A Celebration of Demons*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 7.

<sup>320</sup> Nugteren, A. (2013), Sensing the 'Sacred'? Body, Senses and Intersensoriality in the Academic Study of Ritual, *Jaarboek Voor Liturgie-Onderzoek* (Vol. 29), 49-66. In this article, Nugteren argues that researchers and theorists of rituals should acknowledge the centrality of the senses (or multi-sensoriality) in rituals and not give precedence to the mind.

and foods, serve to 'represent' Ravana in diverse ways. Through rituals, Ravana can be multi-sensorially experienced in the present.

The anthropologist Webb Keane argues that '[i]deas are not transmitted telepathically. They must be exteriorised in some way, for example, in words, gestures, objects, or practices, in order to be transmitted from one mind to another.'<sup>321</sup> When materialised, objects are subject to multiple interpretations. The religious studies scholar David Morgan indicates that scholars often analyse discourses as if they are only imagined in the mind, limiting themselves to what people say and write.<sup>322</sup> As he emphasises, people attribute meaning to the material world around them in their attempts to construct their life-worlds: '[m]eaning is a complex process of interaction in which people, objects, environments, histories, worlds, and ideas take part.'<sup>323</sup> Morgan proposes to study the responses to the object.<sup>324</sup> Rather than limiting their studies to iconography or style, scholars should investigate how objects are used in particular contexts and how people respond to them.<sup>325</sup> Rituals provide contexts for people to 'respond' to ritual objects in very specific ways. I mention here one specific way.

According to the linguist Jan Koster, rituals differ significantly from language in that rituals primarily relate to human emotions.<sup>326</sup> Ritual objects, and especially statues and images, are central to evoking these emotions because these are externalisations of the ideas of the mind. Devotees can express their meaningful relationship with the other (in this thesis: Ravana) in rituals. In her study of Mexican and Mesoamerican rituals, Jennifer Scheper Hughes argues that the presence of visual imagery and figurative objects in diverse cultural traditions indicates that deity images or effigies were sometimes affectionally engaged by the devotees.<sup>327</sup> Her work on the Mesoamerican practice of cradling images of deities in particular emphasises the emotional aspect of 'nurturing the deity.' As she points out:

The Mesoamerican practice highlights an important and neglected aspect of image-based religions more generally: devotional images in diverse religious traditions are commonly engaged, either deliberately or implicitly, as if they are infants or children. Like children, images and effigies (I use these two terms interchangeably) are utterly dependent on the care and ministrations of their caretakers and guardians; they must be birthed, bathed, dressed, fed, sung to,

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<sup>321</sup> Keane, *On the Materiality of Religion*, 230.

<sup>322</sup> Morgan, D. (2008), *The Materiality of Cultural Construction*, *Material Religion*, 4(2), 228-229, 228 DOI: 10.2752/175183408X328334

<sup>323</sup> Morgan, *The Materiality of Cultural Construction*, 228.

<sup>324</sup> Morgan, *The Materiality of Cultural Construction*, 228.

<sup>325</sup> Meyer, B., Morgan D., Paine, C., & Brent Plate, S. (2010), *The Origin and Mission of Material Religion*, *Religion*, 40(3), 207-211. DOI: 10.1016/j.religion.2010.01.010 Here these religious studies scholars argue that the study of the material culture of religion means a focus on bodies, things, places, and practices.

<sup>326</sup> Koster, J. (2003), *Ritual Performance and the Politics of Identity: On the Functions and Uses of Ritual*, *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 4(2), 211-248, 211.

<sup>327</sup> Scheper Hughes, J. (2016), *Cradling the Sacred: Image, Ritual, and Affect in Mexican and Mesoamerican Material Religion*, *History of Religions*, 56(1), 55-107, 106.



stroked, swaddled, cajoled, cuddled, and soothed to sleep. In local Indian expressions of Hinduism, for example, clay icons of the baby Krishna are fed, rocked, and adored as infants [...] Devotional activities directed toward effigies of infant or very young deities bring this childlike dependence into sharp relief. But the same nurture and tender attention can be observed also in the ritual care and maintenance of fully adult representations and even of nonrepresentational or nonfigurative images.<sup>328</sup>

Hughes argues that scholars should pay more attention to the relationship between materiality and affect in the context of religious ritual. I consider the affective culture and the emotional dimension related to rituals and ritual objects of central importance to investigate the 'role' of Ravana in people's daily lives. Ritual objects and statues that materialise Ravana appeal to the human senses and – especially when employed in rituals – open up the possibility for people to affectionally relate to Ravana. This is what the religious studies scholars Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead call religious emotion. With respect to the connection of religious emotion and materiality/rituality, they write that:

[...] attention to religion makes it much harder to ignore this entire realm of culture and materiality, partly because religious emotions are so bound up with sacred places, temples, shrines, and landscapes, and partly because they go beyond ordinary social relations to include relations with gods, goddesses, ancestors, and other symbolically mediated beings.<sup>329</sup>

Before I discuss how representations of the past are employed for ethno-nationalist purposes, I briefly mention here why I prefer the concept ritualising over ritual, without providing an extensive definition of ritual.

In my use of the concept ritualising, I follow the ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes. In his famous work *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, Grimes argues that rituals or rites are a set of actions widely recognised by members of a culture. They are different from ordinary behaviour and performed by ritualists.<sup>330</sup> According to Grimes:

“[r]itualizing” is the act of cultivating or inventing rites. I use it synonymously with “ritual construction” and “ritual making.” The “-izing” ending is a deliberate attempt to suggest a process, a quality of nascence or emergence. Ritualizing is not often socially supported. Rather, it happens in the margins, on the thresholds; therefore it is alternately stigmatized and eulogized.<sup>331</sup>

Because Ravana was not extensively part of a ritual context before the post-war period, I employ ritualising in this thesis to point out the emerging character of (some of) the

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<sup>328</sup> Scheper Hughes, *Cradling the Sacred*, 58.

<sup>329</sup> Riis, O. & Woodhead, L. (2010), *A Sociology of Religious Emotions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 38.

<sup>330</sup> Grimes, R. (2014), *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 192.

<sup>331</sup> Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 193.

rituals. The focus on rituals and ritual objects discloses different patterns compared to the narrative and discursive dimensions of the interest in Ravana on a micro-level, because they appeal to the human senses and emotions in a unique way.

### 3.3 (Ethno-)Nationalism and Representations of the Past

In the previous sections, I have used nationalism and ethno-nationalism interchangeably. Here I explain some of the differences between the concepts, with reference to relevant literature from political science and history, and why ethno-nationalism is more useful than nationalism in this context. I then discuss how representations of the past are employed in ethno-nationalist revitalisations and how that relates to hegemony.

#### 3.3.1 Nationalism and Ethno-nationalism

According to the historian Jerry Muller, there are two major types of theories on nationalism. The first type tends to focus on liberal or civic nationalism. The core idea of liberal or civic nationalism is that people who live within the same border belong to the nation regardless of their diverse ethnic, racial, or religious origins. The second type concentrates on ethno-nationalism. Here, the central idea is that nations are defined by an alleged shared heritage – often including a shared language, religion, and ancestry.<sup>332</sup>

To clarify why I employ the concept ethno-nationalism over nationalism, I briefly summarise the conceptualisation of nationalism and the nation as mentioned by one of the main theorists of nationalism: Benedict Anderson. I then briefly refer to the Sri Lankan situation and the presence of several sub-nationalisms. After that, I mention some of the ideas of Walker Connor, who developed the concept ethno-nationalism in reaction to theories on nationalism.

In his famous work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), the political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson frames nationality, nationhood, and nationalism as cultural artefacts that arouse deep attachments.<sup>333</sup> Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community, imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.<sup>334</sup> He argues that there are four characteristics of the nation. First, the nation is imagined because its members do not know each other personally. The image of the community exists only in the minds of the members.<sup>335</sup> Second,

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<sup>332</sup> Muller, J. (2008), Us and Them: The Enduring Power of Ethnic Nationalism, *Foreign Affairs*, 87(2), 18-35.

<sup>333</sup> Anderson, B. (2006), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Rev. ed.), London: Verso, 4. (Original work published in 1983).

<sup>334</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5-6.

<sup>335</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6-7.

the nation is imagined as limited because it has boundaries. Nations are not all-inclusive and in addition to 'us' there is always 'the other.'<sup>336</sup> Third, the nation is imagined as sovereign because it derives its legitimacy not from divinely-ordained dynastic realms but from the population, the citizens.<sup>337</sup> And last, the nation is imagined as a community connecting people to each other by deep horizontal comradeship.<sup>338</sup>

In Chapter 2, I described Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic country with the Sinhalese Buddhists constituting the majority of the population and the Tamils the largest minority. In a recent study on anti-Muslim sentiments in Sri Lanka, Sarjoon, Yusoff, and Hussin (2016) argue that sub-nationalisms in Sri Lanka – with Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and Tamil nationalism as the major ones – crystallised in the post-independence period. These sub-nationalisms were partly the result of the ethnic segregation that took place under British colonial rule. After the civil war, they argue, there was a similar pattern of inability to include the multiple minority (ethnic) groups, which resulted in what they call a re-emergence or resurgence of ethno-nationalism in post-civil war Sri Lanka.<sup>339</sup>

Ethnicity was at the heart of the various sub-nationalisms in Sri Lanka in the post-independence period (except for the Muslims, who have defined their identity along religious lines). It is in this socio-political context that *Ravanisation* has emerged, and several of its characteristics indicate an increased ethnic consciousness. Chapter 4 argues that *Ravanisation* has a strong focus on ethnicity. Because of this, I introduce here the concept ethno-nationalism and explain why the concept is a useful analytic device in studying *Ravanisation*.

The political scientist Walker Connor challenges the idea of a nation defined by boundaries. He introduces the concept ethno-nationalism instead of nationalism because the latter, he argues, was used improperly by several scholars to refer to a state or to the entire population of a state despite ethnic differences.<sup>340</sup> While other scholars have tended to explain conflicts in terms of post-cold war factors (thus looked at from a western point of view), Connor proposes that ethnic identities and conflicts can have deep roots and that ethnic movements often make a post-war or post-conflict reappearance.<sup>341</sup> Without proposing that present-day ethnic identities are centuries old, he argues that members of ethno-nationalist movements '[...] harbour intuitive convictions of their group's ancient pedigree [...]'.<sup>342</sup> He further mentions that:

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<sup>336</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

<sup>337</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7, 19.

<sup>338</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

<sup>339</sup> Sarjoon, A., Yusoff, M., & Hussin, N. (2016), Anti-Muslim Sentiments and Violence: A Major Threat to Ethnic Reconciliation and Ethnic Harmony in Post-war Sri Lanka, *Religions*, 7(10): 125, 1. DOI:10.3390/rel71001251.

<sup>340</sup> Connor, W. (2004), A Few Cautionary Notes on the History and Future of Ethnonational Conflicts, in A. Wimmer (Ed.), *Facing Ethnic Conflicts: Toward a New Realism*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 23-33, 23.

<sup>341</sup> Connor, A Few Cautionary Notes, 27.

<sup>342</sup> Connor, A Few Cautionary Notes, 29-30.

[t]he point, however, is that members of ethnic groups harbour intuitive convictions of the ancientness and purity of their group's existence. Identity does not draw its sustenance from facts but from perceptions—not, as I said earlier, from chronological/factual history but from sentient/felt history.<sup>343</sup>

In Section 3.1.1, I already introduced another key-theorist in the field of the study of ethno-nationalism: Anthony Smith. He mentions that for ethno-nationalists, elements of pre-existing ethnic communities play a central role. In his study of relationship between pre-existing ethnic communities and modern nationalism in *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (1999), he argues that:

[n]ationalism is a modern ideological movement, but also the expression of aspirations by various social groups to create, defend or maintain *nations*—their autonomy, unity and identity—by drawing on the cultural resources of pre-existing ethnic communities and categories.<sup>344</sup>

Ethno-nationalisms, Connor defines, do not focus on the nation state but look at subjective loyalties, not defined in terms of state borders or political units. Daniele Conversi summarises the aspect of Connor's idea of ethno-nationalism in the following way:

[Ethno-nationalism] denotes both the loyalty to a nation deprived of its own state and the loyalty to an ethnic group embodied in a specific state, particularly where the latter is conceived as a 'nation-state.'<sup>345</sup>

Ethno-nationalism is a useful concept to frame the phenomenon of *Ravanisation* because, as I explain throughout this thesis, the interest in Ravana has a strong ethnic component. In addition, the interest in Ravana takes place among the majority population of Sinhalese Buddhists living in the multi-ethnic country Sri Lanka. Ethno-nationalism is thus useful because it concentrates on ethnicity as central to self-consciousness and group identity.<sup>346</sup> Also, theorists of ethno-nationalism have developed a sensitivity to look at heterogeneity and multiple loyalties within a country and beyond the borders of countries. Since the phenomenon of *Ravanisation* has emerged in Sri Lanka among the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists (one of the sub-nationalisms), the focus on heterogeneity is fruitful to understand the dynamics within the country. Heterogeneity

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<sup>343</sup> Connor, A Few Cautionary Notes, 31.

<sup>344</sup> Smith, A. (1999), *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 18.

<sup>345</sup> Conversi, D. (2004), Conceptualizing Nationalism: An Introduction to Walker Connor's Work, in D. Conversi (Ed.), *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*, London and New York: Routledge, 1-23, 2.

<sup>346</sup> For Connor, nations are not like states but rather are self-consciousness ethnic groups. Members of an ethnic group become a nation instead of an ethnic community – and are not just defined by outsiders as a group – only if they have self-awareness. This ethnic consciousness requires an awareness of other groups and the feeling among the ethnic group of kinship. Connor, W. (1973), The Politics of Ethno-nationalism, *Journal of International Affairs*, 27(1), 1-21, 3-4.

within Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism is discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.4.

In a study on Karen-identity in Burma the anthropologist Ananda Rajah argues that among the markers of ethnic communities in post-colonial countries, which include language, religion, and dress, shared descent articulated in atavistic ethno-histories is the ultimate marker of ethnic identification. Claims of ethnic communities of indigenous and ancient ancestry through their representations of the past have tremendous impact on present-day situations.<sup>347</sup> In general, ancient and indigenous ancestry as well as ancient monarchy are elements central to ethno-nationalist representations of the past. Especially in a context where multiple ethnic communities live together, these are very central to present-day claims.

As described in Chapter 2, scholars often employ the concepts Sinhalese or Sinhala Buddhist nationalism to describe certain dynamics among the majority population within Sri Lanka. As mentioned earlier, nationalism can also imply ethno-nationalism, and I am well aware that several scholars have looked at Sinhala Buddhist nationalism through the lens of ethno-nationalism without explicating it – also because ‘Sinhalese’ implies ethnicity. In some recent publications, authors explicitly employ ethno-nationalism to describe – mostly post-war – developments in Sri Lanka. In addition to the study of Sarjoon, Yusoff, and Hussin, the political scientist Neil DeVotta, for instance, employs the concepts ethnocentrism and ethnocracy in his work to denote patterns of exclusion of minorities by the Sinhalese Buddhists in a political context. He also uses the concept in one of his book titles: *From Civil War to Soft Authoritarianism: Ethnonationalism and Democratic Regression in Sri Lanka* (2019).<sup>348</sup>

When I use the concepts nationalism and ethno-nationalism here, I typically follow how the authors themselves have used them. However, when I discuss some of the characteristics of *Ravanisation* – especially its specific representation of the past – I employ ethno-nationalism. I argue in the coming chapters that the characteristics of ethno-nationalist perceptions of the past are central to the Hela-Ravana representation of the past. As several ethno-nationalist theorists argue, there is a strong tendency among ethno-nationalists to employ representations of the past to build their individual and

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<sup>347</sup> As Rajah indicates on the ethno-history of the Karen in Burma: ‘[w]hat contemporary Karen nationalist ethno-history asserts, evident in these reiterations of Saw Aung Hla’s work, is that the Karen preceded the Burmans into Burma and that they therefore have a prior claim to land. This migratory ethno-history, in other words, makes it possible to claim that the Karen are more indigenous than the Burmans. In nationalist usages, Karen ethno-history is intimately linked to indigeneity as ideology (Wee 2001: 17–18).’ In: Rajah, A. (2002), A ‘Nation of Intent’ in Burma: Karen Ethno-Nationalism, Nationalism and Narrations of Nation, *The Pacific Review*, 15(4), 517-537, 531.

<sup>348</sup> DeVotta, N. (2019), *From Civil War to Soft Authoritarianism: Ethnonationalism and Democratic Regression in Sri Lanka*, Oxford: Routledge. Harsha Senanayake also employs the concept ethno-nationalism in an online article. Senanayake, H. S. M. D. P. (2020, April 5), Hundred Horizons: Territorialization of Sinhala Buddhist Ethnonationalism in Sri Lanka, *Foreign Policy News* <https://foreignpolicynews.org/2020/04/05/hundred-horizons-territorialization-of-sinhala-buddhist-ethnonationalism-in-sri-lanka/> He also refers once to the ‘mythological texts on Rawana used to present strong territorial claims based on Buddhism over the territory.’

collective identities on. The following chapters explore how several of the specific representations that have emerged in the process of *Ravanisation* relate to Sinhalese Buddhist post-war self-consciousness.

### 3.3.2 Remythologising

I have mentioned in Chapter 2 that throughout the twentieth century interpretations of certain narratives and concepts taken from the *Mahavamsa* have been employed by a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority to claim that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country, that the country belongs to the Sinhalese, and to frame tensions with minorities. As DeVotta argues about the multifarious claims of the Sinhalese: '[n]ot only does the Vijaya myth serve to bolster the claim that the Sinhalese were the island's original settlers but the story of the Buddhist warrior King Dutthagamani (second century B.C.E.) also in the *Mahavamsa* suggests that the Sinhalese and the Tamils are longstanding antagonists.'<sup>349</sup>

Not only have several Sinhalese Buddhists employed narratives of the past to make present-day claims, Tamils have also made plenty of references to narratives of the past to make claims about ancestry and territory. I have mentioned in the first chapter that one of the spokespersons of the Vishva Hindu Parishad claimed that Ravana is the ancestor of the Tamils. References to the past by both Tamil and Sinhalese ethno-nationalists were abundant in post-independence Sri Lanka. As Jazeel and Brun explain:

Regarding national and cultural-historical origins, both ideologies make explicit references to 'the past' in order to explain and justify current nationalist sentiments and practices. Advocates of both nationalisms portray their own nation as a primordial unit revolving around fixed essences of language, religion, ethnic origin, and territory (Stokke 1998). Arguments about seniority, antecedence, and therefore, legitimacy, are especially strong: those who came to an area first, irrespective of who have settled there later, believe themselves to have natural rights to the territory (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1990).<sup>350</sup>

Here we see similarities with Smith's assumption that ethno-nationalists reconstruct a coherent new set of ideas derived from existing myths. They employ, to borrow his words, pre-existing myth-symbol complexes. Ethnic categories projected on myths in recent times, however, significantly differ from the contexts in which these were written.<sup>351</sup> As Bruce Kapferer argues: '[i]ts danger is that it naturalises the ethnic present in terms of a past which was probably nothing like it is currently and popularly imag-

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<sup>349</sup> DeVotta, *Blowback*, 26.

<sup>350</sup> Jazeel, T., & Brun, C. (2009), Introduction: Spatial Politics and Postcolonial Sri Lanka, in C. Brun & T. Jazeel (Eds.), *Spatialising Politics: Culture and Geography in Postcolonial Sri Lanka*, Los Angeles: Sage, 1-24, 10.

<sup>351</sup> Kapferer, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka*, 46.

ined.<sup>352</sup> There lies, according to him, an immense potential in the use of myths to motivate people to strive for the ideals of ethno-nationalist ideologies.<sup>353</sup> Due to the utility of myth towards these ends, they were used in political rhetoric in Sri Lanka at the time of civil war.<sup>354</sup>

In *Nationalism, Historiography and the (Re)Construction of the Past* (2007), the historian Claire Norton – whose research focusses on how historical representations play a role for liminal communities in (post-)conflict situations – summarises several common features of nationalist historiographies. Among these are myths of origin, the role of the ‘other,’ and golden ages.<sup>355</sup> I have explained in the previous chapters that I do neither focus on how historians (re-)present the past, nor do I focus on references to Ravana in the political sphere. Instead, I investigate how and what kinds of representations of the past have taken shape on a grassroots level and in popular culture. This does not mean that there is no interaction between those levels of society. As the historian Nira Wickramasinghe argues about the blending of history and heritage in Sri Lanka:

Today, it is clear that the public idea of what constitutes the past is fashioned in a vibrant commercial environment where publishers, authors, film and tele-drama makers, using the print media as well as visual technologies and the internet and harbouring Sinhalese nationalist ideas, reproduce the monumental, most often exclusive, personality-oriented vision of the past as heritage that the state apparatus is conveying through educational institutions.<sup>356</sup>

Although the main focus of this thesis is not elite historiography, there are of course dynamics between that mode of representation and the ideas that take shape among ‘the people’ (see also Section 3.3.4). I point out, for instance, some interactions and similarities between popular researchers (with a clear ethno-nationalist agenda) and academics in Sri Lanka throughout this thesis. In what follows, I pay more attention to the function of myths for present-day representations of the past. Again, I refer to the *Mahavamsa* to introduce a concept that further explains the relationship between existing mythohistories and present-day ideologies: remythologising.

The concept remythologising is introduced by Bruce Kapferer, an anthropologist who has extensively published on myths and nationalism in Sri Lanka. One of his basic assumptions on the use of myths for nationalist purposes is that nationalists project present-day ideas of ethnicity upon the past.<sup>357</sup> The Dutugemunu discourse is an exam-

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<sup>352</sup> Kapferer, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka*, 47.

<sup>353</sup> Kemper, *The Presence of the Past*, 16.

<sup>354</sup> Spencer, J. (2014), Anthropology, Politics, and Place in Sri Lanka: South Asian Reflections from an Island Adrift, *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 10, 1-14. <http://samaj.revues.org/3812>

<sup>355</sup> Norton, C. (2007), Preface, in C. Norton (Ed.), *Nationalism, Historiography, and the (Re)construction of the Past*, Washington: New Academia Publishing, ix-xii, x.

<sup>356</sup> Wickramasinghe, N. (2013), Producing the Present: History as Heritage in Post-War Patriotic Sri Lanka, *Economic and Political Weekly* 48(43), 91-100, 96.

<sup>357</sup> Kapferer, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka*, 47.

ple of this. Kapferer mentions that during the civil war politicians frequently employed myths without paying much attention to the actual context in which the chronicles were written. With reference to the legitimising of power by Sinhalese politicians, Kapferer suggests that:

[i]n Sri Lanka the ideologies of state, society and ethnicity draw on myths present in ancient chronicles and, too, present in practices rooted in tradition or re-invented and asserted as traditional. The events of these myths are part of the imaginary of the state, of its political leaders and of its proponents. They are used to legitimate current political processes and, as I have said, naturalise the present violence as being an extension and further working out of past history.<sup>358</sup>

The intimate connection between myth and politics in Sri Lanka makes Kapferer suggest that there are only a few statements or references to historical myths in Sri Lanka that do not depend on political arguments.<sup>359</sup> In his article 'Remythologizing Discourses: State and Insurrectionary Violence in Sri Lanka,' Kapferer introduces the concept remythologising in the context of state and anti-state nationalist discourses in civil-war time Sri Lanka to refer to the connection between myth and politics. For Kapferer, remythologising serves

[...] to underline nationalist discourse and its historical and other claims as simultaneously an "invention of tradition" or, better, a reinvention of legendary or mythic constructions of past events in the political and economic circumstances of the present.<sup>360</sup>

With reference to the Sri Lankan Buddhist revival (see Section 2.2.3) Kapferer argues that these kinds of reformations and revitalisations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sri Lanka provoked both demythologisation (by asserting the scientific character of Buddhism, for example, in the case of the Buddhist revival) and remythologisations. Part of the remythologising was the selection of specific mythistorical events that were projected upon the civil-war events.<sup>361</sup> In this way – for example, through references to Dutugemunu in political rhetoric – political events have contributed to the

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<sup>358</sup> Kapferer, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka*, 56.

<sup>359</sup> Kapferer, B. (2012), *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*, New York: Berghahn Books, 32.

<sup>360</sup> Kapferer, B. (1997), *Remythologizing Discourses: State and Insurrectionary Violence in Sri Lanka*, in D. E. Apter (Ed.), *The Legitimization of Violence*, Hampshire: MacMillan Press, 159-188, 165.

<sup>361</sup> In his article 'Remythologizing Discourses,' Kapferer mainly discusses the metaphors of cosmic hierarchy and the hierarchical logic from the chronicles in the context of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism to frame the political situation and legitimise modern ideas of the nation-state including the suppression of subordinated others. Kapferer argues that rhetoric from chronicles was employed to meaningfully frame (violent) events in war times.



construction of an imagined history.<sup>362</sup> Myths have been employed for systems of representations to frame actual situations:

[...] a mythic consciousness and the logic of its imagined projections becomes more deeply ingrained as part of the everyday grasping of reality and its experience. The engagement of such a mythic consciousness in the interpretation of events expands and intensifies its imaginative hold. Its discourse, I suggest, becomes more and more motivational in the creation of political events.<sup>363</sup>

Kapferer discusses in detail the central relevance of myths in discourses of violence and nationalism in Sri Lanka (see also Section 3.1.2).<sup>364</sup> By remythologising he means the re-invention of myths and legends of the past as a (nationalist) ideology to frame present-day situations. I employ the concept remythologising to denote the processes of selective appropriation and creative redeployment of narrative elements and concepts taken from multiple sources and traditions for present-day ends. In addition to narratives, I also include (like Kapferer) ideas and concepts that are derived from oral and ritual traditions. I also investigate how, for example, lore is employed. The sociologist/anthropologist Dina Roginsky argues that:

[f]or an imagined community or for an ethnic group striving for revival, folklore represents actual cultural materials, narratives, rituals and performances as the “embodiment of tradition.”<sup>365</sup>

Several of the post-war Hela-Ravana representations, which are grounded in multiple sources and traditions, unveil patterns of a Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist agenda. However, since I am mainly looking at how these representations emerge and take shape on a grassroots level, I do not limit my use of the concept remythologising to ‘ideology.’ The concept hegemony is instead more fruitful for getting a sense of the dynamics between ‘elite’ and ‘the popular’ at times of ethno-nationalist resurgence.

### 3.3.3 History, Myth, and Mythistory

Myth and history are often regarded as opposites, where the former is considered fiction and the latter fact.<sup>366</sup> The historian Joseph Mali, who extensively conceptualised ‘mythistory’ in his work, argues that myths are not pure fiction ‘[...] because it usually contains or refers to certain crucial issues in the history of the community, such as those

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<sup>362</sup> Kapferer, *Remythologizing Discourses*, 174.

<sup>363</sup> Kapferer, *Remythologizing Discourses*, 175.

<sup>364</sup> Kapferer, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka*, 57.

<sup>365</sup> Roginsky, D. (2006), *Nationalism and Ambivalence: Ethnicity, Gender and Folklore as Categories of Otherness*, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40(3), 237-258, 244.

<sup>366</sup> Heehs, P. (1994), *Myth, History, and Theory*, *History and Theory*, 33(1), 1–19, 1.

that concern the common ancestry or territory of the community.<sup>367</sup> Myths convey meanings to communities, often concern beginnings, and are often said to be passed down from generation to generation.<sup>368</sup> These are exactly the elements that I have mentioned as central to ethno-nationalist representations of the past (see Section 3.3.1). Mali also refers to Anthony Smith and considers him right that historians should acknowledge the central relevance of myths for national identities.<sup>369</sup> He thus proposes a recognition of myths as fundamental to human social life and calls for a recognition of myths by historians in historiography.<sup>370</sup> Towards this end, he argues throughout his work that historians '[...] ought to be (and ought to make us) more aware of the mythical patterns of thought and action that reside in all historical events and narratives (including their own) [...]' and refers to this as mythistory.<sup>371</sup>

In *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* Bruce Lincoln differentiates history from myths by arguing that the latter possess authority. By the authority of myths, he means that:

[...] through the recitation of myth, one may effectively mobilize a social grouping. Thus, myth is not just a coding device in which important information is conveyed, on the basis of which actors *can then* construct society. It is also a discursive act through which actors evoke the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed.<sup>372</sup>

In 'Producing the Present: History as Heritage in Post-War Patriotic Sri Lanka,' the historian Nira Wickramasinghe argues with reference to the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka that 'it is a history full of omissions and chosen emphases, on which resembles the heritage/mythic mode of recounting the past rather than modern historiography.'<sup>373</sup> Whereas I do not discuss here the contrast that she suggests between the mythic mode and modern historiography, I find her comment exemplary of how in academia Sri Lankan chronicles are framed as myths. In this thesis, I prefer the concept mythistory over myth (or history). I follow Mali's supposition that myths are central to human life (including identities) and that their relevance should be recognised by historians and scholars across the board. Although I focus on representations of the past in popular culture rather than elite historiography, I employ the concept mythistory because I con-

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<sup>367</sup> Mali, J. (2003), *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 4.

<sup>368</sup> Mali, *Mythistory*, 5.

<sup>369</sup> Mali, *Mythistory*, 6, 7.

<sup>370</sup> Mali, *Mythistory*, 11.

<sup>371</sup> Mali, *Mythistory*, 18.

<sup>372</sup> Lincoln, B. (1989), *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 25. In *Discourse and the Construction of Society* Lincoln demonstrates with multiple examples how myths, rituals, and classification (considered by him discursive modes), can and have been employed for the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of society. Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 3.

<sup>373</sup> Wickramasinghe, *Producing the Present*, 95.

sider myths central to the perception of the past by humans in general (both in the fields of historiography and in popular culture) and recognise the authority of myths as a discursive modes to actively construct societies. In addition, Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana consider Ravana as history (*ithihasa, ethihasa*).<sup>374</sup> My use of the concept mythistory (or mythistorical perception/representation of the past) is thus based on a combination of an emic perspective and, following Joseph Mali, my opinion that myths are of central relevance to human life, including the perception of the past and the construction of ethno-nationalist identities. To denote the employment of legends to frame present-day situations, I sometimes use the concept remythologising as introduced in the previous section. I should note here, too, that I use the term narrative when speaking about stories people told me in casual conversation, whereas I reserve the concept mythistory for the more encompassing system of representations of the past. The boundary between the concepts is, of course, not always clear-cut, and for the sake of variety I sometimes use them interchangeably.

### 3.3.4 Hegemony

The concept hegemony was a central thread in Antonio Gramsci's (1891-1937) writings, most of which he wrote while imprisoned from 1926 until his death in 1937.<sup>375</sup> Far from a fully elaborated theory, hegemony was more like an underlying central principle implicit in his fragmentary pieces of writing. In addition to being sometimes difficult to discern, his ideas were deeply embedded in the Italian context.<sup>376</sup> It is in this very specific context that he developed his ideas of how dominance remained established and introduced what became known as hegemony. Thomas R. Bates gives a very straightforward definition of Gramsci's idea of hegemony:

It means political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class.<sup>377</sup>

Hegemony is according to Gramsci produced in civil society where intellectuals translate and popularise the worldview of the leaders to the masses. This results in consent of the masses to the leaders.<sup>378</sup>

Central to Gramsci's hegemony is that an idea, worldview, or moral order (of the ruling class) should become dominant, popularised, and ingrained in multiple strata of

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<sup>374</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Itihása,' 68.

<sup>375</sup> Femia, J. V. (1981), *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 3.

<sup>376</sup> Hall, S. (2005), Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, in S. Hall & D. Morley (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, 411-441, 415.

<sup>377</sup> Bates, T. R. (1975), Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (2), 351-366, 352.

<sup>378</sup> Bates, Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony, 353.

society. In Gramsci's view, ideology only 'works' when it becomes 'common sense,' [...] when it enters, modifies, and transforms the practical, everyday consciousness of popular thought of the masses.<sup>379</sup>

Several scholars employ the concept hegemony for the Sri Lankan context and specifically discuss the dynamics between the elite and the popular. I mention some of these scholars here and conclude this section with how I employ the concept in this thesis.

In their study on the political economy in Sri Lanka, Dhanusha Gihan Pathirana and Chandana Aluthge (both working in the field of economics) argue that in Sri Lanka a *cultural* hegemony among the Sinhalese Buddhist elite emerged in the nineteenth century. The reform movement and Buddhist revival at that time, led by local elite who opposed racial and religious discrimination by the British colonisers, had no strong ties with the lower classes. They write, for instance, that '[...] there was no Sinhala-Buddhist supremacist self-identification by the Sinhalese general public before independence [...].'<sup>380</sup> They further mention that the vacuum left after independence gave rise to a *political* hegemony on the part of the agrarian bloc grounded in Sinhalese Buddhist supremacy. This movement was reactive to the elite's cultural hegemony, which previously did not include the lower classes.<sup>381</sup>

In her thesis *In Pursuit of Hegemony: Politics and State Building in Sri Lanka* (2011), Shyamika Jayasundara-Smits mentions that one of the limitations of applying Gramsci's idea of hegemony to the Sri Lankan context is his distinction between the political and civil society. Jayasundara-Smits explores the dynamics of Sinhalese Buddhist hegemony in the political sphere and in the broader Sinhalese community. She employs the concept hegemony as a tool to examine not only the inter-ethnic relations between Sinhalese and the Tamils but also the intra-Sinhalese political relations in post-independent Sri Lanka, which involved the Sinhalese elites and the subordinate groups.<sup>382</sup> She argues that both the JVP – Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna or 'People's Liberation Front,' a movement that emerged in the mid-1960s as one of the New Left Maoist movements – and JHU have the characteristics of externally mobilised political parties (see on the JHU Section 2.3.2). These parties gave aid to Mahinda Rajapaksa when he came to power in 2005.<sup>383</sup>

The sociologist David Rampton argues that nationalism should not be considered as an elite instrument for political mobilisation. Instead, the hegemonic potency of Sinhalese nationalism in Sri Lanka should be investigated by looking at interweaving dynamics that are produced and experienced across multiple contexts. Doing so, he suggests, overcomes a limited focus on dichotomies as matter-idea and elite-mass.

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<sup>379</sup> Hall, Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 431.

<sup>380</sup> Pathirana, D. G., & Aluthge, C. (2020), *A History of Underdevelopment and Political Economy of Inflation in Sri Lanka: With an Outline of Nationalisms*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 189-190.

<sup>381</sup> Pathirana & Aluthge, *A History of Underdevelopment*, 192.

<sup>382</sup> Jayasundara-Smits, S. (2013), *In Pursuit of Hegemony: Politics and State Building in Sri Lanka* [doctoral dissertation, Erasmus University], 15-16. <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/40137/>

<sup>383</sup> Jayasundara-Smits, *In Pursuit of Hegemony*, 111.

Rampton's focus is on the ways subaltern forces were drawn into and proactively worked to reproduce nationalist discourses. Elites have some measure of importance, of course, but in order to understand the populist effect of nationalism one has to take into account that Sinhalese nationalism is hegemonic, heterogenous, socially diffuse, and reproduced in multiple areas and strata of society.<sup>384</sup> As he argues:

What needs to be recognised [...] is the gradual but incremental hegemonisation of the social field by Sinhala nationalist dynamics so that it is no longer solely elites who share this social imaginary of Sri Lankan space as Sinhala Buddhist or the state vehicle which drives nationalism. Sinhala nationalism is increasingly apparent in diverse apparatuses which invest the social field, but which achieve a discursive unity through processes of hegemonisation.<sup>385</sup>

Like Pathirana and Aluthge, Rampton mentions that the hegemonic perception of Sinhalese nationalism, which places the Sinhalese at the apex of the population, was present among the elite prior to independence. However, Sinhalese nationalist hegemony was only achieved when these ideas started to dominate political and social articulation in the post-independence period.<sup>386</sup>

Rampton argues that Sinhalese nationalism is '[...] a socio-political representation of Sri Lanka, in which territory, state and nation of the island compose a bounded unity revolving around a majoritarian axis of Sinhala Buddhist religion, language, culture and people.'<sup>387</sup> This social representation reproduces a hierarchy placing the Sinhalese at the apex. It is hegemonic because '[...] it is widely disseminated among the social strata of the Sinhala community, producing a notable congruence between nationalist ideology and popular culture and practices.'<sup>388</sup> The representation of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist unitary state is hegemonic insofar as it has become widely disseminated among multiple social strata.<sup>389</sup>

Despite the limitations of applying Gramsci's idea of hegemony to the Sri Lankan situation, it is useful to refer to the Sinhalese Buddhism ethno-nationalist socio-political representation of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country as *hegemonic* because it has become common sense (among the Sinhalese Buddhists majority) and broadly shared among diverse social strata. I employ the concept hegemony to refer to the dominance of this representation and to explore the aspects of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism in popular culture. I follow Rampton's claim that Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, while hegemonic, is also socially diffuse and heterogenous.<sup>390</sup> The episodes from the *Mahavamsa* of King Dutugemunu and the coming of Vijaya, as well as the represen-

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<sup>384</sup> Rampton, *Deeper Hegemony*, 256.

<sup>385</sup> Rampton, *Deeper Hegemony*, 254.

<sup>386</sup> Rampton, *Deeper Hegemony*, 259.

<sup>387</sup> Rampton, *Deeper Hegemony*, 256.

<sup>388</sup> Rampton, *Deeper Hegemony*, 261.

<sup>389</sup> Rampton, *Deeper Hegemony*, 262-264.

<sup>390</sup> Rampton, *Deeper Hegemony*, 256.

tation of Ravana as the ancient king of the Sinhalese, are all (even contradictory) manifestations of the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist representation that the Sinhalese Buddhists are the rightful owners of the country.

### 3.4 Spatial Dimension

This section introduces two additional concepts that I employ in this thesis to illuminate the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation*: imagined landscape and religious landscape. There is some overlap between the two concepts. In Section 3.4.2, I explain why I have included the concept religious landscape in my conceptual framework in addition to imagined landscape.

#### 3.4.1 Imagined Landscape

I focus in this section on the centrality of perceptions of the past for envisioning the landscape in South Asian contexts. Narratives about the past have been employed in the past and the present to bestow alleged ancientness and sacredness upon sites. Also, I pay attention to how the connection between mythistories and territory creates a fertile breeding ground for present-day claims to the rightful ownership of territory.

The central concept of this section is ‘imagined landscape.’ This concept is introduced by the religious studies scholar Diana Eck in the context of pilgrimage studies in India. As she argues in her book *India a Sacred Geography*, geographical features in India such as rivers, mountains, villages, and waterfalls are linked with ancient stories of gods and heroes, and through these stories such geographical features in the landscape are connected to each other in what she coins an imagined landscape.<sup>391</sup> She writes:

While many branches of geography are scientific in perspective and method, what is clear from the study of Hindu India is that its geographical features—its rivers, mountains, hills, and coastlands—no matter how precisely rendered, mapped, or measured, are also charged with stories of gods and heroes. It is a resonant, sacred geography. But it is also a landscape, in that these features are connected, linked to a wider whole. While I use the term “imagined landscape,” it is far from imaginary. It is lived landscape that may focus on a particular temple, hillock, or shrine but sets it in a wider frame.<sup>392</sup>

Eck’s concept ‘imagined landscape’ focusses on the intimate connection between ‘ancient stories’ and topography.<sup>393</sup> I employ the concept imagined landscape (especially in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7) to refer to the collection of sites in Sri Lanka that are referred

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<sup>391</sup> Eck, D. L. (2012), *India: A Sacred Geography*, New York: Harmony Books, 4-5.

<sup>392</sup> Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*, 11.

<sup>393</sup> Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*, 39.

to by Sinhalese Buddhists as places where certain events that allegedly happened in Ravana's time took place.

Eck argues that the practice of pilgrimage in India turns an imagined landscape into a lived landscape.<sup>394</sup> It is the pilgrims who breathe life into and embed the imagined landscape with emotion, thus turning the imagined landscape into a lived landscape. In Sri Lanka, some young men, especially those who run Ravana research groups and produce media items about their Ravana research, consider the visiting of sites an important part of their research (for an example of this, see Box 1.1). Others mostly learn about these sites by reading or watching media items without paying visits to the sites. Ravana's imagined landscape in Sri Lanka is thus to a great extent imaginary: although there are actual spots and sites all over the country, the vast majority of people with an interest in Ravana has never visited more than one or two of these sites. The concept 'imagined landscape' thus expresses the central role of imagining as a process of the mind to envision a particular landscape even without actually visiting it (and less, as Eck describes, the actual practice of visiting those sites). Also, the sites that are embedded with narratives are mostly natural or (alleged) archaeological sites and not 'religious' sites. Therefore, I do not use Eck's concept of 'sacred geography' but only use her concept imagined landscape to denote the cluster of geographical features and sites in Sri Lanka that relate to fragments of Ravana's alleged whereabouts in Sri Lanka. Ravana's imagined landscape in Sri Lanka includes rocks and mountains, for instance, as well as tunnels, archaeological sites, caves, and waterfalls (see Chapter 5).

As *Ravanisation* is an emerging phenomenon, examining its imagined landscape and the narratives related to these sites promises to disclose some of the key characteristics of this phenomenon. As geographical features can be subject to multiple interpretations and appropriations, investigating the imagined landscape can disclose shifting patterns of perceptions of the past. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7.

The close entanglement of mythstories with sites is taken to a next level in the context of twentieth- (and twenty-first-) century (ethno-)nationalisms in South Asia. In Sections 3.1.2 and 3.3.2, I mentioned that mythstories were used in the twentieth century to define communities and tensions between ethnic groups. At the hands of nationalists, reinterpretations of narratives of the past do not only have the potential to define communities, but also function to lay claim on territory.

Scholars have argued that Hindu nationalism could very easily blur with narratives of the past and territory in India insofar as imagining the landscape is an ingrained practice for many Hindus. In the context of twentieth-century Hindu nationalism, for instance, India has been envisioned as the kingdom of Rama. As the anthropologist Peter van der Veer argues with reference to David Mandelbaum's work:

There is a traditional basis for the larger national identification. It is the idea, mainly engendered by Hindu religion but shared by those of other religion as well, that there is an entity of India to which all inhabitants belong. The Hindu

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<sup>394</sup> Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*, 12.

epics and legends teach that the stage for the gods was nothing less than the entire land and that the land remains one religious setting for those who dwell in it.<sup>395</sup>

References to Rama and his 'glorious' kingdom from the *Ramayana* have become powerful tools in the hands of Hindu nationalists to mobilise people. The nationalist political party (the BJP), for example, has made extensive use of the *Ramayana* for political rhetoric and political mobilisation and have thus taken the imagining of the landscape to a next (political) level.<sup>396</sup>

### 3.4.2 Religious Landscape

Whereas Diana Eck argues that the imagined landscape is also a lived landscape (see previous section), I use the concept religious landscape to refer to spatial features of *Ravanisation* that are not necessarily related to Ravana's whereabouts at and around specific localities. I mention here what I mean by religious landscape and how this concept relates to the concepts materialising and ritualising introduced in Section 3.2.2.

The historian Marietta Horster includes in her definition of a religious landscape actual sanctuaries, 'the ritual and cultural practices in the sphere of religion,' processions, the routes of pilgrims, the areas surrounding sanctuaries, and fairs and markets for religious festivals. Several of these have a temporary character. She further mentions what she refers to as the myths and mythological traditions interwoven with the land.<sup>397</sup> This later dimension of the religious landscape corresponds with the 'imagined landscape' introduced in the previous section.<sup>398</sup>

The religious landscape of *Ravanisation* includes the temporary 'ritual landscape' and the permanent materialising of Ravana in statues and shrines. These shrines and statues are often constructed at public sites, but not always. Sometimes they are built on private property, but their ritual functions are not limited to the private owner. The way I employ the concept religious landscape in this thesis closely relates to my focus on the materialising and ritualising of Ravana. Rituals and materials – especially religious materialisation – are enplaced. Claudia Moser and Cecelia Feldman argue about religious rituals:

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<sup>395</sup> Van der Veer, P. (1996), Riots and Rituals: The Construction of Violence and Public Space in Hindu Nationalism, in P. R. Brass (Ed.), *Riots and Pogroms*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 154-176, 156.

<sup>396</sup> Shukla, From Evil to Evil, 176.

<sup>397</sup> Horster, M. (2010), Religious Landscape and Sacred Ground: Relationships between Space and Cult in the Greek World, *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 227(4), 435-458, 435-437.

<sup>398</sup> The concept religious landscape closely intertwines with ritual landscape. The concept ritual landscape was introduced in the field of archaeology in the 1980s to denote areas where ceremonial artefacts were found and almost no other evidence of other human activities. The concept ritual landscape is now also employed in ethnographic studies. Virtanen, P. K., Lundell, E. A., & Honkasalo, M. (2017), Introduction: Enquiries into Contemporary Ritual Landscapes, *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 11(1), 5-17.



Religious ritual cannot be studied as a disembodied event or series of events – removed from its location and separate from the physicality of its performance. Instead, the ritual must be examined in its specific material and topographical context in which ritual action impacts its physical setting while, simultaneously, the location in which the ritual is enacted informs and guides the religious practice.<sup>399</sup>

In this thesis the focus is mainly – but not exclusively – on shrines and statues as these remain permanent in the landscape. I do, however, extensively look at rituals in Chapter 6. The Ravana statues to be discussed in Chapter 5 are recently constructed (except for one) and are placed at Buddhist sites. These locations, as I will point out, are of central relevance to the post-war effort to place Ravana into a Sinhalese Buddhist worldview and timeframe.

For several of the recently constructed Ravana shrines, narratives about Ravana's whereabouts in Sri Lanka play no role or only a secondary role. Because the Ravana shrines are idiosyncratic, stand on their own, are often privately funded, and are not linked to each other, I do not consider them part of the imagined landscape. The imagined landscape as defined by Eck gives centrality to narratives of the past and the connection of sites to each other.

Scholars have discussed the function of temples and shrines for sociocultural (including ritualistic) and economic ends, their function in preserving and (selectively) promoting heritage through architecture, sculpture, and inscriptions, and as politically charged religious institutions. Shrines and temples have specific functions as areas set apart for communications between humans and the divine.<sup>400</sup> Here we encounter an (alleged) relationship and the religious emotions that these sites evoke as I have mentioned in Section 3.3.2 with reference to Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead.

I have included the concept religious landscape to explicate a particular focus in this thesis on how people might (affectively) relate to Ravana through rituals and his materialisation in statues (at Buddhist sites). The affective dimension is also bound up with landscapes, but insofar as rituals create temporary multi-sensorial experiences, and several of the Ravana shrines are not built at sites that are imbued with narratives of the past, I distinguish the religious landscape from the imagined landscape. In Chapter 5, I introduce both landscapes in the context of *Ravanisation*. The next chapter introduces some key concepts in *Ravanisation*.

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<sup>399</sup> Moser, C., & Feldman, C. (2013), Introduction. in C. Moser & C. Feldman (Eds.), *Locating the Sacred, Theoretical Approaches to the Emplacement of Religion*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1-12, 1.

<sup>400</sup> The convenors of the panel 'Art, ritual, and text at shrines in South Asia: A cross-disciplinary and diachronic investigation of the forms and functions of shrines' of the forthcoming ECSAS conference 2021 mention that the multiple roles and functions of shrines should be given more attention in academic research. Art, Ritual, and Text at Shrines in South Asia: A Cross-Disciplinary and Diachronic Investigation of the Forms and Functions of Shrines [Conference Panel description], *ECSAS 2021 26th European Conference on South Asian Studies*, <https://ecsas2021.univie.ac.at/panels/rwnxc/> (retrieved July 1, 2020).



## PART II: INTRODUCTION TO RAVANISATION

In this second part of my thesis, I introduce *Ravanisation*. The topics in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 are addressed with the chapters of Part III of my thesis in mind; these chapters, in other words, serve as an introduction to the chapters of Part III insofar as they situate my specific case studies in the larger framework of the post-war interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. To do this, I first discuss some of the key-concepts of *Ravanisation* in Chapter 4. And in Chapter 5, I explore a selection of sites in Sri Lanka related to Ravana with a specific section on shrines because shrines play a (central) role in my case studies.

One of the foci of my thesis, as I have mentioned in Chapter 1, is the concern with existing texts, chronicles, and traditions on the part of Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana. Chapter 4 investigates in detail how and why concepts from different sources are employed in the process of *Ravanisation* and what the adaptations made by way of interpretation indicate about *Ravanisation*. I relate my findings to several of the theoretical insights that I have discussed in Section 3.1.1 – for example, the selective use of pre-existing myth-symbol complexes for representations of the past in times of (re-vitalisations of) ethno-nationalism. I do not provide a detailed discussion of the historical use of the concepts, but mainly focus on how these concepts are presently employed.

Whereas Chapter 4 primarily focuses on the narrative and discursive discussion of concepts, texts, and traditions that are selectively employed in the process of *Ravanisation*, Chapter 5 explores the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation*. I give a tentative overview of (public) Ravana shrines in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, I discuss the significance of the imagined landscape to sense competing myth-historical perceptions of the past in more detail by exploring a site that has become central to the imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka: Sigiriya.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> For a broader discussion of Ravana's imagined landscape in Sri Lanka I refer to my co-authored article 'Ravana and Rama in Sri Lanka: Ramayana Tourism, Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism, and Competing Historical Imaginaries in Post-War Sri Lanka.'



## CHAPTER 4

# Key Concepts in *Ravanisation*: Lanka, Hela, *Yaksha*, and *Dasis* Ravana

One of the main focal points of my thesis is the concern with existing (allegedly) ancient texts, chronicles, and traditions on the part of Sinhalese Buddhists interested in Ravana (see Section 1.1.2). In this chapter, I explore how (and why) concepts from multiple (textual) sources and traditions are employed in the process of *Ravanisation* and what the adaptations made to these concepts might indicate about *Ravanisation*. This section relates to the first part of my research question as it aims to disclose how Ravana and Sri Lanka are envisioned by a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority in post-war Sri Lanka. Over the course of my fieldwork, four concepts stood out to me as central to *Ravanisation*: Lanka, Hela, *yaksha*, and (to a lesser extent) *dasis* (ten-headed) Ravana. Because the *yakshas* are considered one of the four Hela ‘tribes,’ I discuss this topic together with the Hela concept in Section 4.2. The other concepts, Lanka and *dasis* Ravana, are discussed in Section 4.1 and Section 4.3 respectively.

Although I present here an ‘overview,’ it should be noted that the selection of concepts discussed here is based on the research that I conducted in 2016, 2017, and 2018 in Sri Lanka. In some ways, then, the selection is mine; but it is also grounded in themes that came up in my conversations with Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana. After I conducted the conversations, I investigated certain topics further by looking up details in popular Ravana publications (which provide a more comprehensive overview than the bits and pieces that were brought up in often informal conversations). I have also explored several of the ‘sources’ to which people (indirectly) referred for certain concepts and claims – some of these ‘sources’ were explicitly mentioned. My exploration was limited to the concepts and processes that relate in one way or another to my case studies.<sup>402</sup> I reflect in this chapter mainly on how concepts and ideas from several textual sources and traditions are employed for the recent interest in Ravana, what logic there might be behind employing these concepts and ideas for the post-war Sinhalese Buddhist interest in Ravana, and how these processes relate to several ethno-nationalist tendencies (see Section 4.4).

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<sup>402</sup> Quantitative analysis of my dataset did not lead me to these topics, but I have used colour coding for my three logbooks (which include notes from interviews and informal conversations as well as my observations). Also, I extensively rewrote the chapters of the second part of my thesis after I wrote the part about my case studies in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. I have thus written Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 in retrospect as background chapters to Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

My exploration of key concepts mainly concentrates on references to Lanka, the Hela (including the *yakshas*), and (*dasis*) Ravana in textual records and traditions selectively employed by Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana for contemporary Ravana representations.

In Chapter 3, I specified 'discourse' as a field of representations and further noted that the Ravana discourse includes the representations that can be found in popular Ravana books and newspaper articles, YouTube channels, TV and radio programmes, activities (online and offline) initiated by popular Ravana research groups, public performances, rituals, and (sports) activities, and the construction of shrines and statues at public sites. The common core is that the ideas have a broader support and are publicly available. To avoid a presentation of idiosyncratic ideas, I mainly provide quotations from popular Ravana books, articles, and interviews with authorities on Ravana. The casual and informal conversations in which people mentioned certain ideas and concepts to me, however, are foundational to this thesis. Some topics repeatedly came up in these conversations, and that is how this selection of key concepts came to be.

In this chapter, I do not attempt to provide a comprehensive set of ideas or to provide a general historical overview. While I have included background information on the textual record or the movement when relevant, and in several sections I refer to the historical use of a certain concept in the Sri Lankan or broader South Asian context, the focus remains on the actual use of certain concepts and ideas in the process of *Ravanisation*.

In the final section of this chapter (Section 4.4), I relate my findings to several of the concepts that I have discussed in Chapter 3, mainly the selective use of pre-existing myth-symbol complexes to construct a new set of ideas in times of (revitalisations of) ethno-nationalism. This new set of ideas or re-mythologising is, as I argue, illustrative of some of the peculiarities of *Ravanisation* and a specific (post-war) zeitgeist among a segment of the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka.

Instead of providing a separate overview of authorities on Ravana, I mention them throughout this chapter and provide details about some of them in the different vignettes. In addition, I do not discuss the time period of Ravana's alleged presence in Lanka in a separate section but instead mention diverse perspectives throughout the chapter in the context of the discussion of a certain concept, textual source, or movement.

## 4.1 Lanka and Sri Lanka

In conversations, Sinhalese Buddhists often described Ravana to me (in English) as king of Sri Lanka. Similarly, Sinhala publications in the Ravana discourse often referred to Ravana as king (*raja*) of Lanka.<sup>403</sup> After a brief exploration of the historical designation

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<sup>403</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Rája,' 531.

of Sri Lanka as Lanka, I discuss sources beyond the *Ramayana* tradition that mention Ravana and/or Lanka as his abode. I conclude with a reflection on why Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana refer to a multiplicity of sources for the connection between Ravana and Lanka.

#### 4.1.1 Sri Lanka as Ravana's Lanka

The island of Sri Lanka has been known in the language of its own inhabitants by different names. The most well-known of these names are Lanka in Sinhala (and Pali) and *Ilankai* in Tamil.<sup>404</sup> In the colonial period the island was called Ceylon by the Portuguese, but alternative designations for the country's name remained. Michael Roberts mentions that Sinhalese Kandyen war poetry (mostly written in the period from 1590s to 1670) praised the king as the protector of the entire unified country, called *Lakdiva* and *Siri Laka*.<sup>405</sup> Ceylon remained the official name of the island until 1972. In that year the official name of the island became Sri Lanka to dissociate from this colonial memory.<sup>406</sup>

Lanka is probably the earliest name for Sri Lanka.<sup>407</sup> The island is referred to as Lanka, for instance, in the Sri Lankan chronicles (which were composed in Pali): the *Dipavamsa* (fourth and fifth centuries) and the *Mahavamsa* (of which the first part was composed in the sixth century; see Section 2.3.1.1).<sup>408</sup> Although the island was called Lanka, this did not automatically imply the equation of Sri Lanka with the Lanka of Ravana. The similarity shared by the two names, however, made it possible to equate Sri Lanka with Ravana's Lanka as it is primarily known (at least in the West) from the famous Hindu epic the *Ramayana*. Justin Henry explained about this (see for his research Section 1.1.1):

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<sup>404</sup> Wilson, A. J. (1993), *Ethnic Strife in Sri Lanka: The Politics of Space, Regional Politics and Policy*, 3(1), 144-169, 147. Wilson has shown that the ancient Greeks referred to the island as Serendib. The present Sinhala word for Ceylon is Sri Lanka, and the Tamil equivalent is *Ilankai*. According to Dagman Hellmann-Rajanayagam, Eelam was used interchangeably with *Ilankai* in oldest Tamil literature. In the 1920s and 1930s, Tamil Eelam became used to indicate the areas in Sri Lanka where the majority population consists of Tamils and considered by them as theirs. See: Hellmann-Rajanayagam, D. (2004), *The Politics of the Tamil Past*, in J. Spencer (Ed.), *History and the Roots of Conflict*, London/New York: Routledge, 107-124, 114.

<sup>405</sup> Roberts, M. (2003), *Language and National Identity: The Sinhalese and Others over the Centuries, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 9(2), 75-102, 82-84. See also: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Lak,' 'Lakdiwa,' 543, 'Siri,' 684.

<sup>406</sup> Rajah, A. R. S. (2017), *Government and Politics in Sri Lanka: Biopolitics and Security*, New York: Routledge, 41.

<sup>407</sup> Knighton, W. (1993), *The History of Ceylon*, Delhi: Sri Satguru, 4.

<sup>408</sup> For more on the dating of the chronicles, see: Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 4, 22.

As Sri Lanka was known as “Laṅkā” from very early on (at least from the time of the *Dīpavamsa*), it would be surprising were there no conflation at all between the island and the “Laṅkāpura” of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>409</sup>

Henry has further argued that it is in the South Indian inscriptional discourse that there appears from the eighth century onwards an unambiguous identification of Sri Lanka with the abode of Ravana.<sup>410</sup> This identification was elaborated upon during the South Indian Chola dynasty whose invasions to Sri Lanka in the tenth and eleventh century solidified the equation of Sri Lanka as Ravana’s abode Lanka (on the Chola invasions in Sri Lanka, see Section 2.2.1). The Sri Lankan Tamils seem to have taken over the identification of the island as Ravana’s Lanka from the South Indians.<sup>411</sup> This identification has also found its way into Sinhalese perceptions of the past. As Henry has argued, the *Ramayana* had become part of the Sinhalese Buddhist mythistorical imagination by the sixteenth century.<sup>412</sup>

In the next sections, I provide an exploration of references to (ancient) textual records – some of which are also discussed by Henry – that mention Ravana as king of Lanka/Sri Lanka. The common denominator of the references discussed here is that they are explicitly referred to in the Ravana discourse and that the references relate to sources beyond the *Ramayana* tradition (on Paula Richman’s definition of the *Ramayana* tradition, see Section 1.1). I specifically focus on how these concepts are employed in the process of *Ravanisation* and why some of these concepts and records have risen into prominence in the post-war period, especially among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority.

#### 4.1.2 Ravana and Lanka in Records Beyond the *Ramayana* Tradition

In Sri Lanka, the conservative perception of the past was constructed, preserved, and updated primarily by Buddhist monks. In the *Dīpavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa* (Section 2.3.1.1), no reference is made to Ravana.<sup>413</sup> Alternative perceptions of the past could be encountered both inside and outside monastic circles. Examples of these, as mentioned by Henry, are poems written by monks and educated laypeople (*sandesa*, or *sandesa kavya* which means ‘messenger poetry’), miscellaneous prose works on topographia (*kadaim poth* or ‘boundary books’), local histories (*viththi poth*), folklore and documents from the colonial period, and less popular chronicles.<sup>414</sup> This section discusses alterna-

<sup>409</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 159.

<sup>410</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 161.

<sup>411</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 164.

<sup>412</sup> Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 239.

<sup>413</sup> *Lankapura*, which means the ‘city of Lanka,’ is mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa* (*pura* also means fortress). See: Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, ‘pura,’ 635, ‘Laṅkāpurī,’ 894, 895; Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Pura,’ 365. For more on this topic, see: Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 146, 177. Also, ancient ‘tribes’ such as the *yakshas* and *nagas* are mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa*. This is discussed further in Section 4.2.3.

<sup>414</sup> An example given by Henry of a Sinhala messenger poem that mentions Ravana is the *Kokila Sande-*



tive perceptions of the past found in texts that mention Lanka as Ravana's abode and are referred to in the process of *Ravanisation*. Most of these texts are Sinhala texts, but I also refer to a colonial record and a Mahayana Buddhist text because they are also selectively employed in the process of *Ravanisation*. I start here with the *Lankavatara Sutra*.

### The *Lankavatara Sutra*

When I asked Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana about the time when Ravana was in Sri Lanka, they often said that it was around 5,000 or 6,000 years ago.<sup>415</sup> Some people did not refer to a specific time period, but rather explained to me that Ravana was in Sri Lanka prior to the visits of Vijaya or Gautama Buddha to the country (pre-*Mahavamsa*, see Section 4.2.3). Others said that Ravana was in Sri Lanka at the time of a previous Buddha. Because this last claim appeared in the context of both case studies to be discussed in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, I introduce it here.

Several Sinhalese Buddhists said that Ravana lived during the time of a specific Buddha. They named Kashyapa Buddha (the Buddha allegedly preceding Gautama Buddha) most often, but there was no consistency in this regard. The idea that Ravana lived in the time of a previous Buddha, however, was according to some derived from the *Lankavatara Sutra*. The *Lankavatara Sutra* belongs to a set of *sutras* written in the fourth century.<sup>416</sup> The *Lankavatara Sutra* was not widely known until it was revived by a Sanskrit translation of the Japanese Buddhist monk and scholar Nanjo Bunyu in 1923.<sup>417</sup> The Zen Buddhist teacher D.T. Suzuki used this Sanskrit version of the *Lankavatara Sutra* for

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*saya*. This *sandesaya* was composed around 1450 and includes a reference that associates Ravana with (Sri) Lanka. The *Kokila Sandesaya* mentions the mythical bridge between India and (Sri) Lanka that was constructed to '[...] convey the vast armies for the battle against the Ten-necked One (Rāvaṇa).' Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 166-167. *Potha* means book, manuscript: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Pota,' 378.

<sup>415</sup> Some people mentioned that Ravana's time was 4,000 or 7,000 years ago. In addition to a period of between 4,000 and 7,000 years ago, a remarkable period was mentioned to me twice – namely, that Ravana lived 30,000 years ago. This happened in the following conversations: informal conversation with AN3, *angampora* student, Maharagama, April 2, 2017; informal conversation with DP3, attendant of Ravana *puja*, Pannipitiya, March 12, 2017. These people probably believed that Ravana lived at the time of a previous Buddha. The *Mahapadana Sutra* of the *Digha Nikaya* or Long Discourses (part of the *Tripitaka* or Pali canon, see also Section 6.1.3) mentions that the lifespan at present time (the time period of Gautama Buddha) is short, with a maximum of 100 years, but that in the time of the previous Buddha (Kashyapa Buddha) the lifespan was 20,000 years and the second previous Buddha (Konagama Buddha) the lifespan was 30,000 years. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya* (M. Walshe, Trans.), (1995), Boston: Wisdom Publications, 200.

<sup>416</sup> Irons, E. (2008), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, New York: Facts On File, 477. Although it would be better to speak of a collection, I refer to the *Lankavatara Sutra* as a 'text' because it is nowadays compiled in a 'book.' *Sutra* is derived from 'to sew' and is used to refer to '[...] that which like a thread runs through or holds together everything, rule, direction [...] a short sentence or aphoristic rule, and any work of manual consisting of strings of such rules hanging together like threads (these Sūtra works form manuals of teaching in ritual, philosophy, grammar [...]).' See: Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'Sūtra,' 1241.

<sup>417</sup> Deal, W. E., & Ruppert, B. D. (2015), *A Cultural History of Japanese Buddhism*, Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley, Blackwell, 221.

his English translation of the *Lankavatara Sutra* in the 1930s.<sup>418</sup> Suzuki was one of the most important Japanese intellectual Zen Buddhists whose missionary activities brought Zen Buddhism to the West (especially North America). As a Zen Buddhist apologist, his main agenda was to promote Mahayana (and particularly Zen) Buddhism in relation to the Japanese distinctive and superior culture.<sup>419</sup> Suzuki's popularity as a Zen teacher has contributed to a wide dissemination of the *Lankavatara Sutra*.

*Lankavatara* means 'entering into Lanka' (or 'descent into Lanka').<sup>420</sup> The first chapter of the *Lankavatara Sutra* (a later addition, according to Suzuki)<sup>421</sup> states that the Buddha was invited by Ravana to preach the *dharmma* in Lanka. It is said that Ravana first went to see the Buddha,<sup>422</sup> and invited him to come to Lanka by approaching him with the following words:

7. I who have come here, am called Ravana, the ten-headed king of the Rakshasas, mayest thou graciously receive me with Lanka and all its residents.  
 8. "In this city, the inmost state of consciousness realised, indeed, by the Enlightened Ones of the past was disclosed on this peak studded with precious stones."  
 9. "Let the Blessed One, too, surrounded by sons of the Victorious One, now disclose the Truth immaculate on this peak embellished with precious stones; we, together with the residents of Lanka, desire to listen [...]"  
 13. "This magnificent city of Lanka is adorned with varieties of precious stones, [surrounded] by peaks, refreshing and beautiful and canopied by a net of jewels."  
 14. "Blessed One, here are the Yakshas who are free from faults of greed, reflecting on [the Truth] realised in one's inmost self and making offerings to the Buddhas of the past; they are believers in the teaching of the Mahayana and intent on disciplining one another."  
 15. "There are younger Yakshas, girls and boys, desiring to know the Mahayana. Come, Blessed One, who art our Teacher, come to Lanka on Mount Malaya." [...] 23. The Blessed One accepting the request [of the King] remained silent and undisturbed; he now mounted the floral chariot offered by Ravana. 24. Thus Ravana and others, wise sons of the Victorious One, honoured by the Apsaras singing and dancing, reached the city. 25. Arriving in the delightful city [the Buddha was] again the recipient of honours;

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<sup>418</sup> Irons, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, 479.

<sup>419</sup> According to Suzuki, the *Lankavatara Sutra* was regarded at the time of his translation one of the nine principal texts in Nepalese Buddhism, and in China and Japan it also gained an important place in Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. It was also in China that four translations of the *Lankavatara Sutra* were compiled between 420 and 704. Suzuki, D. T. (1998), *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 3-4, 17. (Original work published in 1930). See on Suzuki, his apologetics, and his idea of cultural superiority of the Japanese: Sharf, R. H. (1993), *The Zen of Japanese Nationalism, History of Religions*, 33(1), 1-43.

<sup>420</sup> Irons, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, 477.

<sup>421</sup> The distinction into chapters is a later adaptation of scholars. Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, 3, 17. For Suzuki's argument about Chapter 1, see: *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, 20.

<sup>422</sup> According to the *Lankavatara Sutra* (Chapter 1 verse 4), the Buddha was at that time preaching in the palace of the king of the sea-serpents, or the abode of Makara. *The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text* (D. T. Suzuki, Trans.), (1932), London: Routledge, 5.

he was honoured by the group of Yakshas including Ravana and by the Yaksha women.<sup>423</sup>

Jonathan Young and Philip Friedrich, in their contribution to the special section on the *Ramayana* (see Section 1.1.1), have argued that there is no evidence to suggest a connection between the toponym Lanka used in the *Lankavatara Sutra* and contemporary Sri Lanka.<sup>424</sup> However, in the references to the *Lankavatara Sutra* made within the Ravana discourse, the Lanka from the *Lankavatara Sutra* was considered to equate ancient Sri Lanka.<sup>425</sup> In addition, some referred to the *Lankavatara Sutra* to point out that Ravana's Lanka was very prosperous.

#### Box 4.1: A Selection of Popular Ravana Books and Some Keypersons from the Ravana Discourse

Several bookshops in Colombo offer a selection of popular Ravana books, most of which are written in Sinhala.<sup>426</sup> I mention here a selection of books that explicitly mention Ravana in their titles. Books marked with \* were only available at particular temple sites, and books marked \*\* could only be ordered online from popular Ravana research groups.

Amarasinghe, J. T. (2009), *Ravana and Untold Truth About His Legacy*, Kurunegala: Asliya Printers.\*\*

Amarasinghe, J. T. (2014), *Sri Ravana Urumaya saha Thaporavanaya: Mayanu Varsa 5126ka Gupta Ithihasaya* [Sri Ravana Heritage and Thaporavanaya: Mysterious History of 5126 Mayan Years], Kurunegala: Asliya Printers.\*\*

Chulavansa, P. S. T. (2012), *Hela Ithihasaye Ravana Rajathuma ha Lankapuraya*, [King Ravana and Lankapura in the History of the Hela], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Gunasekara, S. (2015), *Ethihasika Ravana* [Historical Ravana], Boralasgamuwa: Visidunu Publications.

Jayatilaka, B. M. (2013), *Sri Ravanna Puvatha: Hela Yak Parapure Kathava*, [Sri Ravana News: The Story of the Hela Yak Generation], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Jayatilaka, B. M. (2015), *Sakvithi Ravana Hamuva Saha Venat Atbhuta Siduvem*, [Meeting Universal Monarch Ravana and other Mysterious Events], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Kolonnave Siri Sumangala Thero (2013), *Visvadhpathi Maha Ravana: Sinhala Jathiyeye Piya vu Mani Manthaka Yagu Kaurana Maha Ravana Raju Pilibanda Vighrayak* [Ruler of the Universe

<sup>423</sup> I use Suzuki's translation of the *Lankavatara Sutra* here because it is widely accessible. *The Lankavatara Sutra* (Suzuki Trans.), 5-7.

<sup>424</sup> Young & Friedrich Mapping Lanka's Moral Boundaries, 768.

<sup>425</sup> Interview with Darshana Mapa Pathirana, lecturer in mass communication at Kelaniya University, Kelaniya, February 28, 2016.

<sup>426</sup> An exception to this is *Ravana, King of Lanka*, a book that narrates the ideas of Mirando Obeyesekere (see Box 4.2). This book could also be bought at the Vijitha Yapa Book Shop, located in the Bandaranaike international airport. I visited this small bookshop on June 12, 2017. In the library of the University of Visual and Performative Sciences in Colombo, I found a reprint of a book with a similar title: *Ravana: King of Lanka*. This book was written in 1928 by M. S. Purnalingam Pillai and has to be placed in the context of Dravidian nationalism. Interestingly, he equates the city of Lanka with Kandy on page 7. Purnalingam, M. S. (1993), *Ravana: King of Lanka*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services. (Original work published 1928).

Great Ravana: An Analysis of King Mani Manthaka Yagu Kaurana Great Ravana, the Father of the Sinhalese Nation], Pannipitiya: Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana Mehevara Divya Ramya Jaya Maluwa.\*

Kolonave Siri Sumangala Thero (2014), *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, Pannipitiya: Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana Mehevara Divya Ramya Jaya Maluwa.\*

Obeyesekere, M. (2012), *Ravana Sistaraya* [Ravana Civilisation], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Obeyesekere, M. (2013), *Sri Lankave Ravana Adhirajayage Sanskrithika Urumaya* [Cultural Heritage of Emperor Ravana in Sri Lanka], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Obeyesekere, M. (2015), *Ravana, King of Lanka* (S. C. Jayawardana, Trans.; N. Tennekoon, Narr.), Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications.

Obeyesekere, M. (2015), *Sri Lankave Ravana Adiradjayagen Pasu ape Raja Parapura*, [Our Dynasty after Emperor Ravana of Sri Lanka], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Obeyesekere, M. (2016), *Ravana Amaraneyayi* [Ravana is Immortal], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Obeyesekere, M. (2016), *Ravana Yali Negitiyi* [Ravana Rises Again], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Perera, M. (2017), *Ravanayana: Saga of Lanka*, Colombo 10: S. Godage and Brothers.

Premachandra, A. (2015), *Ravana: Story of the Most Distinguished Lankan Monarch* (translation of 2006, *Uthuru Doratuwa* [Northern Gate]), Udumulla: Asoka Publishers.

Premachandra, A. (2017), *Lankadipati Sri Ravana* [Sri Ravana, Supreme Lord of Lanka], Udumulla: Asoka Premachandra.

Puja Bopitiye Ariyangnana Thero (2017), *Hela Isivara Maha Ravana: Ithihasayen Vasan Kala Maha Viravarayage Punaragamanaya* [Hela Saint Great Ravana: The Return of the Great Hero Hidden from History], Ganemulla: Udaya Publications.

Samarasinhe, R. P. (2014), *Mityavak Novana Ravana Puravruththaya* [The Ravana Legend which is not a Myth], Dankotuwa: Wasana Publications.

Sandakelum Vitana Gamage, G. (2015), *Hela Vansaya Ravanadaya* [Hela Lineage Theory of Ravana], n.p.: Karttu Publications.

Seneviratna, A. (2012), *Sri Lanka Ravana Rajadhaniya* [Sri Lanka Ravana Kingdom], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Seneviratna, A. (2014), *Sri Lanka Ravana Rajadhaniya saha Sigiri Puranaya* [Sri Lanka Ravana Kingdom and Ancient Sigiriya], Hettigama: Samanthi Poth.

Somasundara, D. (2015), *Ravana: Sri Lankave Shreshtha Raju* [Ravana the Great King of Sri Lanka], Colombo 10: S. Godage and Brothers.

This list of book titles indicates that most of the popular Ravana books are published from 2012 onwards.<sup>427</sup> The books are written by men with different backgrounds. For instance, Kolonave Siri Sumangala and Puja Bopitiye Ariyangdana are Buddhist monks, Mario Perera is a novelist, and several of the others are middle class young men who via multiple media try to propagate their ideas. I briefly introduce here four key figures in the process of *Ravani-sation* who have – in addition to writing books and articles – also disseminated their ideas via other media (see for Mirando Obeyesekere Box 4.2 and Kolonave Siri Sumangala Section 6.1.2).<sup>428</sup>

<sup>427</sup> Most of the books cost between 300 or 400 rupees. The books that were printed for the second or third time are: Gunasekara, *Ethihasika Ravana*, (first published in 2012); Jayatilaka, *Sri Ravanna Puwatha*, (first published in 2008); Kolonave Siri Sumangala Thero, *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, (first published in 2013); Obeyesekere, *Ravana Sistaraya*, (first published in 1991); Obeyesekere, *Ravana, King of Lanka*, (first published in 2013).

<sup>428</sup> Another leading figure of the Ravana discourse is Manawe Wimalarathana Thero (the monk who

- Jalitha Amarasinghe is a young man from the surroundings of Kurunegala who has written several books about Ravana. He runs his own research group and is very active in promoting his Ravana ideas amongst youngsters (he organises, for instance, Ravana Research Centre Training Camps).<sup>429</sup> In addition, he initiated the construction of a Ravana shrine at a Buddhist site (see Section 5.3.1) and also relates his ideas to international developments to give his Ravana ideas international allure. He has (co-)presented the programme *Hela Vansaya* (Hela lineage).<sup>430</sup>
- Raj Somadeva is professor at the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology Kelaniya University. To my knowledge he has not written any popular Ravana books, but he has published academic articles. His name was often mentioned to provide archaeological evidence to the Ravana interest. Somadeva explained that his main field of interest is protohistoric archaeology and that there is sufficient proof that Sri Lanka was inhabited 6,000 years ago.<sup>431</sup>

Suriya Gunasekara is a very respected author in the Ravana discourse. He is a graduate from the University of Peradeniya who has written many novels and held respected administrative positions.<sup>432</sup> He has been asked to give his opinion on Ravana related items by several TV programs. He has also been consulted for the recent to-scale replicas of the *dandu monaraya* (see Section 4.3.2).

In his book *Hela Vansaya*, Gayan Sandakelum (see Box 4.1) has argued that the *Lankavatara Sutra* demonstrates that Ravana's Lankapura was civilised and prosperous. According to the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the city was protected by a roof decorated with gems. His main argument of the advanced technology mastered in Ravana's time is that this text indicates that it was Ravana who owned and used the first aircrafts of the world: Ravana brought Buddha and his companions with the *pushpaka* (floral chariot that became also known as aerial car) to Lanka.<sup>433</sup>

In addition to connecting Ravana to the prosperous Lanka (which is not that very different from the *Ramayana* in which Lankapura or the city of Lanka is also described as a beautiful city),<sup>434</sup> the *Lankavatara Sutra* also connects Ravana to a previous Buddha.

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allegedly owns the *Vargapurnikava*). He is most famous for his publications on the *yaksha* language. For more on his contributions to the recent interest in Ravana, see: Witharana, Ravana's Sri Lanka: Redefining the Sinhala Nation? 781-795.

<sup>429</sup> Amarasinghe, J. (n.d.), *Sri Ravana*, <http://sri ravana.org/> (retrieved March 24, 2021); Amarasinghe, J. (2020, July 3), *Ravana Research Center Training Camp* [video], YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BhNrHXDww8> (retrieved March 24, 2021).

<sup>430</sup> *Vansa(ya)* means lineage or race. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'wanṣa,' 557.

<sup>431</sup> Interview with Raj Somadeva, archaeologist at the postgraduate institute of the University of Kelaniya, Colombo, May 2, 2016.

<sup>432</sup> Gunasekera, S. (2015), *Ethihasika Ravana* [Historical Ravana], Nugegoda: Visiduni, book cover.

<sup>433</sup> Sandakelum Vitana Gamage, G. (2015), *Hela Vansaya Ravanadaya* [Hela Lineage Theory of Ravana], Karttu Publications, 99-108. In the Sanskrit version of the *Lankavatara Sutra* Ravana's flying machine is referred to as *pushpaka*, for instance in Chapter 1 verse 23. See: *The Lankavatara Sutra* (B. Nanjio, Trans.), (1956), Kyoto: Otani University Press, 6. The Sanskrit word *pushpaka* can be translated as the self-moving aerial car of Kuvera that was carried off by Ravana. Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'pushpaka,' 640.

<sup>434</sup> In the fifth book of the *Ramayana*, for instance, Hanuman describes the splendour of Ravana's Lanka. See: *The Ramayana of Valmiki: Sundara Kanda* (H. Prasad Shastri, Trans.), (1957), London: Shanti Sadan,

Mirando Obeyesekere (see Box 4.2), for instance, has suggested in *Ravana, King of Lanka* that: '[t]he Lankavatara Sutta of Mahayana also states that Ravana was an adherent of Buddhism.'<sup>435</sup> One visitor to the Ravana shrine in Pannipitiya (see Chapter 6), who considered himself a Mahayana Buddhist, explained that according to the *Lankavatara Sutra* Ravana was a Buddhist who lived in the time of a previous Buddha (Dipankara Buddha).<sup>436</sup> Jalitha Amarasinghe, the president of a popular Ravana research group (see Box 4.1), said that he learned that Ravana lived at the time of Kashyapa Buddha through local *kadaim poth* from his area (Kurunegala) and through the *Lankavatara Sutra*. Though he explicitly mentioned that Ravana was not a Buddhist, he also held that Ravana learned Buddhist teachings. As he mentioned:

I found the exact Kurunegala *kadaim ola*. This [is] clearly mentioning [that] Ravana is living [in] Kashyapa Buddha's time period. Not this Buddha's time period. It is clearly, there is a *Lankavatara Sutra*, there is a *Mahayana Sutra*, *Lankavatara*, it is clearly mentioned Ravana listening – he is not following Buddhism – but he is learning Buddhist teachings [...].<sup>437</sup>

#### Box 4.2: Mirando Obeyesekere

Because Mirando Obeyesekere has played a key role in the instigation of the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists, I visited him in 2016 and 2018 to discuss some of the details of his publications. At that time, he was already ill and had difficulties with speaking. He passed away in 2020.

Obeyesekere explained in 2018 that his interest in Ravana dated 40 years back. The people from his village of origin were familiar with Ravana through folklore, and that is how his interest in Ravana started. Also, his family owned *ola* leaf books that contained specific information on Ravana. He sent the Ravana *katha ola* leaf book abroad for security rea-

338-351.

<sup>435</sup> Obeyesekere, M. (2015), *Ravana, King of Lanka* (S. C. Jayawardana, Trans.; N. Tennekoon, Narr.), Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 20. He has also suggested that there is a mix up in the *Lankavatara Sutra* of the names of Gautama Buddha and Konagama Buddha. According to him, it is incorrect to say that Ravana lived in the time of Gautama Buddha. Instead, he lived in the time of Buddha Konagama. Obeyesekere, *Ravana, King of Lanka*, 83.

<sup>436</sup> Informal conversation with DP6, visitor of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2017. Dipankara Buddha is considered one of the *tathagatas* that lived prior to Gautama Buddha. Getty, A. (1988), *The Gods of Northern Buddhism: Their History and Iconography* (2nd ed.), New York: Dover Publications, 13. (Original work published in 1928). According to Holt a *tathagata* is in Theravada thought considered to be the 'thus-gone-one.' As he further points out: '*Tathagata* is an ambiguous Pali compound combining either *tatha + gata* or *tatha + agata*. Therefore, it can also be translated as "thus-come-one." This translation is usually used within Mahayana contexts to signify the Buddha's salvific presence. In Theravada, however, "thus-gone-one" is preferred because it indicates that the Buddha has conquered rebirth and "gone" to the "further shore" of *nibbing*.' See: Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 16, 228 (note 9). Clough translates *tathagata* as '[...] name or epithet of Buddha given him in allusion to his having come to or obtained the rank of the Buddha in the same way as his predecessors.' See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Tathāgatha,' 201.

<sup>437</sup> Interview with Jalitha Amarasinghe, president of the Sri Ravana Research Centre and author of several popular Ravana books, Kurunegala, May 11, 2016. For more on Amarasinghe, see Box 4.1.

sons.<sup>438</sup> Several other people in the Ravana discourse also referred to (privately) owned ola leaf books to claim specific knowledge about Ravana (for instance, Manawe Wimalarathana Thero; see Section 1.3).

Obeyesekere lived in Thalakiriyawa, Madipola, a village located in the Mathale district (see Section 7.1 for more on the location of the Mathale district). He considered this area of special importance to Ravana: the famous Sigiriya rock – located at the northern border of the district – was Ravana’s palace, and according to the ola leaf book, Lakegala mountain (see Section 5.2.1 and Chapter 7) was famous for its red soil. From this soil Ravana made medicine for people who suffered from diabetes.<sup>439</sup>

In 1984, Obeyesekere published an article ‘The Aristocrats of Matale’ in the book *Historic Matale* published by the cultural board of the Mathale District (for the details of this book, see Section 7.2). He also published *The Cultural Heritage of King Ravana*<sup>440</sup> in the 1980s. In this book he already set out that Sita was Ravana’s sister and Sigiriya the fortress of Ravana<sup>441</sup> – ideas that resonate in the current Ravana discourse (for more on Sigiriya, see Section 5.2.1).

In the past ten years Obeyesekere has written several popular books on Ravana, (see Box 4.1). In addition, several series of articles on multiple Ravana-related topics appeared in newspapers, written by people who interviewed Obeyesekere. One remarkable Ravana representation that he has propagated is that Ravana recently woke up. According to Obeyesekere, Maha Brahma gave Ravana the boon of immortality. Thus, although Ravana was hit by an arrow at the time of the war (with Rama), he never died. Instead, he was only in a coma for a long time. On May 25, 2012, Ravana allegedly woke up. Obeyesekere was told – while meditating – that he had to go to Nuwara Eliya where the body of Ravana was kept. And there, he witnessed the resurrection of Ravana. After the resurrection of Ravana – which happened after a princess sprinkled water on the body of Ravana – the people present at the place were told to leave the place immediately.<sup>442</sup> Due to these and other miraculous stories, some people in the Ravana discourse accuse Obeyesekere of discrepancies in his stories or even hallucinations. Nonetheless, he has greatly influenced the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists.

Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero*, a respectable monk in the Ravana discourse, also claimed that, according to the ola leaf manuscripts he and his family allegedly own, Ravana lived in Kashyapa Buddha’s time.<sup>443</sup> I reflect on the specific relevance of the connection of Ravana to a previous Buddha in more detail below.

<sup>438</sup> Interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, March 15, 2018. This type of books/manuscripts is frequently referred to as *puskola poth*: blank (*pus*), leaf (*kola*), book (*potha*). See Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Puskola,’ 369, ‘Pota,’ 378.

<sup>439</sup> Interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, March 15, 2018.

<sup>440</sup> Obeyesekere, M. (ca. 1987), *The Cultural Heritage of King Ravana*, (n.p). I found the book *The Cultural Heritage of King Ravana* in the library of the University of Visual and Performative Sciences in Colombo. The exact year of publication is unclear, but there was a stamp in it from 1987. Other library catalogues suggest that the book is from the 1980s. Visit to the library of the University of Visual and Performative Sciences in Colombo, April 25, 2018.

<sup>441</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Cultural Heritage of King Ravana*, 16, 21.

<sup>442</sup> Interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, March 15, 2018.

<sup>443</sup> Interview with Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero*, April 25, 2017.

### The *Rajavaliya*<sup>444</sup>

A specific text that gained in popularity in the Ravana discourse is the *Rajavaliya*.<sup>445</sup> The *Rajavaliya* or 'list of kings' is a seventeenth-century Sinhala alternative chronicle that narrates the kings in Sri Lanka. It contains several references to Ravana, Rama, and Sita. The Sinhala critical edition of the *Rajavaliya* (2014, first published in 1976) by A. V. Suraweera and his translation of the *Rajavaliya* (2014, first published in 2000) in English are now available in plenty of bookshops in Sri Lanka.<sup>446</sup> Editions of the *Rajavaliya* can be found on the shelves between popular books on Ravana. And this, I argue, indicates a connection between the interest in Ravana and this alternative chronicle.

The *Rajavaliya* includes, like the *Mahavamsa*, the episode of the coming of the Indian prince Vijaya to Lanka (see Section 2.3.1.1 and Section 4.2.3). The *Rajavaliya* explains why Vijaya encountered *yakshas* upon arrival in Sri Lanka:

Before the time of our Buddha, the teacher of the three worlds had attained enlightenment and after the war of Rāvanā, Sri Lanka had been left over to the Yakkhas for one thousand eight hundred and forty four [sic] years.<sup>447</sup>

Direct references to the *Rajavaliya* were only made by leading figures in the Ravana discourse. The *Rajavaliya* was, for instance, mentioned by a lecturer at Kelaniya university who wrote an article on *dasis* Ravana (for more on the *dasis* concept, see Section 4.3.2). As he explained:

Ravana's time I mean 5,000 years before present [...] In *Rajavaliya* book, Sri Lankan book, it's a chronicle, it's a chronicle book [...] it states that Ravana lived [...] 1,844 years before death of Gautama Buddha.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> In addition to the *Rajavaliya* there is also the late-sixteenth-century *Ravana Rajavaliya*. The *Ravana Rajavaliya* is categorised by scholars – due to its content – as a *kadaim*. Obeyesekere, G., Kumara, A.T., & Weeraratne, N. (Eds.), (n.d.), *Rare Historical Manuscript series -1*, Colombo: The International Centre for Ethnic Studies Colombo & S. Godage Publishers, iv, v. Because the *Ravana Rajavaliya* was never referred to in the field (and it has most probably only attracted the attention of scholars), I do not discuss it here. For some details of the *Ravana Rajavaliya* I refer to Young & Friedrich, *Mapping Lanka's Moral Boundaries*, 771, 772. For more on the drowning of part of Sri Lanka as mentioned in the *Ravana Rajavaliya*, see note 450.

<sup>445</sup> According to Henry, the most complete version of the *Rajavaliya* dates to the late-seventeenth century. Henry, *Distant Shores of Dharma*, 33.

<sup>446</sup> I use Suraweera's translation of the *Rajavaliya* because it is common in Sri Lanka.

<sup>447</sup> *The Rājāvāliya: An Account of the Rulers of Sri Lanka* (A.V. Suraweera, Trans.), (2014), Colombo: Vihitha Yapa Publications, 16. The *Rajavaliya* also mentions that some of the *yakshas* who were not sent (presumably by Buddha, as it is narrated in the *Mahavamsa*) to the island of Yakgiri remained hidden in Laggala and Loggala. When Vijaya slept with Kuveni – the female *yaksha* he encountered upon arrival in Lanka – he was awakened by the sound of a marriage festival celebrating the marriage between a *yakkhini* of Laggala with a *yaksha* from Loggala. After Vijaya banished Kuveni, as the *Rajavaliya* narrates, a curse fell upon successive kings, a story quite similar to a story recounted in the *Kohomba kankariya*. For more on this folk ritual, see Box 1.3.

<sup>448</sup> Interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, February 28, 2016.



The *Rajavaliya* is referred to in the process of *Ravanisation* because it gives an exact date of the time when Ravana was in Lanka or Sri Lanka. In his book *Hela Vansaya*, Gayan Sandakelum (see Box 4.1) has cited the *Rajavaliya* to calculate that the end of Ravana's war was 4402 years before the writing of his book in 2014.<sup>449</sup> Moreover, similar to his reference to the *Lankavatara Sutra*, Sandakelum has argued that the text also shows the magnitude of Ravana's era. One particular verse from the *Rajavaliya* is employed for this statement:

Between that place and Sri Lanka was only the city of Rāvanā and let it be known that due to the wickedness of Rāvanā, his fortress along with twenty-five places [sic] and four lakhs of streets, all of these got submerged into the sea.<sup>450</sup>

According to Sandakelum, the flood destroyed twenty-five palaces.<sup>451</sup> Together with the palaces, the four hundred thousand streets allegedly indicate the splendour of Ravana's era. The 'wickedness' of Ravana is smoothed away by Sandakelum through his explanation that the flood came over Sri Lanka due to the testing of nuclear weapons by Ravana.<sup>452</sup> Because of the flood, only a very small portion of Ravana's country remains today.<sup>453</sup>

The envisioning of Ravana's Lanka as an extensive geographical location is a topic discussed by other authors within the Ravana discourse as well. Some have opined that the ancient Lanka of Ravana was larger than present-day Sri Lanka. This idea was already present in the alternative seventeenth-century Sinhala chronicle the *Rajavaliya*, but it has been extensively elaborated upon in the context of the recent interest in Ravana (see Box 4.3). The text serves as a justification for the idea that Sri Lanka is the remainder of Lanka, the much larger and more splendid kingdom of Ravana. The 'lost golden ages' are often central to ethno-nationalist representations of the past. At present, the reason that parts of Lanka were drowned due to Ravana's wickedness is not

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<sup>449</sup> Sandakelum *Hela Vanshaya*, 50, 51.

<sup>450</sup> *The Rajavaliya*, 22. Another alternative chronicle that mentions the drowning of parts of Lanka is the *Ravana Rajavaliya*. The *Ravana Rajavaliya* contains anecdotal references to Ravana and it mentions several times that a flooding took place in Lanka after the end of Ravana's reign. In the introduction to the *Ravana Rajavaliya*, it is stated that there were several Ravanans and that one of them was known by the name *dasis* Ravana. This unrighteous Ravana owned gardens, ponds, palaces, and herds of horses and tuskers as his vehicles. He was brought to war because he imprisoned a queen named Sita. Half of the country and city were drowned, and what remained of *Lakdiva* was entrusted to Vibhishana by King Rama. The extent of the flooding is also elaborated upon in the *Ravana Rajavaliya*: 1280 leagues of the country were drowned in the sea and only 58 leagues remained. See: Obeyesekere, Kumara, & Weeraratne, *Rare Historical Manuscript series -1*, iv, v. This summary of the story is a loose translation of the story of Ravana as recounted in the introduction of the *Ravana Rajavaliya* in: Obeyesekere, G. (2005), *Ravana Rajavaliya saha Upan Katha* [Ravana Rajavaliya and Birth Stories], Colombo: Godage, 33, 34.

<sup>451</sup> Sandakelum *Hela Vanshaya*, 55-56. Whereas the English translation of Suraweera refers to twenty-five 'places,' both the version of Gunasekara and the Sinhala version of the *Rajavaliya* to which Sandakelum refers, mentions palace and respectively *maligaya*. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Māligāwa,' 481.

<sup>452</sup> Sandakelum *Hela Vanshaya*, 56-58.

<sup>453</sup> Sandakelum *Hela Vanshaya*, 55-56.

mentioned (or smoothed away) because it is not palatable to the post-war representation of Ravana as hero of the Sinhalese Buddhists.

#### Box 4.3: Representations of the Extensive Lanka of Ravana in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Sri Lanka

That Ravana's Lanka was much larger than present-day Sri Lanka is based in part in the idea that Ravana has ten heads. In conversations, some people interpreted Ravana's putative ten heads (see Section 4.3) to mean that Ravana ruled ten countries. The exact number of ten countries has a longer tradition in Sri Lanka. It was, for instance, propagated in the early-twentieth-century Hela movement (see Section 4.2.1). The *Subasa*, the journal of the Hela language movement, mentions that the Hela king Ravana had ten states or governments and that Greece (Hela) was one of them.<sup>454</sup> The late Hela representative Arisen Ahubudu has argued that during the reign of Ravana the glory of the island of the Sinhalese was known throughout the world as the country that ruled ten nations.<sup>455</sup> He also referred to the *Rajavaliya*:

History shows that the location of Sri Lanka was different from the present. According to the oldest available map of Sri Lanka, the island has been considerably larger than its present size [...]. The second [subsidence] was during the reign of the Great Sinhala (Hela) King Ravana (2554-2537 BC). It should be particularly noted that the most developed area at that time was submerged by the ocean waters. According to the author of the *Rajavaliya*, Ravana Kotte, and twenty five [sic] palaces as well as four hundred thousand streets were submerged by the ocean waters.<sup>456</sup>

Although the symbolic interpretation of the ten heads of Ravana as ten countries is at present not the main interpretation of the *dasis* concept, it still circulates in Sri Lanka. In a group conversation between a Buddhist monk and an author, it was explained as follows:

Monk: That King Ravana had ten countries, ruled ten countries, one crown for one country.

Author: Middle East countries and India, ten countries.<sup>457</sup>

There is a tendency to incorporate at least parts of India in Ravana's kingdom. The general idea is that a relative of Ravana – most often his sister Shurpanakha – ruled parts of India

<sup>454</sup> This section is part of a speech of Munidasa Cumaratunga as published in *Subasa*, the journal of the Hela movement. Cumaratunga, M. (1941), *Hela Nama, Subasa*, 2(25), 392-395, 392.

<sup>455</sup> Ahubudu, A. (2012), *The Story of the Land of the Sinhalese (Helese)* (N. Jayakura, Trans.), Pannipitiya: Stamford Lake, 27. (Original work published 2005). The book is a translation of the 2005 Sinhala book *Ape Derana Vaga* (Our Earths' Information).

<sup>456</sup> Ahubudu, *The Story of the Land of the Sinhalese (Helese)*, 1-2, 5.

<sup>457</sup> Group conversation at Buddhist site in Colombo with a Buddhist monk and an author, Colombo, June 3, 2017. In 2016, I had a conversation with a Buddhist monk in Vidurupola in the Uva province. He gave me a print-out of a public speech in Sinhala that he delivered in 2014 when a movie about Rama and Ravana was released. The speech states that, according to the *Rajavaliya*, Ravana lived in 1,844 BCE. In addition, this monk referred to a local medical dictionary of a monk that says that (translation) 'King Ravana who was named *dasis* since he wore ten crowns as he ruled ten territories in *dambadiva* [India], lived 4,000 years ago.'

and that Rama entered the territory of Shurpanakha when he was in exile. As Jalitha Amarasinghe, author of several popular Ravana books and president of a popular Ravana research group (see Box 4.1), explained:

[...] long time before there is no big difference between India and Sri Lanka. Ravana control[ed] all the down south. [...] Shurpanakha went to attack Rama and ask[ed him] ‘why you are living here [in] our residential area?’ She went there Shurpanakha, Ravana’s sister [...]. We are controlling down south at that time period.<sup>458</sup>

The president of another Ravana research group explained that in Ravana’s time Shurpanakha ruled Tamil Nadu and that Rama controlled North India. The way Rama treated Shurpanakha and the conflict between the two in India caused the war.<sup>459</sup>

The idea that Ravana’s Lanka was an extensive country and that multiple other countries – especially India – were subordinate to Ravana’s reign, discloses a hierarchical worldview on the part of post-war Sinhalese Buddhists in which Sri Lanka is at the apex. In Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, I discuss this worldview in more detail.

### ***The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon***

The last source to be mentioned here is *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, a colonial record that mentions Ravana’s connection to Lanka. Referred to only once (erroneously) in a very specific context, to be discussed in Chapter 7, this colonial record includes an important Ravana representation that resonates with the contemporary interest in Ravana. The colonial record was not directly referred to for this specific Ravana representation. It seems, however, probable that over the centuries the book’s alternative representation remained present in Sri Lanka.

The *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon* was written in the 1680s by Fernão de Queiroz. According to Ines Zupanovto, de Queiroz was a Jesuit who called for political, missionary, and military intervention in South Asia. Although de Queiroz stayed in Goa (India) and never visited Sri Lanka, his book provides an interesting overview of Sinhalese perceptions of the past, including their belief in Ravana.<sup>460</sup> It says that the natives believe that they have been ruled by the famous King Ravana, who had ten

<sup>458</sup> Interview with Jalitha Amarasinghe, May 11, 2016.

<sup>459</sup> Interview with Sri Mal, president of the Universal Knowledge Research Centre, Kurunegala, April 23, 2017. As noted down by Sumangala *Thero* (the chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya; see Chapter 6) in his popular Ravana book, many of the territories in India were under Ravana’s rule. Ravana’s aunt and Ravana’s sister Shurpanakha ruled these parts of Ravana’s kingdom in India. Ravana’s sister was attacked by Lakshman, and this resulted in a war in which thousands were killed. Shurpanakha escaped and complained to Ravana about the war. It was because of the war that Ravana went to India and took Sita into custody. Kolonave Siri Sumangala *Thero* (2014), *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, Pannipitiya: Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana Mehevara Divya Ramya Jaya Maluwa, 16-18.

<sup>460</sup> Županov, I. G. (2006), Goan Brahmans in the Land of Promise: Missionaries, Spies and Gentiles in the 17th-18th century Sri Lanka, in J. Flores (Ed.), *Re-exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 171-210, 171-172.

heads and twenty arms. With his supernatural power, Ravana discovered gold and silver on the island. Also, Ravana kidnapped Sita the wife of Rama and brought her from Hindustan (India) to the port of Triquilimale (Trincomalee) in Ceylon. After Ravana kidnapped Sita, Rama built a bridge between India and Sri Lanka and a war took place between Rama and Ravana.<sup>461</sup> Then de Queiroz introduces an interesting belief of the Sinhalese about the war's ending:

Rauâna [Ravana], seeing himself defeated and dishonoured, carried away by his feelings hid himself in the lands of Mayogâma in the borders of Sofragaõ and bewitched the gold and silver from the mountains, that they might never more be seen or found [...]. In one of these mountains, they say, he fell asleep and is still sleeping, believing that he who offers a sacrifice of the husk of *nêle mari* (*nêle* is rice in the husk) and of the oil of the coco, will wake him and heal him of the wounds which so many centuries ago he received in battle [...].<sup>462</sup>

Several Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana believe that Ravana is in an unconscious state (or a long 'sleep') and that his body is still present in the mountains waiting to be awakened in the future. In Section 5.1 and Chapter 6, I explore diverse Ravana representations related to the belief that Ravana will return in the future. Here I continue to reflect on what might be the logic underlying the references to multiple records for Ravana's alleged connection to Lanka.

#### **Reflection 4.1: References to Ravana and Lanka in records beyond the *Ramayana* Tradition**

Why do Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana refer to records beyond the *Ramayana* tradition in the process of *Ravanisation*? In general, I argue that they do so in order to distance Ravana from the *Ramayana*/Hindu context in which he is often portrayed as a cruel king. Using sources other than the *Ramayana*, they mainly aim to construct a positive portrayal of Sri Lanka and Ravana and to transform Ravana into a famous king with whom they can identify themselves.

The selective use and interpretation of references to Ravana and Lanka from various textual records are illustrative of the tendency to place Ravana into a favourable light. In general, the *Rajavaliya* and *Lankavatara Sutra* are used to argue that ancient Lanka was an extensive and prosperous kingdom. The *Rajavaliya* tells how part of Lanka drowned – the lost golden ages – but what is left out is that it drowned due to Ravana's wickedness. With reference to the *Lankavatara Sutra*, Ravana is framed not only as a magnificent king but also as owning the first aircrafts. This drive to construct a glorious past can be related to the first level of revitalisation outlined in Chapter 3: the perception of a glorious past as part of the revitalisation of ethno-nationalism. In Section 3.3.1, I pointed out

<sup>461</sup> De Queiroz, F. (1992), *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon* (Vol. 1 (1/2), S. G. Perera, Trans.), New Delhi: Jetley, 8. (Original work published 1688).

<sup>462</sup> De Queiroz, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, 8.

that, at times of ethno-nationalist resurgence, ethno-nationalists often appropriate and re-imagine existing myth-symbol complexes to construct a new set of ideas. Their representations of the past focus on (lost) golden ages, ancient monarchy, mythic ancestry, and mythistorical imaginations of (indigenous) origin. I reflect on this process in more detail in Section 4.4.

According to the *Ramayana*, Hanuman praised Lanka for its beauty and splendour. For this reason, it might at first seem unnecessary to refer to other texts to make this point. I argue, however, that there is another motive for Sinhalese Buddhists to selectively refer to the *Rajavaliya* and the *Lankavatara Sutra*. The *Rajavaliya* contains a verse that Ravana lived 1,844 years prior to the *parinirvana* of Gautama Buddha. Several Sinhalese Buddhists refer to the *Lankavatara Sutra* to argue that Ravana lived at the time of a previous Buddha. Here we encounter the tendency in the process of *Ravanisation* to place Ravana in a (Sinhalese) Buddhist time frame – one that relates Ravana to either Gautama Buddha or a previous Buddha (most often Kashyapa Buddha, the Buddha directly preceding Gautama Buddha, or Konagama Buddha, the second last Buddha). The selective employment of these textual sources illustrates how Ravana is distanced from the Hindu timeframe in which Rama comes to the world at the end of Tretayuga to slay the evil Ravana.<sup>463</sup> Many Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana believe that the *Ramayana* provides a distorted picture because it was written from an Indian perspective. That for the recent interest in Ravana references to Ravana and Lanka from records and movements beyond the *Ramayana* tradition are made, discloses a tendency to extensively distance the post-war Ravana from the *Ramayana* tradition.

The efforts to construct an imagined glorious past of the Sinhalese and to distance Ravana from the Hindu/*Ramayana* tradition disclose a (post-war) ambition of a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority to oppose the cultural dominance of India. While the *Ramayana* depicts Ravana as king of Lanka, multiple records from other traditions are selectively employed to make this point. In representing Ravana's Lanka as an extensive kingdom, it is often mentioned that India was part of it and that a relative of Ravana reigned over (parts of) India. This representation of Ravana's Lanka of the past challenges most of the established perceptions of the relationship between the two countries in past and present. I explore this dynamic of *Ravanisation* in more detail in the following chapters.

## 4.2 The Hela 'Tribes' and Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Sinhalese Representations of the Past

In this section, I explore how the Hela concept is used within the process of *Ravanisation*. The way the concept has been used in Sri Lanka has evolved over time, and Hela became very central to the claims of some Sinhalese language loyalists in the past cen-

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<sup>463</sup> Flueckiger, J. B. (2015), *Everyday Hinduism*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 25.

tury. Due to this increased importance, Section 4.2.1 pays considerable attention to the Hela perception of the past as propagated in the early-twentieth-century Hela movement and by one of the representatives of this language movement who played an important role for the contemporary interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. In Section 4.2.2, I explore how the Hela concept is presently used in the process of *Ravanisation*. And Section 4.2.3 addresses how the Hela concept becomes related to the *Mahāvamsa*.

When we examine the Hela concept, we quickly find ourselves in a different field than – as I explain further in this section – its contemporary use in the process of *Ravanisation*. Elu or Hela is a concept coined in the field of language and literature to denote a specific type of Sinhala language. Charles Hallisey, professor in Buddhist literature, has argued that Sinhala was one of the early languages that had a distinctive literary culture in South Asia, but that it also stood in close interaction with the other literary cultures.<sup>464</sup> In the beginning of the eighth century, the Brahmi script was replaced in Sri Lanka by a round-shaped script (very similar to the present-day Sinhala script). From the eighth century onwards, Sinhala developed as a literary language, which was coined Elu. Elu or poetic Sinhala had fewer letters than prose or spoken Sinhala because it did not use the aspirated consonants of Sanskrit.<sup>465</sup> In the following centuries, according to Hallisey, the effort to create an autonomous literary space, the use of Elu, and the production of Sinhala inscriptions together signalled the ambition of Sri Lanka for autonomy and cultural-political separateness from the mainly Sanskrit-dominated literary culture in South Asia.<sup>466</sup>

In Section 2.3.3, I described that in the nineteenth century a cultural awakening took place among the Sinhalese Buddhist elite. Language was key to this cultural awakening. James D’Alwis (1823-1878) was one of the first so-called language loyalists who gave central importance to language for the ethnic identity of the Sinhalese. He was born as a Christian into an aristocrat family, and he was well-educated in English. Despite his background, he was strongly aware of his own cultural tradition. According to K. N. O. Dharmadasa he was a lone figure among the English-educated Sinhalese in his belief that language was the essence of Sinhalese identity.<sup>467</sup> In the early-twentieth cen-

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<sup>464</sup> Hallisey, *Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture*, 689-690.

<sup>465</sup> Hallisey, *Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture*, 694-695.

<sup>466</sup> Hallisey, *Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture*, 698-699. An example of inscriptions that Hallisey mentions are the ‘graffiti’ at the Sigiriya rock palace (see Section 5.2.1). According to him, the poetry found there is not only a ‘[...] backdrop for much of the *Elu* poetry that developed in the tenth to fifteenth centuries, it also became a key part of the nativist search for a more usable Sinhala literary past that developed in the decades leading up to and just after the independence of Sri Lanka as a nation in 1948.’ Hallisey, *Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture*, 721. There was, according to Dharmadasa, an ethnic connection of the Sinhalese with the island as in the graffiti the country is referred to as *Hela div*. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 20. For this, Dharmadasa refers to Gunawardana’s 1979s *Sinhala Vaag Vidyā Mūldharma* [Principles of Sinhala Linguistics].

<sup>467</sup> Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 38-41, 51. D’Alwis argued in 1850 against the ‘Europeans’ that there is no difference between Sinhala and Elu or Hela. D’Alwis, J. (1850), On the

tury, other language loyalists also started to promote that Hela was an indigenous language and key to the ethnic identity of the Sinhalese.<sup>468</sup> I focus on the language loyalists of the Hela movement here in more detail because the contemporary use of the Hela concept continues to build on how the Hela concept evolved within this movement.

#### 4.2.1 The Hela Movement

The founder of the Hela movement was the language loyalist Munidasa Cumaratunga (1887-1944). According to Sandagomi Coperahewa, head of the Sinhala department of Colombo University, Cumaratunga was '[...] the most important figure in the Sinhala literary scene during the 1930s and 1940s.'<sup>469</sup> In his ambition to purify the Sinhala language, Cumaratunga opposed the dominant discourse of his time to regard Sinhala as an Indo-Aryan language. Instead, he proposed that Sinhala (Hela) was the mother of all languages.<sup>470</sup>

The Hela movement was first and foremost a linguistic movement. The periodicals of the Hela movement were the *Subasa* and the *Helio* (the English journal of the movement). In several of the articles, the Hela representatives made a connection between 'ancient language' and an 'ancient civilisation.' According to Coperahewa, there was a nationalist motivation in Cumaratunga's work.<sup>471</sup> In his efforts to purify the Sinhala language he aimed to construct an indigenous Hela identity as well.

In a speech published in the *Subasa*, Cumaratunga argued that Vijaya was a bastard and that the inhabitants of the island should be called Hela instead of Sinhala.<sup>472</sup> The Hela concept was mainly used in the Hela movement to refer to language, but Cumaratunga also referred to the country as Hela *diva*, the nation as Hela *daya*, and language as Hela *basa*.<sup>473</sup> Hela *diva* was, for Cumaratunga, much larger than present-day Sri Lanka – an idea that I have mentioned also in the first section of this chapter (see Box 4.3) – and was ruled by great monarchs such as the Hela King Ravana.<sup>474</sup> The ancient inhabitants

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Elu Language, Its Poetry and its Poets, *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 2(5), 241-315, 243.

<sup>468</sup> Also, in one of the early Sinhala newspapers (*Lak Mini Kirulla*, 1881) a Buddhist monk wrote a serialised 'history' of Sri Lanka. He suggested that prior to the coming of Vijaya to Lanka there was a powerful kingdom in Lanka. Moreover, as Dharmadasa has mentioned, in this newspaper '[...] the mythical ruler Ravana was referred to as having ruled the island in about 2837 B.C. with the assistance of a council of ten.' Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 119-120.

<sup>469</sup> Coperahewa, S. (2012), Purifying the Sinhala Language: The Hela Movement of Munidasa Cumaratunga (1930s-1940s), *Modern Asian Studies*, 46(4), 857-891, 861.

<sup>470</sup> Coperahewa, Purifying the Sinhala Language, 880.

<sup>471</sup> Coperahewa, Purifying the Sinhala Language, 879.

<sup>472</sup> Cumaratunga, *Hela Nama*, 393.

<sup>473</sup> Cumaratunga, *Hela Nama*, 392.

<sup>474</sup> For extensive references to the island's 'history' Dharmadasa refers in a footnote to a speech delivered by Cumaratunga in 1931 and his contributions to *Helio* 1, 11, 12 (1941) and 14, 15 (1941); and *Subasa* 2, 25 (1941). Also, these ideas were elaborated upon by R. Tennakoon in 'The Hidden history of the Helese,' published in *Helio* Volume 1. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 264. I have read both the contributions of Cumaratunga in *Subasa* 2 (25), 392-395 and six contributions of 'The

of the country were the Hela. They were also given the name *rakusu* (from *raksha karanava* or to protect) because they protected the world by opposing the animal offerings of the brahmins.<sup>475</sup>

After Cumaratunga's death in 1944, other Hela representatives elaborated upon the Hela theory of the islands' ancient history.<sup>476</sup> Some of the authors within the Ravana discourse are aware of the efforts that have been undertaken by representatives of the Hela movement to construct an indigenous Hela identity with Ravana as one of the most famous kings of Hela *diva*. Sumangala Thero, the chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (see Chapter 6), has stated that:

[r]ecently some scholars disclosed with evidence that Rawana is true. Those scholars are Ven. Farther [sic] Spense Hardy, Professor Gunapala Malalasekera, Great Scholar Munidasa Kumarathunga, Great poet Rapiyal Thennakone, Arisen Ahubudu, Mahanama Dissanayake, Jayantha Weerasekera, recent researches carried out by Dr. Mirando Obesekera, Dr. Sooriya Gunasekera, Naagoda Ariyadasa Senawirathna, Asoka Premachandra, Dr. P. E. P Deraniyagala, Dr. Shiran Deraniyagala and Dr. Raaj Somadev. Although the evidence is there, powerful people are reluctant to accept it.<sup>477</sup>

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Hidden History of the Helese' in *Helio 1* (I in: *Helio 1*, (4) (1941), 28-29; II in: *Helio 1*, (6) (1941), 41-42; III in: *Helio 1*, (7/8) (1941), 59-62; IV in: *Helio 1* (9/10) (1941), 75-79; V in: *Helio 1* (13/14) (1941), 106-110; VI in: *Helio 1*, (15/16) (1941), 113-117. However, in these six contributions of Tennakoon, Ravana is never referred to, and in the *Subasa* Ravana is mentioned only a few times.

<sup>475</sup> Cumaratunga, *Hela Nama*, 393. *Rakus* is also a designation used in Sinhala for demon. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Rakus,' 519.

<sup>476</sup> One of these Hela movement representatives was the poet Rapiyel Tennakoon (1899-1965), who was one of Cumaratunga's closest colleagues. Tennakoon's first poetic work *Vavuluva* (1939) is rather difficult to understand because the Hela movement representatives used their works to standardise their particular linguistic register. *Vavuluva* (bat language) is a long narrative poem that comprises 551 quatrains and it could be labelled as a kind of anti-*Ramayana*. According to Garrett Field, Tennakoon wrote his *Vavuluva* for two principal reasons. First, he wanted to criticise the Royal Asiatic Society's Sinhala dictionary and Geiger's attempt to trace the etymologies of thousands of Sinhala words to Indo-Aryan origin. Second, he rewrote in this work the anti-Sri Lankan scenes from the *Ramayana* epic. In his *Vavuluva* he elaborated upon the ancient 'tribes' of Sri Lanka and referred to the country as Hela *diva*. Field, G. (2017), *Modernizing Composition: Sinhala Song, Poetry, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Sri Lanka*, Oakland: University of California Press, 34; Field, G. (2014), *Commonalities of Creative Resistance: The Regional Nationalism of Rapiyel Tennakoon's Bat Language and Sunil Santa's "Song for the Mother Tongue," Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities*, 38(1/2), 1-24, 1.

<sup>477</sup> Kolonave Siri Sumangala Thero (n.y.), *Sri Lankeswara Maha Ravana, SriDevramVehera*, [http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=149&Itemid=180](http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=149&Itemid=180) (retrieved February 20, 2019). The first person mentioned, the British Methodist missionary Robert Spence Hardy (1803-1868), referred to Ravana in the footnote of a story about an unrighteous king from the *Rajavaliya* and *Mahavamsa* in his book *The Legends and Theories of the Buddhists*. The footnote says that 'The same legend informs us that, in a former age, the citadel of Ráwaná, 25 palaces, and 400,000 streets were swallowed up by the sea. This was on account of the impiety of the giant king. The submerged land was between Tuticoreen and Manaar, and the island of Manaar is all that is now left of what was once a large territory. This legend, notwithstanding its manifest exaggeration as to the extent of the injury, may be founded on fact, as the Hindu and other nations have a similar tradition, and suppose that Ceylon was then



The third representative of the Hela movement as mentioned by Sumangala *Thero* – after Munidasa Cumaratunga and Rapiyel Tennakoon – is Arisen Ahubudu. Arguably the most famous Hela representative in the Ravana discourse, probably because he passed away only in 2011 and was thus still alive at the time the post-war interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists began to solidify, Ahubudu was an influential person not only among literati but on a political level as well. I point out three important ‘contributions’ of the late Hela representative Arisen Ahubudu to the interest in Ravana – although there is much more to say about his work and publications. The first is his theatre play *Sakvithi Ravana*, the second is a Ravana depiction designed by him, and the third is his elaboration on the Hela concept.

In the late 1980s, Arisen Ahubudu staged a theatre play. This play was labelled *Sakvithi Ravana* (universal monarch Ravana) and staged in 1987 (probably also in 1988).<sup>478</sup> The play included characters known from the *Ramayana* such as Hanuman, Sita, Rama, and Ravana. It has an interesting ending: instead of being killed by Rama, Ravana commits suicide.<sup>479</sup> Rama, who witnesses this, starts a song in praise of Ravana titled *Sakvithi Ravana*. The first part praises the noble deeds of Ravana (poetic translation):

The universal monarch (*sakvithi*) Ravana  
Is a noble man  
Who sacrificed his life for the nation’s pride

The universal monarch Ravana  
Is a noble man  
Who is the noblest of the king’s lineage of Lanka

The universal monarch Ravana  
Is a noble man  
Who even gave hands for the enemy to rise

The universal monarch Ravana  
is a noble man  
who always gave a place to humanity  
May the lies of the brahmins be unveiled!  
May the black mark upon the customs be wiped away!  
May the name Ravana shine in the world!  
May the name Lanka be renowned in the world!<sup>480</sup>

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much larger than it is at present.’ Hardy, R. S. (1866), *The Legend and Theories of the Buddhists, Compared with History and Science: With Introductory Notices of the Life and System of Gotama Buddha*, London: Williams and Norgate, 6.

<sup>478</sup> Ahubudu, A. (2007), *Sakvithi Ravana Naluva* [Universal Monarch Ravana; Actor], Nugegoda: Panasara. (Original work published 1988).

<sup>479</sup> Ahubudu, *Sakvithi Ravana Naluva*, 62-63.

<sup>480</sup> Ahubudu, *Sakvithi Ravana Naluva*, 62-63.

The stanzas praising Ravana as *sakvithi*, or universal monarch, have recently been popularised in a song composed by the Ravana research group the *Ravana Brothers*.<sup>481</sup> As explained by one of the people actively involved in this research group, they considered Arisen Ahubudu their guru and derived part of their inspiration from him.<sup>482</sup>

At the time of the theatre performance Ahubudu also wanted to create a proper depiction of Ravana.<sup>483</sup> According to the president of one of the popular Ravana research groups (the *Ravana Shakthi*; see Box 1.1), Ahubudu appointed a young man who transferred his ideas into an actual depiction of Ravana on a banner and also moulded a Ravana statue.<sup>484</sup> In this depiction Ravana has only one head (the other heads are depicted on his crown) and two hands that hold two attributes: a sword and a book (see Figure 4.1). This depiction of Ravana – with some adaptations – has become common at several Sinhalese Buddhist sites (see Figure 4.2, Section 5.3.1, and Section 6.2.1).

Whereas the idea of the ancient Hela as people (the Sinhalese) was present in the writings of Cumaratunga and his close friend Tennakoon, the superiority of the Hela and the division of the Hela into different subgroups became a topic of its own in the writings of Arisen Ahubudu.<sup>485</sup> It is not exactly clear to me when the four Hela ‘tribes,’ or *Siv* (four in formal Sinhala) Hela, crystallised, but Arisen Ahubudu mentioned them in several of his publications. In *Sakvithi Kit Rasa* (Collection of the Universal Monarch’s fame), a compilation of hundreds of his poems written over the past decades, the Hela, Ravana, and his ‘tribes’ are central topics of several of these poems and songs. The first stanzas of *Asura Yak Rakus*, written for the theatre play *Sinharaja* (it is not clear to me when this theatre play was exactly staged), praises Ravana and the Sinhalese as the *Siv(u)* Hela divided into four different ‘clans’ (*kula*; poetic translation):<sup>486</sup>

We are Sinhala, descending from the Asura, Yak, Na, Rakus – the *Sivu Hela* clans  
 Our kings from the times of Maha Sammatha are Sinhala  
 All these gods Isuru, Ganapathi Uma and Mahasen are Sinhala  
 We are Sinhala, descending from the Asura, Yak, Na, Rakus – the *Sivu Hela*  
 clans

Sinhala on land, Sinhala in water and the skies of those days were Sinhala too  
 Wherever the commandings of Ravulu [Ravana] were made, the flag that was  
 there was Sinhala

<sup>481</sup> YakshaSL (2011, September 27), *Sakvithi Ravana Song* [video], YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN8GoD4ofwo> (retrieved November 16, 2020). This is the version of *Sakvithi Ravana* of the *Ravana Brothers*. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Sakviti,’ 648. Clough mentions that *sakviti* is the Elu form of *chakravarti*.

<sup>482</sup> Phone conversation with one of the people involved in the *Ravana Brothers*, Colombo, April 18, 2018.

<sup>483</sup> Informal conversation with relative of Arisen Ahubudu, Dehivala, May 7, 2018.

<sup>484</sup> Interview with PRL, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Nugegoda, May 12, 2018.

<sup>485</sup> Interview with S. Coperahewa, head of the Sinhala department of Colombo University, Colombo, April 18, 2018.

<sup>486</sup> Here the word *kulen* is used (*kulaya* translates as caste), whereas at present the concept *gothraya* (caste or tribe) is used. See Section 4.2.2. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Kula,’ 127.

Our grandfather the universal monarch *maha* Ravana was Sinhala  
 We are Sinhala, descending from the Asura, Yak, Na, Rakus – the *Sivu Hela*  
 clans.<sup>487</sup>



**Figure 4.1** (left): Picture originally taken in the 1980s of Arisen Ahubudu with the Ravana banner and statue. This picture is from the official website of A. Ahubudu: Arisen Ahubudu *Padanama* [Foundation], Ravana Piliruva Athethive [Ravana statue in the hand, picture], <https://www.ahubudu.lk/> (retrieved March 4, 2019).

**Figure 4.2** (right): ‘Copper plate’ of Ravana next to the entrance of the Ravana *devalaya* constructed at the site of the Bolthumbe Saman *devalaya* (see Section 5.3.1). Picture taken by author, Bolthumbe, May 6, 2016.

In his later publications – for instance, *Ira Hada Nagi Rata* (1994, *Country where the Sun and Moon Rise*) – Ahubudu explained that the concept Sinhalese is derived from *Sivu Hela* and that the four (*siv*) Hela ‘tribes’ are the *asura*, *rakus*, *yak* and *na*.<sup>488</sup> In his later

<sup>487</sup> Ahubudu, A. (2013), *Sakvithi Kith Rasa* [Collection of Universal Monarch’s Fame], Mount Lavinia: Arisen Ahubudu Foundation, 154. Other authors from the Hela movement, for instance Rapiyel Tennakoon, have used Ravula to denote Ravana.

<sup>488</sup> Ahubudu, A. (1994), *Ira Handa Nagi Rata (Yata Giya Vansaya)* [Country where the Sun and Moon Rise (Past Lineage)], Maharagama: Press of the Maharagama National Institute of Education, first page. Miranda Obeyesekere also mentions that Sinhala is derived from *Siv* Hela in *The Cultural Heritage of King Ravana*: ‘[a]ccording to transition of time and languages Sivhela become Singhala. Therefore, Sri Lanka is the first country which had unified all the tribal inhabitants under one name with [intermarriages] that is Sivhela-Singhala. The combination of these four tribes exist in Sri Lanka as yet.’ In:

*Hela Derana Vaga* (2005, *Hela Earth Information*), which was recently translated as *The Story of the Land of the Sinhalese* (Helese), he proposed that the *Asura Helese* should be considered the most ancient of the Sinhala (Hela) 'tribes.' And he further argued that:

[i]t was these Asuras who first achieved a civilized state not only amongst the Sinhalese (Helese) but also in the entire world [...] the era of the Raksha King Ravana is famous as an era in which the glory of the island of the Sinhalese spread throughout the world as the country that ruled 10 nations.<sup>489</sup>

He further suggested, too, that the *yak* were specialised in working with iron (*ya/yakada* means iron) and that the *naga* were engaged in navigation (their name is allegedly derived from the Sinhala word for those who sail by ship; *nava* means ship in Sinhala).<sup>490</sup>

This section has illustrated how in the early-twentieth-century Hela movement the concept Elu or Hela was employed to denote Sinhala (literary) language. The language loyalists employed Hela to refer to an indigenous language of Sri Lanka, some of them even claiming that Hela or Elu was the oldest language. They also extended their use of the Hela concept to the country and ethnicity (the Sinhalese). The idea that the ancient Hela were the ancestors of the Sinhalese was further developed by some (late) Hela representatives. They started to develop more extensive representations of a glorious Hela civilisation with Ravana as the most famous Hela king. Arisen Ahubudu, in particular, made an effort to propagate Ravana as king of the Sinhalese. He argued that Ravana was the forefather of the Sinhalese and that Ravana was the noblest in lineage of Sinhala kings (starting with Maha Sammatha, see Box 6.3).

In her book *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, the historian Nira Wickramasinghe has offered an explanation as to why the representation of the past of the Hela movement did not appeal to a larger audience:

[...] the Hela theory of the origins of the Sinhalese and the earlier incarnations of the Ravana myth did not succeed in capturing the imagination of a large group of people. While the Hela theory was perhaps too literary and complex to be understood by non-literate people, the Rama Sita Ravana myth which saw the king of Lanka ultimately defeated by Rama did not give Ravana a persona Sinhala people could easily identify with. It was very much a myth for Hindus.<sup>491</sup>

While I agree that the appeal of the Hela representation of the past remained limited to a certain group of people at the beginning of the twentieth century, I have shown in this section that the work of the late Hela representative Arisen Ahubudu helped to

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Obeyesekere, *The Cultural Heritage of King Ravana*, 20.

<sup>489</sup> Ahubudu, *The Story of the Land of the Sinhalese*, 27.

<sup>490</sup> Ahubudu, *The Story of the Land of the Sinhalese*, 37. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Náwá,' 286, 'Yak,' 506, 'Ya,' 506, 'Yaksha,' 506-507, 'Yaká,' 507, 'Yakadé,' 507.

<sup>491</sup> Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 96-97.

gradually overcome both limitations mentioned by Wickramasinghe. Ahubudu elaborated on a positive portrayal of Ravana and the Hela by praising Ravana as world monarch, extending his kingdom, portraying the different Hela clans in a favourable way (and explaining this ‘linguistically’), and relating Ravana to other kings and stories known from the Sinhalese Buddhist chronicle tradition. Also, he used a variety of media to address a broader audience. In addition to (popular) books and poetry, these include theatre plays and dramas, as well as the materialisation of Ravana, which – as I explain in Chapter 5 – probably inspired the construction of the Ravana statue under Premadasa (1978-1989 Prime Minister; 1989-1993 President of Sri Lanka) at the famous pilgrimage site Kataragama. After Cumaratunga’s death, the Hela perception of the past remained peripheral but gradually evolved into a representation of a glorious past of the Sinhalese that became fully disclosed in the post-war period. I here continue to explore how the Hela concept is employed for the post-war Sinhalese Buddhists interest in Ravana.

#### 4.2.2 Ravana and the Hela

In this section, I introduce some contemporary ideas of the Hela ‘tribes’ among Sinhalese Buddhists. I first explore the notion of ‘tribes,’ generally speaking, then I zoom into the alleged characteristics of the different tribes and how the tribes are at present claimed to be related to Ravana.

I have argued in the previous section that the Hela ‘tribal’ perception of the past was present prior to the post-war period. In the 1980s and 1990s, Mirando Obeyesekere and Arisen Ahubudu provided creative etymological explanations of Sinhala/Sinhalese as derived from *Siv* Hela, with *siv* meaning four (this is not the colloquial number four, *hatara*, but the formal number four).<sup>492</sup> Another word used by Sinhalese Buddhists to talk about the tribes was *gothra(ya)*. This concept was employed to denote the different ‘groups’ believed to be present in Sri Lanka in Ravana’s time. The Sinhala concept *gothra(ya)* can be translated as ‘tribe’ or ‘clan.’<sup>493</sup>

The set of ‘tribes’ mentioned to me by several people with an interest in Ravana was not fixed. Typically, only three ‘tribes’ (see note 498 for examples) were named – the *yaksha*, *naga*, and *deva* ‘tribes.’ In Section 4.3.3, I speculate on what the motives might be to give centrality to these three specific ‘tribes’ in the process of *Ravanisation*.

In addition to the *yaksha*, *naga*, and *deva* ‘tribes,’ the *asuras* or *rakshas* were both frequently mentioned as the fourth tribe. The president of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* mentioned the *yaksha*, *naga*, *deva*, and *raksha* as the four Hela ‘tribes,’ and he also ritualised them in several Ravana *pujas*. In 2017, I joined this research group to perform a sun greeting ceremony around New Years’ time (April) at Galge in Dondra (see Box 1.1). At this archaeological site they performed – in addition to the *surya namaskar* – an extensive ritual together with a local monk. For this ritual,

<sup>492</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Siv,’ 686.

<sup>493</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Gótra,’ 168, ‘Hatara,’ 723.

they placed ritual paraphernalia in and around a massive tree. Amongst the various ritual paraphernalia was a copperplate of Ravana similar to the one used in the wall of the Ravana shrine at Bolthumbe (see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4), as well as a set of four half coconuts (see Figure 4.4). When I asked the president of the *Ravana Shakthi* why they used four half coconuts as candles, I was told that these coconuts represent the four 'tribes'.<sup>494</sup>



**Figure 4.3** (left): Lighting of four coconut candles representing the *Siv Hela* or four *Hela* 'tribes' (*yaksha*, *naga*, *rasksha*, *deva*). The lighting of the coconut candles was part of an extensive *puja* performed after the *surya namaskar* by the *Ravana Shakthi* at Galge.

**Figure 4.4** (right): 'Copperplate' of Ravana used in the *puja* organised by the popular Ravana research group, the *Ravana Shakthi* at Galge. Pictures taken by author, Galge, April 12, 2017.

The president of another popular Ravana research group mentioned a different set of 'tribes' when I asked him about it: the *yaksha*, *asura*, *naga*, and *raksha*.<sup>495</sup> The *asuras* were also mentioned by Arisen Ahubudu as one of the four tribes (see Section 4.2.1).<sup>496</sup> The set of four *Hela* 'tribes' consisting of the *yakshas*, *rakshas*, *nagas*, and *asuras* was also

<sup>494</sup> Informal conversation with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Galge, April 12, 2017. Fieldwork participation in rituals organised by the *Ravana Shakthi*, Galge, April 12, 2017.

<sup>495</sup> Interview with Sri Mal, April 23, 2017.

<sup>496</sup> In Pali, the *asuras* are mythological beings. See: Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'asura,' 102. There is a connection between the *asuras* and *devas* (as mythical creatures and not as 'tribes') in Indian mythology. In the *Rig Veda* – belonging to the set of oldest Indian literature – *asura* was sometimes used as an honorific for *devas* (the gods), but in later literature it refers to a set of mythological creatures opposed to the gods (demons or anti-gods). Johnson, *Dictionary of Hinduism*, 'asura,' 34. In Sinhala the concept is used to refer to a class of demons: See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Asura,' 61. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the variety of mythological creatures in detail.

mentioned by the chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya.<sup>497</sup> However, in the Ravana *mandiraya* (designed by the same Buddhist monk), the subscript of one of the murals explains that in ancient times kings used to marry wives from four ‘tribes’: the *yaksha*, *naga*, *deva*, and *raksha* (see Figure 5.8). The women in this mural show close similarities with the celestial maidens of the Sigiriya fortress, and I discuss the interest in Sigiriya in the process of *Ravanisation* in more detail in Section 5.2.1. The general tendency seems to be that in the context of *Ravanisation* more recently the *asura* ‘tribe’ is replaced by the *deva* ‘tribe.’ This, I argue in Section 4.2.3, aligns more with the Sinhalese Buddhist chronicle tradition.<sup>498</sup>

What seems to be broadly agreed upon is that different ‘tribes’ were there mainly for one reason: each ‘tribe’ had its own speciality or unique profession.<sup>499</sup> For example, the president of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* explained that the *yakshas* worked with metal, that the *devas* were the rulers, the *nagas* were people from the water, and that the *rakshas* were protectors. Ravana, in his opinion, was a *raksha* and the king of the four ‘tribes.’<sup>500</sup>

Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana mostly elaborated upon the specialities of the *yakshas*, *rakshas*, and *nagas*. The concept *naga* is commonly used in Hindu and Buddhist traditions to denote serpent-like beings that inhabit the waters.<sup>501</sup> Sometimes people with an interest in Ravana mentioned the connection of the *nagas* with snakes and serpents. However, instead of being serpents or snakes themselves, it was said that the *nagas* ‘worshipped’ snakes.<sup>502</sup>

A more common explanation given by people with an interest in Ravana was that the *nagas* were related to the sea as navigators.<sup>503</sup> This is in line with Arisen Ahubudu’s

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<sup>497</sup> Interview with Kolonave Siri Sumangala *Thero*, chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, June 5, 2017.

<sup>498</sup> In Pali, *deva* denotes a god or divine being and *naga* a serpent. Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary*, ‘Deva,’ 368, ‘Nāga,’ 390. Here I provide some examples of tribes mentioned within the Ravana discourse and in informal conversations: *yaksha*, *naga*, *deva*, and *gandhabba*: Obeyesekere, *Ravana, King of Lanka*, 1; *deva*, *yaksha*, *raksha*, and *naga*: informal conversation with *angampora* master, Maharagama, March 11, 2017; *yakkha*, *naga*, and *deva*: ‘Visit Sri Lanka’ promotional clip of *Kelaniya*, Screened by Sri Lankan Airways, (watched March 9, 2017); *yaksha*, *raksha*, *naga*, *deva*: informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, June 3, 2017; *yaksha*, *naga*, and *deva*: interview with PA., laycustodian of a *devalaya* that is partially devoted to Ravana, Dolosbaga, May 4, 2017 (see Section 5.3.1); *yaksha*, *naga*, *deva*, *raksha*: group conversation at Buddhist site in Colombo that included a Buddhist monk and an author, Colombo, June 3, 2017; *naga*, *yaksha*, and *deva*: informal conversation with DV4, Buddhist nun, visitor of Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 24, 2018.

<sup>499</sup> Interview with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, May 12, 2018.

<sup>500</sup> Informal conversation with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 21, 2017.

<sup>501</sup> Keown, D. (2003), *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, New York: Oxford University Press, ‘nāga,’ 185.

<sup>502</sup> The *nagas* were referred to as both navy people and worshippers of dragons by Darshana Pathiranage: interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, Kelaniya, February 28, 2016. In Pali, *naga* refers to serpent or naga-being. Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary*, ‘Nāga,’ 390.

<sup>503</sup> Interview with SR., tour guide specialised in *Ramayana* tours, Colombo, March 17, 2016. *Nagas* were characterised as travellers of the ocean in an informal conversation: informal conversation with DO13,



explanation mentioned in the previous section. In the book *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, Sumangala Thero has likewise proposed that Ravana constructed even submarines and colossal ships capable of transporting pyramids. The transport overseas was controlled by the *naga* tribe. They were the navy people.<sup>504</sup> Also, the president of the *Ravana Shakthi* pointed out that the snake shaped jewellery on Ravana's upper arm, visible in the depiction of Ravana created by Arisen Ahubudu (see Figure 4.1), signified Ravana's connection with the *nagas*.<sup>505</sup>

The speciality of the *raksha* 'tribe' was most often referred to as 'protection.' In Sinhala, the verb *rak(sh)a karanava* means 'to protect.'<sup>506</sup> This etymological connection of the *rakshas* to protection is in line with the origin story of the *rakshas* as given in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Also, the protection of animals as the noble task of the Hela served as grounds for Munidasa Cumaratunga to call the Hela *rakshas*. Suriya Gunasekara, a renowned author in the Ravana discourse (see Box 4.1), explained that *rak* means 'to protect' and that a *raku* is a person who protects industry and farmers.<sup>507</sup> Most often the *rakshas* were considered to be security people, like present-day police.<sup>508</sup> They controlled and even governed the country in ancient times.<sup>509</sup>

The designations *yakshas* and *rakshas* were sometimes used interchangeably.<sup>510</sup> The *rakshas* could, for instance, be considered as a subdivision of the *yakshas*.<sup>511</sup> Prominence was often given to the *yakshas*, and Ravana was often considered a *yaksha*.<sup>512</sup> Mirando Obeyesekere, for instance, has argued in *Ravana King of Lanka*:

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layperson who assisted in the annual *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* in 2017, Colombo, February 27, 2018; *nagas* were characterised as merchants and sailors in a group conversation: group conversation with TY. and SA. Colombo, March 5, 2018; *nagas* were mentioned as sailors by Mirando Obeyesekere: interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, Madipola, March 15, 2018. In his book, Obeyesekere has criticised the view that the tribe was called 'naga' because they worshipped cobras: Obeyesekere, *Ravana King of Lanka*, 6-7.

<sup>504</sup> Kolonave Siri Sumangala Thero, *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, 14.

<sup>505</sup> Interview with PR1, President of *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, May 12, 2018.

<sup>506</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Raka,' 519.

<sup>507</sup> Interview with Suriya Gunasekara, author of the book *Ethihasika Ravana*, Pita Kotte, April 5, 2017, (on Suriya Gunasekara, see Box 4.1); interview with Sri Mal, April 23, 2017; informal conversation with DO13, February 27, 2018.

<sup>508</sup> Group conversation at Buddhist site in Colombo that included a Buddhist monk and an author, Colombo, June 3, 2017; the *rakshas* were compared to policemen in the book: Chulavansa, P. S. T. (2012), *Hela Ithihasaye Ravana Rajathuma ha Lankapuraya* [King Ravana and Lankapura in the History of the Hela], Hettigama: Samanthi Publications, 29-30.

<sup>509</sup> Interview with Sumangala Thero, June 5, 2017.

<sup>510</sup> Interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, February 28, 2016.

<sup>511</sup> Interview with Suriya Gunasekara, April 5, 2017; interview with PR1, May 12, 2018. *Rakshas* considered to be the elites of the *yaksha* tribe was mentioned by Darshana Mapa Pathiranage: interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, February 28, 2016.

<sup>512</sup> In mythology the concepts *raksha* and *yaksha* are often likewise used interchangeably and said to share several characteristics. For references to *yaksha* as *brahman* in the *Atharva Vedas*, the *Brahmanas*, and the *Upanishadic* literature see: Sutherland, G. H. (1991), *The Disguises of the Demon*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 21, 72-76. For connections of *yakshas* with other 'demon races' see for instance Sutherland, *The Disguises of the Demon*, 49-52.



Yaksha tribe of yore had been a highly advanced and intelligent tribe to which King Ravana belonged [...]. When the Buddha visited Lankādīpa, both the Yakshas and the Nagas had been living here. They were true human tribes like the Aryans, Dravidians, Negros and the Mongolians.<sup>513</sup>

And in an interview, he said:

[...] truly they [the *yakshas*] are not demons. They [are] also human beings but belonging to *yakha*.<sup>514</sup>

Obeyesekere pointed to the alleged visit of the Buddha to Lanka to show that the *yaksha* and *naga* tribes were present in ancient Sri Lanka, and I reflect on that in more detail in Section 4.3.3. In addition, he explained that the *yakshas* should be considered humans and not demons, which is how they are often referred to in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon, and Sri Lankan rituals.<sup>515</sup> Although indications for a positive portrayal of *yakshas* can be found in (Sinhalese) Buddhist traditions, they are most often displayed as malevolent beings.<sup>516</sup> Sinhalese Buddhists were well aware of this negative association of the *yakshas* with evil. For this reason, some of them started to explain that the *yakshas* were not demons but a human 'tribe' instead.

Those interested in Ravana believe that the *yakshas* have a specialisation and that this speciality is also connected to the Sinhala creative etymology of the name of their 'tribe.' This was already brought forward by the late Hela representative Arisen Ahubudu:

One of the four clans of Sinhalese or the four Sinhalese (Helese) (Siv Hela) as they were called, the 'Yak' clan showed special skills in the metal industry of the iron industry in particular. The name 'Yak' itself denoted this skill.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Obeyesekere, *Ravana King of Lanka*, 6.

<sup>514</sup> Interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, March 3, 2016. For details of Mirando Obeyesekere, see Box 4.1. This was also mentioned by an *angampora* student: interview with AN1, *angampora* student, Maharaagama, March 28, 2017; and in an informal conversation with a young Buddhist monk: informal conversation with monk, surrounding of Lakegala mountain, April 9, 2017.

<sup>515</sup> The *yakshas* are sometimes considered to be the demons in the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon. See: Goonasekera, S. (2013), *Buddhism in South Asia: Practicing Religion Today*, in K. Pechilis & S. J. Raj (Eds.), *South Asian Religions: Tradition and Today*, London: Routledge, 101-142, 112.

<sup>516</sup> In Pali, *yakkha* refers to a certain type of non-human beings. Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Yakkha,' 605-607. Sutherland, *The Disguises of the Demon*, 106. In the *Jatakas* (tales about Buddha's previous lives), there are plenty of encounters between the Buddha and the *yakshas*. The Buddha embodies the principle of light and the *yaksha*, as his opposite, is a metaphor of impurity which is for instance expressed by their cannibalism. Dehejia, V. (1990), *On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art*, *The Art Bulletin*, 72(3), 374-392, 374. For an example of a *Jataka* on the *bodhisatta* and the *yaksha*, see: Sutherland, *The Disguises of the Demon*, 93-96. Sree Padma mentions that *yakshas* in Buddhist mythology are also sometimes considered guardians and connected to fertility. Sree Padma, *Borders Crossed*, 753.

<sup>517</sup> Ahubudu, *The Story of the Land of the Sinhalese (Helese)*, 35.

Ahubudu pinpointed the word *yakada* (or *ya*), the Sinhala word for iron, as the explanation for why this 'tribe' was called the *yaksha* 'tribe,' and this is also the way the name of this 'tribe' is presently explained by Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana.<sup>518</sup>

The connection of the *yakshas* with iron appeals to the imagination. Because the *yakshas* are believed to have worked with metal, they lived close to the mountains in the middle of Sri Lanka.<sup>519</sup> Raj Somadeva, the famous archaeologist from the Ravana discourse (see Box 4.1), has conducted some excavations in these mountainous areas. As he explained in an interview:

So we have the carbon dates and we have metal analysis [...]. I believe that there is some relationship between the early iron smelting technology and the legend of Ravana. [...]. First we got for example the carbon dates we got from [certain area, which] goes back to 2400 B.C. So inside that burial cunnel we got iron [...] so it means that the people who resided in the mountains area in 2400 B.C. they knew the extraction the technology of extraction iron. So very old date.<sup>520</sup>

In his article 'Prelude to the State: Further Thinking of Early Political Institutes in Sri Lanka' (2017), Somadeva noted several inscriptions in Sri Lanka:

A hitherto unknown cave inscriptions [sic] reported from Kirimakulgolla in the Kaltota escarpment in the southern frontier of the central highland has mentioned a group of people who themselves used the term *Yakkha* (Somadeva, Wanninayake & Devage 2015). As once mentioned above, a group of that name is described by *Mahavamsa* as the indigenous community who occupied Sri Lanka when the event of *Vijaya's* arrival [sic]. We must use the opportunity to compare between the *Yakkha* identity in our inscription and the same identity of the local group inhabited the country as described in the chronicles.<sup>521</sup>

The iron melting technology mastered by the *yakshas*, is referred to as an example of the highly advanced civilisation in Sri Lanka under Ravana's reign.<sup>522</sup> In Section 4.3, I treat this in more detail. I explore in the next section how the prominence of the *yakshas* (and

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<sup>518</sup> Two examples of conversations in which the connection of the *yaksha* tribe with iron was mentioned were: informal conversation with DO13, layperson who assisted in the annual *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* in 2017, Colombo, February 27, 2018; and interview with Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero*, April 25, 2017.

<sup>519</sup> Informal conversation with DO13, February 27, 2018.

<sup>520</sup> Interview with Raj Somadeva, May 2, 2016. On Raj Somadeva, see Box 4.1.

<sup>521</sup> Somadeva, R. (2017), *Prelude to the State: Further Thinking of Early Political Institutes in Sri Lanka*, in H. Dehanandha and R. Dasanayake (Eds.), *Professor R. A. L. H. Gunawardhana Felicitation Volume*, Colombo: Godage, paragraph '4. Proto historic cemeteries in Sri Lanka: an optimistic clue.'

<sup>522</sup> Sumangala *Thero*, for instance, mentioned that *yakshas* worked with iron and created vehicles and weapons. Interview with Sumangala *Thero*, June 5, 2017.

to a lesser extent the *nagas* and *devas*) in the post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past relates this alternative perception of the past to the *Mahavamsa*.

### 4.2.3 *Ravanisation and the Mahavamsa*

In Section 2.3.1.1, I illustrated that in twentieth-century Sri Lanka the *Mahavamsa* became the most popular chronicle of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority. In Section 4.2.1, I showed not only that several representatives of the Hela movement opposed the idea that the Sinhalese descend from Vijaya (an idea based on the *Mahavamsa*) but also that the Hela counternarrative remained limited in appeal. This section further explores how reference is made to the *Mahavamsa* in the process of *Ravanisation* and how this might contribute to a wider appeal of the interest in Ravana in post-war Sri Lanka.

Two narratives from the *Mahavamsa* became very popular in the context of twentieth-century Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka: the story that the Buddha visited Sri Lanka three times (which makes Sri Lanka the ‘chosen country’ of Buddhism) and the coming of the Indian prince Vijaya, who became considered the progenitor of the Sinhalese (an ethnical connection of the Sinhalese to the island; see on this also Section 2.3.1.2). These two stories are also referred to in the process of *Ravanisation* to indicate the presence of the ‘tribes’ in Lanka prior to the visits of both Vijaya and the Buddha. I briefly mention here which ‘tribes’ are mentioned in the context of these stories.

The first chapter of the *Mahavamsa* includes the narratives of three visits that Gautama Buddha allegedly paid to Lanka. It is said that the Buddha set forth to the isle of Lanka and that:

[...] Lanka was known to the Conqueror as a place where his doctrine should (thereafter) shine in glory; and (he knew that) from Lanka, filled with the yakkhas, the yakkhas must (first) be driven forth. (*Mahavamsa* 1:18-20).<sup>523</sup>

At the time of the first visit of the Buddha to Lanka, the *yakshas* had a gathering and the Buddha terrified them. The terrified *yakshas* asked the Buddha to send them to *Giridipa*, and on their request the Buddha sent them away. The *devas* then approached the Buddha and, after listening to the *dhamma*, they converted to his teachings.<sup>524</sup> The Buddha returned to Jetavana, and after several years he paid a second visit to Lanka. The reason to visit Lanka for the second time was a fight between two *naga* relatives:

Now the most compassionate Teacher, the Conqueror, rejoicing in the salvation of the whole world, when dwelling at Jetavana, in the fifth year of his buddhahood, saw a war, caused by a gem-set throne, was like to come to pass between the *nāgas* Mahodara and Cūlodara, uncle and nephew, and their followers; and

<sup>523</sup> *The Mahāvamsa, or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon* (W. Geiger & M. H. Bode, Trans.), (2014), Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 3.

<sup>524</sup> *Mahavamsa* 1: 21-43. In: *The Mahāvamsa* (Geiger & Bode, Trans.), 3-5.

he, the Sambuddha, on the uposathday of the dark half of the month Citta, in the early morning, took his sacred alms bowl and his robes, and, from compassion for the nāgas, sought the Nāgadīpa.<sup>525</sup>

After listening to the Buddha's teachings, the two *naga* kings settled the fight and gave the throne to Buddha. A *naga* king from Kelaniya heard of this story and invited the Buddha several years later to his residence. During this third visit to Kelaniya, the Buddha is said to have visited some other places in Lanka as well.<sup>526</sup>

The other well-known mythistory from the *Mahāvamsa* is the coming of the Indian prince Vijaya to Lanka (narrated in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of the *Mahāvamsa*). Vijaya was banished from India by his father because of his evil deeds.<sup>527</sup> Vijaya and his seven-hundred followers encountered the *yakini* (female *yaksha*) Kuveni.<sup>528</sup> She sat under a tree making threads. Because Vijaya's men were protected by a protective thread, Kuveni was unable to kill them and decided to throw them in a cleft instead. When Vijaya started to look for his men, he encountered Kuveni. He immediately figured out her true identity. Terrified by Vijaya's power, Kuveni brought back the seven hundred men. Kuveni, taking the form of a beautiful sixteen-year-old maiden, spent the night with Vijaya. Vijaya asked Kuveni that night about the sound of music and singing that he heard. Kuveni answered, saying:<sup>529</sup>

Here there is a yakkha-city called Sirisavatthu; the daughter of the chief of the yakkhas who dwells in the city of Lanka has been brought hither, and her mother too is come. And for the wedding there is high festival, lasting seven days. Therefore there is this noise, for a great multitude is gathered together. Even today do thou destroy the yakkhas, for afterwards it will no longer be possible. (*Mahāvamsa* 7: 32-35)<sup>530</sup>

Because the *yakshas* were invisible, Kuveni had to assist Vijaya in destroying the *yakshas*, and with her help the *yakshas* were dispelled.<sup>531</sup> Kuveni was later banished by Vijaya and killed by the *yakshas* because of her betrayal. Vijaya then married the daughter of a Tamil king.

In my fieldwork, people referred to the *Mahāvamsa* for two main reasons. The first and most prominent reason was to point out that there was an indigenous inhabitation in Lanka prior to Vijaya's and Buddha's alleged visits to Lanka. As mentioned in a promotional clip on Kelaniya shown by Sri Lankan airlines:

<sup>525</sup> *Mahāvamsa* 1: 44-47. In: *The Mahāvamsa* (Geiger & Bode, Trans.), 5-6.

<sup>526</sup> *Mahāvamsa* 1: 48-83. In: *The Mahāvamsa* (Geiger & Bode, Trans.), 6-9.

<sup>527</sup> *Mahāvamsa* 6: 39-47. In: *The Mahāvamsa* (Geiger & Bode, Trans.), 53-54.

<sup>528</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Yakinī,' 507, 'Yakshinī,' 507.

<sup>529</sup> *Mahāvamsa* 7: 10-31. In: *The Mahāvamsa* (Geiger & Bode, Trans.), 56-57.

<sup>530</sup> *Mahāvamsa* 7: 31-35. In: *The Mahāvamsa* (Geiger & Bode, Trans.), 57-58.

<sup>531</sup> *Mahāvamsa* 7: 36-38. In: *The Mahāvamsa* (Geiger & Bode, Trans.), 58.

The different tribes of ancient Sri Lanka are named *yakkha*, *naga* and *deva*. At Kelaniya and at *nagadipa* resides the *naga* tribe. When Lord Buddha visited Sri Lanka these kingdoms were ruled by *naga* kings and the king who ruled Kelaniya at that time was named King Maniakkika. Gautama lord Buddha visited Sri Lanka [three] times I just said. And the details of these visits are recorded in the *Mahavamsa* and the *Culavamsa*, the two oldest historical chronicles of Sri Lanka.<sup>532</sup>

In general, out of the Buddha's encounters with the 'tribes,' his interactions with the *nagas* were brought up most often by Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana. This is not surprising since two out of the three visits of the Buddha to Sri Lanka involved extensive interactions with the *nagas*.<sup>533</sup> Following the *Mahavamsa*, the *naga* 'tribe' is related to a particular area: Kelaniya. According to Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, lecturer of mass communication at Kelaniya University, the *nagas* had their own kingdom in the northern part of Sri Lanka (where the island *Nagadipa* is located) and at Kelaniya. According to him, this 'tribe' was dominant in Sri Lanka when Buddha visited Sri Lanka.<sup>534</sup>

According to the *Mahavamsa*, the Buddha encountered in Lanka the *yakshas* at Mahiyangana during the time of his first visit and sent them away to *Giridipa*. As evidence for the presence in Lanka of the *yakshas* – as an indigenous tribe – people with an interest in Ravana referred to the story of Vijaya's coming to Sri Lanka over the story of the Buddha. In a group conversation with a young man involved in *angampora* and a man of around 50 years old who investigated the location of the Ravana's Lankapura in his free time, it was mentioned that there was a rich civilisation in Lanka before Vijaya came. For this, they referred to the *Mahavamsa* in which it is mentioned that Kuveni made cotton. The monk who came from India and wrote the *Mahavamsa* created, according to these men, a distorted picture about the *yakshas* and the, what they called, 'pre-Vijaya history.' The *yakshas* were an ancient tribe, not devils.<sup>535</sup>

These men referred to the *Mahavamsa* to point out not only that certain tribes were present in Lanka prior to Vijaya's and Buddha's visits, but also that the tribes were civilised. In general, references to the fight between the two *naga* kings aimed to show that they were civilised. In Lakegala area, a member of the cultural committee involved in organising village rituals said that there must have been a civilisation prior to the time of Vijaya since Vijaya came after Buddha passed away and the *Mahavamsa* mentions that Buddha also had several encounters with *yakshas*. He argued that there was a rich civilisation with reference to the *Mahavamsa* – for example, an episode in which Kuveni and Vijaya heard the sounds of dancing and singing of a wedding festival when they spent the night together as well as the fight between the two kings in Kelaniya over a

<sup>532</sup> 'Visit Sri Lanka' promotional clip of Kelaniya, (watched March 9,2017).

<sup>533</sup> Sumangala Thero argued that there were Hela people living in Sri Lanka when the Buddha visited *Nagadipa*. Interview with Kolonave Siri Sumangala Thero, June 5, 2017.

<sup>534</sup> Interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, February 28, 2016.

<sup>535</sup> Group conversation with TY. and SA., March 5, 2018.

chair studded with gems, which indicated that the *nagas* were extremely skilled and civilised.<sup>536</sup>

The encounter of Vijaya with Kuveni was also frequently referred to as evidence that the *yakshas* were civilised. The main indication of their civilised status was that Kuveni made cotton when Vijaya arrived. In a group conversation between a Buddhist monk and an author, the author explained that the *yakshas* and *nagas* were the originators of Sinhalese culture and that they were developed people because Kuveni was weaving when Vijaya came to Sri Lanka.<sup>537</sup> In general, clothing and fabric were important to argue that the *yakshas* were civilised. Sumangala Thero, the chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, has argued in his book, for instance, that Vijaya took the clothes of the *yaksha* king he killed, and that the *yakshas* were not demons but a majestic tribe who dwelled in Lakdiva from thousands of years back.<sup>538</sup>

Despite the absence of direct references to Ravana in Sri Lanka's most famous chronicle of the twentieth century, those interested in Ravana still make reference to the *Mahavamsa* to bolster some of their claims. I reflect here on what the selective use of the Hela and *yaksha* concepts and fragments from different textual sources and movements might indicate about *Ravanisation*.

### **Reflection: Ravana, the Hela, and twentieth- and twenty-first-century Sinhalese representations of the past**

Like the interpretation of fragments about Ravana and Lanka discussed in Section 4.1, the creative etymologies of the names of the tribes disclose the effort to construct an imagined glorious Sinhalese past. The creative etymologies introduced in the Hela movement have been elaborated upon by the late Hela movement representative Arisen Ahubudu. In his publications, he produced creative etymologies that linked 'tribal' names to different tasks and skills: working with iron (*yaksha*), protectors (*rakshas*), and sailors/navigators of the waters (*nagas*). Among these, it is the creative etymology of the *yaksha* tribe that perhaps most appeals to the imagination in the process of *Ravanisation* because working with iron allegedly enabled Ravana and his civilisation to develop airplanes. In addition to creative etymologies, I have indicated that in the process of *Ravanisation* reference is made to the *Mahavamsa* to argue that certain Hela tribes were civilised. Especially the *nagas* and *yakshas* have gained prestige: the *nagas* with the gem-set chair, the *yakshas* with the production of fabric.

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<sup>536</sup> Conversation with member of the cultural committee, Ranamure, April 9, 2017.

<sup>537</sup> Group conversation at Buddhist site in Colombo that included a Buddhist monk and an author, June 3, 2017.

<sup>538</sup> Kolonave Siri Sumangala, *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, 3. Vijaya's taking of garments and ornaments from the *yakshas* has been elaborated upon in the book *Hela Vanshaya Ravanavadaya*. With reference to this passage from the *Mahavamsa*, Gayan Sandakelum has argued that the idea that there were only inhumane demons in the country before the coming of Vijaya is a lie. Sandakelum *Hela Vanshaya Ravanavadaya*, 34-36.

The centrality of the Hela and *yaksha* concepts in the Hela-Ravana representation of the past, together with the sources selectively employed for these concepts, indicate – similar to my analyses in the previous section of how references of Ravana and Lanka from multiple sources are employed in the process of *Ravanisation* – that Sinhalese Buddhists want to distance their Hela-Ravana perception of the past from the *Ramayana*/Hindu tradition by making reference to sources other than the *Ramayana* and by giving prominence to concepts that are part of (alternative) Sinhalese Buddhist representations of the past. Moreover, the use of the Hela concept and references to the indigenous *yaksha* tribe from the *Mahavamsa* reveal a cultural ambition in the process of *Ravanisation* of ethnic and cultural independence (from India) and even superiority of Sri Lanka (or the Hela) over India. This focus on ethnic and cultural independence of the Hela/Sinhalese from India is the principal feature of the Hela ‘tribal’ system. As I have indicated, the elements of Sinhalese self-awareness and a distinctive (literary) culture were present in how the Hela concept was employed in the past. For example, Hela or Elu as (literary) language was opposed to the Sanskrit-dominated culture. In the twentieth-century Hela movement, it was argued that Hela was an indigenous language and even the mother of all languages. In addition, Hela became used to denote the indigenous ethnicity of the Sinhalese. This theory of the Hela past not only strongly opposed the alleged descentance of the Sinhalese from Vijaya as derived from the *Mahavamsa* but also proposed an indigenous Hela identity with Ravana as its famous monarch. Although the *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of the past rose into prominence in twentieth-century Sri Lanka, this alternative perception of the past remained present in Sri Lanka throughout the twentieth century. Albeit in the periphery, it further developed under several (late) Hela movement representatives. Key to the popularisation of Ravana and the Hela theory was Arisen Ahubudu. He used a variety of media (poetry, theatre, and statues) to spread his ideas. He made concerted efforts to create a representation of the Hela past that appealed to a larger audience: the Hela civilisation was indigenous and glorious, and he gave a central position to Ravana who was not only the King of Lanka but even a world monarch.

My exploration of the Hela ‘tribal’ system indicates that the *yakshas*, *nagas*, and *devas* are solidified as the three most prominent Hela tribes. These are exactly the ‘tribes’ mentioned in the first chapters of the *Mahavamsa*, to which appeals are made in the process of *Ravanisation* to argue that the tribes were indigenous (pre-Vijaya) and civilised. The re-interpretations of existing concepts and ideas for the specific present-day framing of post-war Sinhalese Buddhists ‘ideology,’ which centres on the indigenous origin of the Sinhalese and the civilised status of this indigenous civilisation, can be considered as re-mythologising.

The extensive interaction with the *Mahavamsa* for the Hela ‘tribal’ system stands in striking contrast with the Hela perception of the past from the early-twentieth-century Hela movement. I contend that the ‘inclusion’ of the *Mahavamsa* contributes to the broader appeal of the interest in Ravana in post-war Sri Lanka as it relates Ravana and the Hela representation of the past to the dominant Sinhalese Buddhist chronicle tradition in a creative way.

### 4.3 The Representation of Ravana as *Dasis* Ravana

My discussion of the *dasis* concept in this section further explores a central theme of the Hela-Ravana representation of the past, which is also central to the selective use of texts and concepts by Sinhalese Buddhist with an interest in Ravana discussed above: the golden ages of the Sinhalese. In Section 4.3.1, I first introduce the *dasis* concept and the representation of Ravana as ten-headed as known from Hindu traditions. I then introduce the present-day symbolic interpretation given to this concept in the process of *Ravanisation*.

#### 4.3.1 The Ten-headed Ravana in Hindu Traditions

According to Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Ravana was born with ten necks and twenty arms.<sup>539</sup> A designation of Ravana in the Hindu context is *dashamukha* (ten-faced) or *dashagriva* (ten-necked).<sup>540</sup> Throughout the world one can find (temple) sculptures that display Ravana with ten heads and twenty arms. A ninth-century bas relief of the Prambanan Hindu temple (Yogyakarta), for instance, depicts the defeated Ravana with multiple heads and multiple arms (see Figure 4.5).<sup>541</sup>

In the twentieth century, the *Ramayana* – including the character of Ravana – was materialised and mediated in new and creative ways. In Section 3.3.1, I referred to several scholars who have argued that Rama and his 'glorious' kingdom from the *Ramayana* became powerful tools of exclusion in the hands of Hindu nationalists in twentieth- and twenty-first-century India. In the context of increased Hindu nationalism, according to Anita Shukla, new practices and rituals were invented to create a larger notion of the Hindu community – for example, the burning of effigies during the festival of *dashara*. On the specific day of *dashara*, Rama allegedly killed Ravana. To celebrate the triumph of good over evil, effigies of Ravana are burnt during this festival (see also Box 1.2).<sup>542</sup> The massive effigies of Ravana depict him with ten heads (see Figure 4.6). In several *dashara* announcements on the internet it is explained that Ravana's ten heads

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<sup>539</sup> As mentioned in Valmiki's *Ramayana*: Ravana was '[...] a hideous child with the face of a demon, exceedingly dark; and he had ten necks and great teeth and resembled a heap of collyrium; his lips were of the hue of copper, he had twenty arms and a vast mouth and his hair was fiery red.' Chapter 9 of the *Uttarakanda* in: *The Ramayana of Valmiki Volume III* (H. Prasad Shastri, Trans.), (1985), London: Shanti Sadan, 399.

<sup>540</sup> Bakker, F. L. (2009), *The Challenge of the Silver Screen: An Analysis of the Cinematic Portraits of Jesus, Rama, Buddha and Muhammad*, Leiden: Brill, 99. Monier-Williams, Leumann & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'grīva,' 274, 'mukha,' 819, 'dasamukha,' 472.

<sup>541</sup> In Indonesia, Ravana is not always depicted with multiple heads and arms. Most of the Ravana *wayang* puppets I have seen (in Indonesia, for example, and at the 'Bali – Welcome to Paradise' exhibition at Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden) do not depict Ravana with ten heads. 'Bali – Welcome to Paradise' exhibition, Leiden, visited November 8, 2018.

<sup>542</sup> Shukla, *From Evil to Evil*, 175-177.



symbolise his ten evil character traits: lust, anger, delusion, selfishness, greed, pride, jealousy, cruelty, injustice, and ego.<sup>543</sup>



**Figure 4.5** (left): Bas-relief of the defeated multiple-headed Ravana at the ninth-century Prambanan Temple, Yogyakarta. Picture taken by author, September 29, 2017.



**Figure 4.6** (right): Effigy of Ravana with ten heads created for a *dashara* celebration. Picture taken by author, Amsterdam, October 21, 2018.

In the twentieth century, the *Ramayana* also became mediated on the screen.<sup>544</sup> In one of the early *Ramayana* movies, Ravana's ten heads are explained symbolically. Freek Bakker explains about one of the fragments from the film *Sampoorna Ramayan* (1961):

Ravan is also called Dashamukha, which means ten faces or ten heads. When Ravan is considering what to do—either to fight or to return Sita to Rama—in the last night before the decisive battle, the film reveals how it interprets these ten heads. Each head represents a moral, psychological or spiritual quality; four of them are good (insight, intelligence, caution and mercy) and five are evil (arrogance, lust, greed, desire and anger). They talk to him in turns during that night—first a good head, then an evil one. Eventually, one head is left, his normal head, which ultimately decides to fight. This image clearly reveals that Ravan was not only evil.<sup>545</sup>

<sup>543</sup> Bardoloi, P. (2016, October 8), Dusshera, Ramleela aur Ravana! *The Indian Trumpet*, <http://www.theindiantrumpet.com/2016/10/08/dusshera-ramleela-aur-ravana/> (retrieved April 2, 2019); *Dusshera / Vijaydashmi Festival* (2018, October 1), *IndoIndians*, <https://www.indoindians.com/dusshera-vijay-dashmi-festival/> (retrieved April 2, 2019); Walia, S. (2014, October 2), 10 Childhood Memories That Make Dussehra One Of The Best Festivals In India, *Scoopwhoop*, <https://www.scoopwhoop.com/inother-news/childhood-dussehra-memories/#.258kuwe0o> (retrieved April 2, 2019).

<sup>544</sup> Dwyer, R. (2006), *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1.

<sup>545</sup> Bakker, *The Challenge of the Silver Screen*, 99.

This example of the interpretation of Ravana's ten heads reveals a tendency in modern Hindu traditions to give a symbolic interpretation to Ravana's ten heads. Sinhalese Buddhists also have a particular concept to denote the ten-headed Ravana. I explore this in more detail in the next section.

### 4.3.2 The Ten-skilled Ravana in Post-War Sri Lanka

Sinhalese Buddhists have a specific concept to denote the 'ten-headed' Ravana: *dasis* Ravana. Several Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana explicitly told me that the meaning of *dasis* was 'ten-headed' consisting of the Sinhala words *dasa* (ten) and *his* (heads).<sup>546</sup> They often further explained that this did not mean that Ravana literally had ten heads. They considered it a misconception that Ravana was displayed in that way.<sup>547</sup> Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, lecturer in mass communication at Kelaniya University, explained that:

[o]ur Sinhala, the god concept, Sinhala god concept one head, ok? But Hindu god concept ten heads and twenty hands [...] Hindu concepts ten heads, but I tell this is ten subjects or ten industries.<sup>548</sup>

Pathiranage has written on the *dasis* concept. For his article 'Folklore Study about Communicative Meanings revealed by Million Titles in the Myth Concept of Raniah (dasis) Ravana in Sri Lanka,' he interviewed five 'experts' on the *dasis* Ravana concept. These experts were: Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero*, Ritigala Sumedha, Suriya Gunasekara, Kolonnave Sumangala *Thero*, and M. D. Jinadasa.<sup>549</sup> Based on these interviews, he made a list of '[...] the ten knowledge [sic] which were mastered by King Ravana, and possessed by *Yaksha* and *Naga* tribes.'<sup>550</sup> The ten are as follows:

01. Language and Mathematics
02. Law and politics
03. Architecture and city planning
04. Philosophy and knowledge of soul
05. Technical knowledge of Physics

<sup>546</sup> Group conversation at Buddhist site in Colombo that included a Buddhist monk and an author, June 3, 2017. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Dasa,' 236, 'Hisa,' 738.

<sup>547</sup> This was for instance mentioned in: interview with PR1, May 12, 2018; interview with Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero*, April 25, 2017.

<sup>548</sup> Interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, February 28, 2016. The multiple heads ascribed to Ravana was also a reason to equate him with Kataragama who is in the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon depicted with six heads. This idea is hailed by Mirando Obeyesekere: interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, March 3, 2016.

<sup>549</sup> I myself have interviewed three out of the five 'Ravana experts' mentioned by Pathiranage: Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero*, Suriya Gunasekara, and Kolonnave Siri Sumangala *Thero*.

<sup>550</sup> Pathiranage, D. M. (2016, August 25-26), *Folklore Study about Communicative Meanings revealed by Million Titles in the Myth Concept of Raniah (dasis) Ravana in Sri Lanka* [Conference Paper], 2nd International Conference on Multidisciplinary Academic Research & Global Innovation, Beijing, 1-8, 5.

06. Esotericism and juggling knowledge
07. Arts
08. Sri Lankan traditional Medicine (*Hela wedakama*)
09. Astrology
10. Fighting skills and battle techniques<sup>551</sup>

Section 4.1.2 above treated an interpretation of *dasis* Ravana as the ruler of ten countries exists among Sinhalese Buddhists. A more popular – and probably a more recent interpretation – is this symbolic interpretation of the ten heads as special skills, powers, or industries that Ravana mastered.<sup>552</sup> Some popular publications on Ravana contain lists of the ten skills. Several of these lists refer to the *Vargapurnikava*.<sup>553</sup> This palm leaf manuscript allegedly belongs to Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero*, a Buddhist monk who extensively publishes about the *yaksha* language (see Section 1.3). The *Vargapurnikava* has become an authoritative text in the process of *Ravanisation*.<sup>554</sup> Both Darshana Mapa Pathiranage and Sumangala *Thero* have referred to the text to list Ravana’s ten skills. Their lists are more or less the same. According to Sumangala *Thero*, Ravana’s skills are as follows (translation):

According to what is stated in the book *Vargapurnika*, the king *maha* Ravana was a pious, just, disciplined, and kind person with straightforward ideals. According to the same, *maha* Ravana was a person with a tenfold wisdom [...] He was referred to as *dasis* Ravana due to the possession of [this] ten-fold knowledge.<sup>555</sup>

In informal conversations, people could often mention only a few of Ravana’s skills. I discuss here the skills that people referred to as exemplary for Ravana.

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<sup>551</sup> Pathiranage, *Folklore Study*, 5.

<sup>552</sup> That Ravana’s ‘ten-heads’ denote his ten skills was mentioned in: informal group conversation DG4, DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, and DO2 caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 11, 2018; group conversation TY. and SA. Colombo, March 5, 2018; Interview with Sri Mal, April 23, 2017.

<sup>553</sup> According to Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero* the *Vargapurnikava* was written in the Kandyan period but the language used in the manuscript is much older. He mainly used the book to reconstruct the *yaksha* language (in his publications on the *yaksha bhasava*) but the document also deals with the kings’ history in Sri Lanka prior to the coming of Vijaya, including the Ravana dynasty. Interview with Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero*, April 25, 2017. In addition to Manawe Wimalarathana *Thero*, some other people referred to a Ravana dynasty as well. Then, Ravana is considered one of the famous kings of that dynasty. This dynasty was also sometimes referred to as the *surya* dynasty, expressing the connection of these kings with the sun. An example of this was: interview with Sri Mal, April 23, 2017. In informal conversations this ‘dynasty’ was not referred to at all.

<sup>554</sup> In this online article ‘Ravana History’ Kasu argues that in the *Vargapurnikava* the *dasis* concept meant that Ravana ruled ten areas of land and that he mastered ten talented abilities: Kasun, B. (2018, May 26), *Ravana History*, Buddhika Kasun, <https://medium.com/@coolkasun2/king-ravana-8c59e41545d9> (retrieved November 24, 2020).

<sup>555</sup> Kolonave Siri Sumangala, *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, 27.

According to Suriya Gunasekara (see Box 4.1), four areas of expertise function as evidence for Ravana's existence: medicine, astrology, fighting methods, and music.<sup>556</sup> In informal conversations, Sinhalese Buddhists tend to focus on three particular skills: fighting techniques (*angampora*), medicine, and technology (aircraft technology, in particular). As I was told in an informal conversation:

Ravana belonged to the *yakka* tribe. This tribe [...] combined women power and meditational power and were famous for medicines, weapons and aircraft [technology]. The NASA is even doing research on him.<sup>557</sup>

In what follows, I briefly explore these three skills and reflect on their relevance for the post-war interest in Ravana.

### Medicine

In general, Ravana is considered to have excelled in medicinal skills or invented certain types of medicine. Some Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana have even argued that it is via the traditional medicine – which is allegedly passed down from generation to generation – that Ravana's existence can be proved and the marvels of his kingdom explored (translation):

In my opinion, the only way we can find more information about Ravana is through Ravana's medicine that still exists. We call it *rasa vedakama*. There are doctors in Sri Lanka who still practice *rasa vedakama* even today. They have the history [*ithihasaya*] of this. We can find more information from this point. The only [...] that still exist of Ravana is *rasa vedakama*. In history it says that Ravana is a talented doctor. We have many things like Ayurveda, dancing that still exist. Ola leaf books [*puskola poth*] states that *rasa vedakama* is from Ravana. It directly states that *rasa vedakama* is from Ravana. This *rasa vedakama* could not be from Ravana but surely it is from the time period of Ravana. All of the other information we have is from folklore [*janaprawada*]. [...] the only fact that can be traced is the one written in ola leaf books that states that *rasa vedakama* comes from Ravana.<sup>558</sup>

In several conversations, this *rasa* (mercury) *vedakama* (medicine) was strictly divided from Ayurveda.<sup>559</sup> Ayurveda mainly relates to India whereas *rasa vedakama* is considered the Sri Lankan indigenous medical system:

<sup>556</sup> Interview with Suriya Gunasekara, April 5, 2017.

<sup>557</sup> Informal conversation with DO13, layperson who assisted in the annual *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* in 2017, Pannipitiya, March 26, 2017.

<sup>558</sup> Interview with RA., news reporter Sirasa TV, Colombo, March 29, 2016. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Janaprawada,' 189.

<sup>559</sup> *Vedakama* means the practice of medicine. *Rasa* translates as mercury or quicksilver: See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Rasa,' 528, 'Wedakama,' 610.

[The] Indian medicine system and Sri Lankan medicine system is totally different. They [the Indians] have Ayurvedic system; they destroy the tree and make the drugs. But [in] our system natural plants we will get it [from] and [produce at] same time indigenous medicines. It is a Ravana's thing. Ravana never killed anything.<sup>560</sup>

As this quote shows, it was occasionally emphasized that Ravana's medicinal treatment was not Ayurvedic, which is here associated with the destruction of nature and elsewhere with the use of meat.<sup>561</sup> But the main difference mentioned was the countries of origin of both types of medicines. Sumangala *Thero*, for example, said that Ayurveda belongs to India, but Ravana's knowledge of medicine should be considered Hela *vedakama*. The latter focusses on mercury.<sup>562</sup> This type of medicinal treatment is believed to have been invented by Ravana. The director of the Sri Lankan Tourism Board who expressed an interest in Ravana mentioned that:

I have some documents I found actually from the Ayurvedic commission, from the Ayurvedic commissioner. When I go to this document [...] what we knew about King Ravana: he was the pioneer of the art. In Sinhala we call [it] *rasa vedakama*. *Vedakama* means treatment. *Rasa* means mercury. He has used the mercury [...].<sup>563</sup>

While there is this tendency to distinguish the Sinhala traditional medicine from Ayurveda, I was often told in informal conversations that nonetheless several of the Ayurvedic books were allegedly written by Ravana. Thus, a Sinhala translation of the *Kumara Tantraya* – a key book about Ayurveda – is sold these days in bookshops in Colombo with Ravana as its author.<sup>564</sup> In some conversations, Indian medical literature was explicitly connected to Ravana. One author, for example, said:

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<sup>560</sup> Interview with Jalitha Amarasinghe, May 11, 2016.

<sup>561</sup> An example of a conversation in which it was mentioned that the traditional Sinhalese medicine should not be considered Ayurveda was: group conversation TY. and SA., March 5, 2018. A member of the *Ravana Shakthi* told me that the *Kumara Tantraya* was written by Ravana but it was not an Ayurvedic book; instead it dealt with Hela medicine: informal conversation with member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Colombo, May 6, 2018. That Ayurveda uses meat products was mentioned by the president of the *Ravana Shakthi*: interview with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Nugegoda, March 9, 2018. The difference between Ayurveda and Hela medicine also became a topic of extensive discussion in a group conversation, and the discussion was ended by considering Sri Lankan medicine and Ayurveda as the same: group discussion between DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero* and DO2, March 11, 2018.

<sup>562</sup> Interview with Kolonave Siri Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, May 11, 2018. Mercury has actually been part of some Ayurvedic treatments as well. See for instance: Paul, S., & Chugh, A. (2011), Assessing the Role of Ayurvedic 'Bhasms' as Ethno-nanomedicine in the Metal Based Nanomedicine Patent Regime, *Journal of Intellectual Property Rights*, 16(6), 509-515, 510. <http://nopr.niscair.res.in/bitstream/123456789/13060/1/JIPR%2016%286%29%20509-515.pdf>

<sup>563</sup> Interview with Indrajith de Silva, Director of Sri Lankan Tourism Board, Colombo, April 19, 2016.

<sup>564</sup> That Ravana is the author of the *Kumara Tantraya* was also explicitly mentioned by a monk: informal conversation with Buddhist monk, Vidurupola, March 11, 2016.

In the *Rigveda* you have sutras that you can curse people. Ayurveda is invented by Ravana.<sup>565</sup>

In addition to Ayurvedic books, there are several (self-declared) traditional physicians (*veda mahaththayas*) who have allegedly inherited traditional medicinal knowledge. One *veda mahaththaya* I met owned some traditional palm leaf manuscripts that he inherited from his family. As he explained, it contained the oldest form of medicine, which he called *vedakama*.<sup>566</sup> This *veda mahaththaya* was also an *angampora* (martial arts) master. I look at this specific skill and the technological marvels here first, before reflecting on what the relevance might be of these specific skills for the recent interest in Ravana.

### **Angampora or Martial Arts**<sup>567</sup>

*Angampora* is a skill often ascribed to Ravana (some people mentioned war techniques instead), and it has recently received a lot of attention (also by researchers). I discussed *angampora*, for instance, with Ankumbura, a senior assistant librarian working at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts. In her article on *angampora*, she has explained the different types of Sinhalese martial art as follows:

*Angam* (also known as *angampora*) is a top-level Sinhalese martial art. Included in the Sri Lankan national ICH [Intangible Cultural Heritage] list, the techniques of this indigenous combat performance rely on the strength of human body incorporating shots, punches, locks, jumps, and wrestling elements. Yoga, meditation, and magic are also fundamental parts of *angam*.<sup>568</sup>

Ankumbura further mentioned that it is nowadays accepted among *angampora* teachers and students that there are three types or traditions of *angampora*.<sup>569</sup> A famous *angampora* master, who also declared himself a *veda mahaththaya* (see previous section and Section 5.3.1), outlined the differences between the three types: *angam* (*angampora* just with the body, no weapons and spells involved), *ilangam* (*angampora* with weapons), and *mayangam* (*maya angam*, *angampora* that involves the use of spells).<sup>570</sup>

Ravana is (increasingly) considered to be the inventor of *angampora*.<sup>571</sup> Some *angampora* students told me that there was a watershed in the continuation of practicing

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<sup>565</sup> Group conversation at Buddhist site in Colombo that included a Buddhist monk and an author, June 3, 2017.

<sup>566</sup> Interview with *angampora* master, Katuwana, May 14, 2018.

<sup>567</sup> In Sinhala *anga* means body and *pora* means fighting. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Anga,' 9, 'Pora,' 379.

<sup>568</sup> Ankumbura, A. V. M. K. (2019), Angam: A Sinhalese Martial Art in Need of Wider Transmission, *International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region*, <https://www.ichcap.org/news-authors/a-v-muditha-kumari-ankumbura/> (retrieved March 19, 2019).

<sup>569</sup> Interview with Ankumbura, assistant librarian at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, April 25, 2018.

<sup>570</sup> Interview with *angampora* master, May 14, 2018.

<sup>571</sup> Ravana as the inventor of both medicine and *angampora* was for instance mentioned by a volunteer

*angampora* in Sri Lanka when the British took over the country. Before that Sri Lankans believed in Ravana and practiced martial arts, but this changed when the British came. Prior to the final battle against the British, the *angampora* chief of the army conducted a special Ravana *puja*. Nonetheless, they lost the fight, and the British took their Ravana statue and placed it in the British museum.<sup>572</sup> In a recently published newspaper article it is formulated that the British governor after the Uva-Wellessa rebellion from 1818 onwards forbade the teaching of *angampora*. The art was from then on secretly practiced.<sup>573</sup>

*Angampora* is surrounded by stories of power, magic, (ancient) resistance, election, and secrecy. I was told that until recently, the performance and practice of *angampora* was kept hidden for public. Several *angampora* students told me that they had practiced *angampora* from their childhood, but that this was done in secret. A senior student who told me in 2016 that he had been practicing *angampora* for around twenty-five years thus explained:

[...] martial art also before, we don't do presentation, we don't do exhibition in front of people, ok? Because this is only very special and secret martial arts when I was [young I] joined master [...]. People doesn't know that I was doing this martial arts, right? It is a kind of secret.<sup>574</sup>

As he pointed out, this changed under the (first) Rajapaksha government around 2014/2015. At that time, the Ministry of Culture and the Arts brought multiple *angampora* teachers together.<sup>575</sup> This move to promote *angampora* was already mentioned in the progress report of the Ministry of Culture and the Arts in 2012. In the section 'Spreading Angam Shilpa Kalawa (Angam Fight)' it states under the heading 'Objective' that:

[t]he objective of this project is identification of Angam fighters who claim for a history of 2500 years over, preservation of the art of Angam fight and ensuring heritage of the art of Angam for future generation. It is expected to bring together all Angam fighters who are currently practicing this art, under the patronage of the Government.<sup>576</sup>

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who helped in the preparations of the Ravana *perahera* at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. Informal conversation with DO27, volunteer *Medin maha perahera*, Pannipitiya, March 24, 2018.

<sup>572</sup> Group conversation TY. and SA., March 5, 2018.

<sup>573</sup> Joseph, D. (2019, March 10), Angampora: 5,000 Years of Combat Tradition, *Sunday Observer*, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2019/03/12/spectrum/angampora-5000-years-combat-tradition> (retrieved March 19, 2019).

<sup>574</sup> Interview with YR., senior *angampora* student, Colombo, March 31, 2016.

<sup>575</sup> Interview with YR., March 31, 2016.

<sup>576</sup> The document also mentions an *angampora* fight show and pageant organised, respectively, in February and June 2012. In the picture of the fight show, my *angampora* master and his students are performing on stage. The document also mentions as target for 2013 to construct a craft village to preserve and promote *angampora*. Ministry of Culture and the Arts, (2012), *Progress 2012*, 24, [https://www.cultural.gov.lk/web/images/stories/publications/03\\_englishdoc\\_progress\\_2012.pdf](https://www.cultural.gov.lk/web/images/stories/publications/03_englishdoc_progress_2012.pdf) (retrieved March 19, 2019).



**Figure 4.7** (left): Weapons and tools used for *angampora*. Picture taken by author, Maharagama, April 2, 2017.

**Figure 4.8** (right): Cutting of vegetable with swords placed on the stomach of the *angampora* student as part of the *angampora* performance organised at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in 2016. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, March 28, 2016.

Several of the *angampora* teachers were brought together under STIMA: the Sri Lankan Traditional Indigenous Martial Art Association. According to their website, this organisation is approved by the government and registered in the ministry of Cultural Affairs and ministry of Sports.<sup>577</sup> The aim to bring *angampora* teachers together is mainly to promote *angampora* in public and thereby to promote this allegedly ancient fighting technique.<sup>578</sup> During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to watch some public *angampora* performances and to practice *angampora* myself. In the type of *angampora* that I learned, the use of weapons was central to the performances: these included swords, knives, and other tools for self-defence (see Figure 4.7). Also, magic and spectacle were part of the performances of my *angampora* master, such as blindfolded performances with swords (see Figure 4.8).

### Technology: The *dandu monaraya*

When it comes to Ravana's technological skills, one particular object stands out: Ravana's alleged flying machine or *dandu monaraya* (it translates to wooden *dandu* peacock monaraya in Sinhala).<sup>579</sup> Valmiki's *Ramayana* mentions the *pushpaka vimana* as

<sup>577</sup> Sri Lankan Traditional Indigenous Martial art Association (STIMA), *Angam*, <http://www.angampora.com/stima/> (retrieved March 19, 2019). My *angampora* master showed me his official registration as Member of the State Angam Arts Panel under the arts council of Sri Lanka.

<sup>578</sup> I have seen several *angampora* performances in the context of Ravana related activities, mainly the ones led and performed by my *angampora* master. Also, I have watched many of his performances online.

<sup>579</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Dandu,' 230, 'Monara-yantra,' 500.



Ravana's flying chariot. In the process of *Ravanisation*, Ravana's flying machine is connected to the iron melting technology mastered by the *yakshas* (see Section 4.2.3.) As the archaeologist Raj Somadeva told me:

So that technological advance [iron melting technology] so you need to make a furnace that have 1400 Celsius degrees to melt iron. So that is a great technology. So according to the legends that describe the Ravana story. So he had powerful weapons. And also the aircraft called *dandu monara*. So without a metal like iron so you cannot do anything.<sup>580</sup>

Among a selective group of people with an interest in Ravana, there is a rumour that the *dandu monaraya* still flies around. This rumour is related to the star gate technology in which it is maintained that Ravana has the ability to travel through space and time. Darshana Mapa Pathiranage explained that (translation):

He [Ravana] was not dead. Because times does not elapse, he remains the same age. [...]. In the recent past there are some people they had seen [him]. There is a tank [name of tank] close to Anuradapura. Some people have seen an unidentified space craft like *dandu monara* [...]. [This] was one occasion that Ravana was traveling around that area.<sup>581</sup>

Since Ravana allegedly continues to live in another space, and uses the star gate technology, some people claim to have seen Ravana flying around in his *dandu monaraya*. Several people showed me pictures, taken at different localities in the country, of what they thought to be the *dandu monaraya*. When a group of men visited the famous pilgrimage site Sri Pada to perform a Ravana *puja*, for example, they took a picture of what they believed to be the *dandu monaraya* in the sky.<sup>582</sup>

The *dandu monaraya* and Ravana's flying technology are taken to a next level in Sri Lanka's aviation. In the article 'Why Sri Lanka named its first-ever satellite after Ravana,' the Chennai based journalist Sruthisagar Yamunan reported that on 19 June 2019 Sri Lanka named its first satellite that went into orbit after Ravana. The inspiration behind this, he suspected, was Ravana's aerial chariot. He further argued that there is a cultural ambition in this project related to anti-Indian feelings that have increased at the time of and after the civil war. The naming of Sri Lanka's first satellite after Ravana, according to Yamunan, marked the '[...] mythical king's transformation into a political

<sup>580</sup> Interview with Raj Somadeva, May 2, 2016. In the same interview he also mentioned that the Sinhalese have a *ola* leaf book called the *dandumonaraya katava*.

<sup>581</sup> Interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, February 28, 2016. The place in Anuradhapura pointed out to be related to the star gate used by Ravana is called Ranmasu uyana: Amarasinghe, J. (2009), *Ravana and Untold Truth about his Legacy*, Kurunegala: Asliya Printers, 30.

<sup>582</sup> Informal conversation with DO29, volunteer of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 16, 2017. I was also told by an *angampora* student that they went to Sigiriya and took some pictures and they recognised Ravana's aircraft on the photograph. Interview AN1, March 28, 2017.

symbol [...] complete.’<sup>583</sup> In addition to the naming of this satellite after Ravana, the Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka started in 2019 a research project on ‘Ravana and the lost heritage of aviation dominance.’ In 2020, they asked people to come forward with any relevant documents and literature related to Ravana’s aircraft technology.<sup>584</sup>

The *dandu monaraya* has become subject to extensive materialisation. Ravana is often displayed with the *dandu monaraya* in articles and on book covers, and replicas of the *dandu monaraya* are also produced. I was told, for instance, that someone possessed a replica of the *dandu monaraya*, and this was considered to be very special.<sup>585</sup>



**Figure 4.9:** A ‘replica’ of the *dandu monaraya*. This chariot is annually taken around in the Ravana *perahera* organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, March 23, 2018.

A replica of the *dandu monaraya* is put on display in the annual *maha* Ravana *perahera*, a procession organised by the Buddhist temple site the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (see Chapter 6). This wooden chariot is modelled in the shape of a bird (see Figure 4.9), which is how the *dandu monaraya* is often depicted in the Ravana discourse. Since 2020, wooden models of the *dandu monaraya* with gold-coloured peacock-shaped prows (at a scale of 1:120) made by a Colombo-based artist can be ordered for 750 USD.<sup>586</sup>

<sup>583</sup> Yamunan, Why Sri Lanka Named its First-ever Satellite after Ravana.

<sup>584</sup> Pulse (2020, August 8), *The Civil Aviation Authority’s Quest for Ravana* [video], YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ms5yXhLWgBU> (retrieved April 20, 2021).

<sup>585</sup> Informal conversation with Buddhist monk, March 11, 2016.

<sup>586</sup> TENAI Workshop (2020, November 18), *Dandu Monara - Pushpak Vimana* [video], Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=360094511953887> (retrieved April 28, 2021).

Ravana's airplane technology also has a specific function in the imagined landscape, a topic that I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7. I reflect here on the relevance of the *dasis* Ravana concept and the three skills discussed above to the process of *Ravanisation* in post-war Sri Lanka.

### **Reflection: *Dasis* or ten skilled Ravana in post-war Sri Lanka**

The ways in which the *dasis* Ravana concept is employed and interpreted in the process of *Ravanisation* show close similarities to how the concepts Lanka, Hela, and the *yakshas* are used. In representing Ravana as *dasis* Ravana, an existing concept is employed, and this concept is – even more extensively than some of the other ones – interpreted in a new way. As noted above, the idea of Ravana with ten heads or ten necks is common in Hindu traditions. It is also present in other, non-Hindu texts – for instance, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the *Ravana Rajavaliya*, and the colonial record *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*. The symbolic interpretation that is given to the *dasis* concept in the process of *Ravanisation* aims to construct a positive portrayal of Ravana insofar as the ten heads symbolise ten extraordinary skills that he mastered. Although I have only discussed three of the alleged ten skills in any depth here, two aspects of the remythologising of this concept stand out: the ethnic and cultural independence (and even superiority) of the Sinhalese and the continuation of alleged ancient practices in the present. I briefly mention them here and discuss these elements of *Ravanisation* in more detail in the following chapter.

I have argued that the interpretations given to the *yaksha* and Hela concepts in the process of *Ravanisation* reveal the ambition of cultural and ethnic independence of the Sinhalese. The Hela 'tribal' system lays claim to the indigenous ancestry of the Sinhalese and opposes the descentance of the Sinhalese from Vijaya as derived from the *Mahavamsa*. Throughout twentieth-century Sri Lanka, the *Mahavamsa*-inspired version of descentance of the Sinhalese from the Indian prince Vijaya became dominant. The Hela-Ravana representation of the past opposes this story of foreign ancestry of the Sinhalese and proposes indigenous ancestry of the Sinhalese via the *yakshas* and the other 'tribes.' The interpretations and creative etymologies of the *yakshas*, *nagas*, and *rakshas* already pointed in the direction of cultural independence. The aspect of cultural independence is further developed in the interpretation of the ten skills. The Hela-Ravana representation of the past, first of all, aims to claim independence from India. Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana claim that their traditional medicine – Hela, *rasa*, or Ravana *vedakama* – is ancient, indigenous to Sri Lanka, and better than Indian Ayurveda. Moreover, some argue that Ayurvedic books were written by the great Hela King Ravana and that this is an example of the alleged Sinhalese superiority over India. In addition to traditional medicine, indigenous martial arts also relate to cultural independence of the Sinhalese. The extensive public promotion of *angampora*, supported by the (first) Rajapaksha government, is in line with the general apotheosis of an indigenous Sinhalese culture that is central to the post-war interest in Ravana. The promotion of *angampora* is surrounded with stories of magic and power, and the

British are held responsible for the break of continuation of *angampora* from past to present. The post-war governmental support of *angampora* as a cultural product shows similar patterns to the promotion of Kandyan dance and the *Kohomba kankariya* or *yakkamas* (see Box 1.3). In the 1980s and 1990s, the *Kohomba yakkamas* were mainly performed as cultural heritage events by the state.<sup>587</sup> Eva Ambos has argued that Kandyan dance was taken out of its original context (the *Kohomba yakkama*) and presented as 'the' national and Buddhist dance. Employed by the state, Kandyan dance performances are transformed to fit the national post-colonial identity project of the Sinhalese. The government's promotion of *angampora* and *Hela* or *rasa vedakama* is part of a larger post-war identity project of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority that gives full credentials to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country. I discuss this in more detail in Section 4.4.

In addition to cultural resistance of the Sinhalese against India, the three skills of Ravana explored above also indicate a perception of a segment of the majority Sinhalese Buddhists of superiority of the *Hela* over other countries. In Chapter 6, I indicate that some Sinhalese Buddhists also argue that all types of medicines were invented by Ravana and that this discloses a post-war worldview among a segment of Sinhalese Buddhists in which the *Hela* civilisation is framed as the very cradle of civilisation itself. The *dandu monaraya* is a fine example of superiority of the *Hela* over others: the *dandu monaraya* – the apex of Ravana's technology – is a symbol of what the Sri Lankan Civil Aviation Authority refers to as aviation dominance.

The symbolic interpretation of the *dasis* Ravana concept is also relevant because it transforms abstract ideas (from the past) into contemporary practices. *Angampora*, *Hela vedakama*, and to a lesser extent the technological marvels, provide the opportunity to allegedly enter the realm of the glory of Ravana and the *Hela*. Several people from the Ravana discourse are involved in either *angampora* or *Hela vedakama*. Through these practices, Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana materialise and ritualise the ancient marvels of the *Hela*, and by doing that they hope to experience Ravana and his powers in the present. In addition, knowledge of traditional medicine and the practice of *angampora* were claimed by several gurus and masters who proclaim expertise in these areas. Such skills, and also the opportunity to 'catch' the *dandu monaraya*, allow several Sinhalese Buddhists to promote themselves based on expertise that is allegedly inherited by their family or related to a specific region.

#### 4.4 Reflection: Key-Concepts in *Ravanisation*

In this concluding section, I reflect on how the selective use and the interpretations of Lanka, *Hela*, *yaksha*, and *dasis* Ravana in the process of *Ravanisation* relate to several ethno-nationalist tendencies. In Section 3.3.1, I mentioned that the anthropologist Anthony Wallace characterised revitalisation movements as reactive to and critical of

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<sup>587</sup> Reed, *Dance and the Nation*, 174, 180.

existing systems. I further noted with reference to several ethno-symbolist theorists (for instance, Anthony Smith and John Hutchinson) that (ethno-)nationalists employ (pre-) existing cultural resources to build their present-day ideologies on in times of revitalisation. In the case of *Ravanisation*, as I have aimed to show throughout this chapter, concepts and ideas from multiple traditions are taken and re-interpreted for contemporary Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist purposes. My explorations of how the Hela and *yaksha* concepts are re-interpreted in the process of *Ravanisation*, relate to the above mentioned processes that emerge at times of ethno-nationalist resurgence (or revitalisation): as I have indicated throughout this chapter, concepts and fragments of representations of the past from multiple traditions are taken and re-interpreted. Some of these concepts were present among the Sinhalese in twentieth-century Sri Lanka. The post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past, for instance, continues to build on the alternative representation of the past as present in the early-twentieth-century Hela movement. It also selectively employs fragments from the *Mahavamsa*, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, and the *Rajavaliya* to argue that Ravana was the king of the marvellous Lanka. These concepts and ideas are, however, re-interpreted to create a specific representation of the past that exalts Ravana and the Hela. The Hela-Ravana representation of the past in post-war Sri Lanka is explicitly critical of the *Mahavamsa*-derived idea that the Sinhalese originated from Vijaya, which provides the Sinhalese with a story of foreign ancestry. According to the *Mahavamsa*, the *yakshas* were already present in Sri Lanka when Vijaya and the Buddha came to Lanka. In the process of *Ravanisation*, the *yakshas* are re-framed as humans and employed to argue that there was inhabitation in Sri Lanka prior to any foreign invasion. The desire for indigenous Sinhalese ancestry relates to a central characteristic of ethno-nationalist representations of the past: indigenous presence provides credentials for ownership the country. Following ethno-nationalist principles, the Hela 'tribal' system allegedly makes the Sinhalese the rightful owners of the country as their ancestors were in the country prior to any foreign (Indian) invasion. The re-interpretation of concepts discussed in this chapter can be understood as an example of what Kapferer defined as remythologising: the reinvention of myths and legends of the past as a (nationalist) ideology.

In addition to the way in which pre-existing myth-symbol complexes are used and the focus on indigenous ancestry, another key aspect stands out in the re-interpretations of the concepts Lanka, Hela/*yaksha*, and *dasis* Ravana. In Section 3.3.2, I mentioned several theorists (Claire Norton, Tariq Jazeel, Catherine Brun, and Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam) who have argued that antecedence, myths of origin, and golden ages are examples of central elements of ethno-nationalist representations of the past. The post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past is an example of this insofar as it provides a story of indigenous ancestry of the Sinhalese by claiming that there were *yakshas* in Lanka prior to the advent of Vijaya. In addition, it provides the Sinhalese with a representation of a once glorious civilisation, and this element is key to the framing of Lanka, Hela/*yaksha*, and *dasis* Ravana in the process of *Ravanisation*. References to the *Lankavatara Sutra* and *Rajavaliya* are made to argue that the Lanka of Ravana was an extensive and civilised kingdom. The creative etymologies of the differ-

ent tribes indicate their specific skills: conquering the seas, protecting, and working with iron. In addition, making of fabric is mentioned with reference to the *Mahavamsa*, and the symbolic interpretation of *dasis* Ravana also contributes to provide 'evidence' of cultural independence of the Sinhalese: the origin and continued existence of these skills indicate that the Hela were self-sufficient and had an advanced civilisation. In Section 2.3.2, I noted that in the Sri Lankan political context it is often said that the national heritage of a country belongs to the ethnic group who made the country into a habitable civilisation. This ethno-nationalist presumption deeply imbues the post-war apotheosis of Ravana and the Hela.

By exploring the 'tribal' system in this chapter, I have disclosed the central importance of the elements of cultural and ethnic independence of the Hela (i.e., a glorious civilisation and indigenous ancestry) in the Hela-Ravana representation of the past. These elements of ethno-nationalist representations of the past appeal to post-war triumphalist feelings and give fuller credentials to the hegemonic perception among the Sinhalese majority of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country. In addition to these elements of ethno-nationalist representations of the past, I found three other elements that are not exclusively or only indirectly linked to the process of ethno-nationalist reframing of the past. They are worth mentioning here because they help us understand the broad appeal of *Ravanisation*. The first is the selective inclusion of fragments from the *Mahavamsa*. In addition to the explicit criticising of the descendance of the Sinhalese from Vijaya as derived from the *Mahavamsa*, the Hela-Ravana representation of the past also selectively includes some sections from the *Mahavamsa* to argue that there was an indigenous inhabitation in Sri Lanka prior to the coming of Vijaya. The prominence given to the *yaksha*, *naga*, and *deva* 'tribes' in the post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past indicates this close interaction with the *Mahavamsa*. This creative connection of the Hela-Ravana representation of the past to the *Mahavamsa* contributes to a broader appeal of the post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past – compared to, for instance, the Hela movement – because it relates Ravana and the Hela to a timeframe and worldview familiar to Sinhalese Buddhists. Second, the Hela-Ravana representation of the past distances Ravana from the Hindu/*Ramayana* tradition. Alternative chronicles, the Hela movement, and a Mahayana Buddhist text are selectively employed to place Ravana in a Buddhist timeframe and the Sinhalese lineage of kings. The following chapters investigate in detail how Ravana becomes related to the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon and the Sinhalese lineage of kings in different localities in the country. Third, one of the central characteristics of *Ravanisation* is that the Hela-Ravana representation of the past is not limited to the narrative or discursive sphere. In Chapter 1, I summarised five studies on the literary history of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka. In the contributions of Sree Padma and D. Withrana, the post-war interest in Ravana among Sinhalese is framed as a story (of the past). My investigation of the *dasis* Ravana concept illustrates that practice, both ritual and otherwise, is key to *Ravanisation* and its present-day appeal. People engage with Ravana in ritual contexts, but they also participate in alleged ancient practices when they engage in indigenous traditional medicine and martial arts, when they explore aviation technology, and

when they try to catch glimpses of the *dandu monaraya*. In post-war Sri Lanka, Ravana is related in creative ways to multiple facets of Sinhalese Buddhist everyday-life and diverse strata of the Sinhalese Buddhist society. In the following chapter, I explore in more detail how the Hela-Ravana representation of the past becomes related to and materialised in the actual landscape and what the relevance of the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation* might be.





## CHAPTER 5

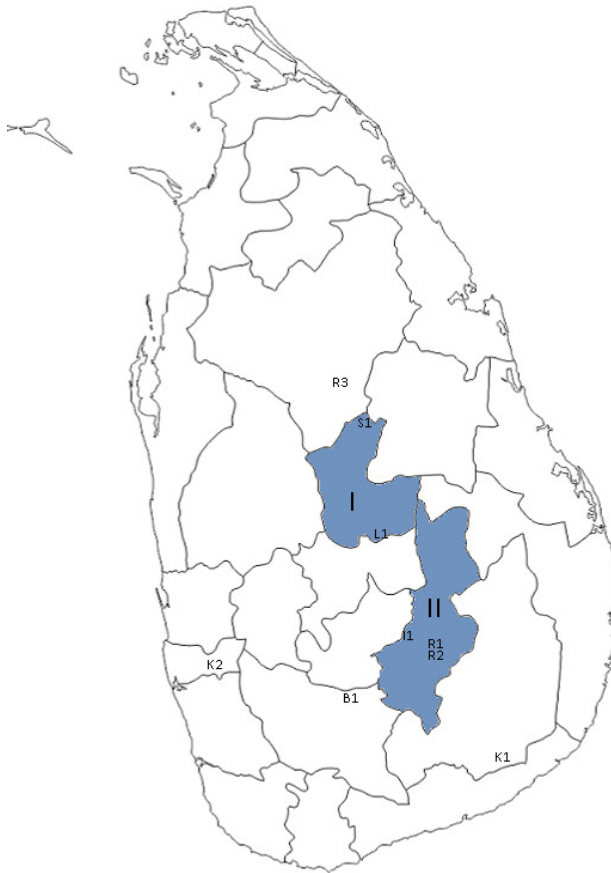
# **An Introduction to the Spatial Dimension of *Ravanisation***

In this chapter, I explore the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation*. In Section 3.4, I introduced two concepts to discuss the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation*: the imagined landscape (Section 3.4.1) and the religious landscape (Section 3.4.2). The concept ‘imagined landscape’ was coined by Diana Eck to denote the geographical features in the landscape that are connected to each other through ancient stories of gods and heroes. The ‘religious landscape,’ defined by Marietta Horster, includes shrines and sanctuaries but also the ritual and cultural practices in the sphere of religion. In their broadest sense, these concepts are co-extensive. Despite this, these two landscapes need to be distinguished in the case of *Ravanisation* because they are not closely connected to each other and because they have different functions for the recent interest in Ravana. While Eck has given prominence to stories that connect the sites to each other, most of the shrines presented in this chapter are constructed on private initiative, are not related to episodes of Ravana’s alleged presence in Sri Lanka, and are not often connected to each other.

I visited most of the sites discussed in this chapter during the explorative phase of my research (mainly in 2015, 2016, and 2017). Out of these sites, I selected two places to conduct in-depth research in 2017 and 2018. I discuss these sites in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. This chapter is based primarily on single visits to the other sites, informal conversations with people who were there at the time of my visits, and supplementary information gleaned from interviews and popular Ravana publications. This chapter mainly aims to explore the relevance of the sites for the post-war emerging phenomenon of *Ravanisation*. The sites disclose (the materialising of) several Ravana representations and an investigation of these sites thus relates to the first part of my research question. In addition to this, I have included this chapter in my thesis to place the sites of my in-depth research in the larger context of the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation*.

My research question centres on the diverse Ravana representations and how they have taken shape on a local level. Though I have structured the subsections of the following chapters around multiple Ravana representations, I begin this chapter with a presentation of what I have noticed about sites at a local level and in interviews. I then make some tentative remarks about the prominent Ravana representations that are related to the sites, which are themselves part of the landscapes. After each subsection I reflect on the relevance of sites for *Ravanisation*. In Section 5.4, I show how the two landscapes relate to diverse Ravana representations and what the relevance of the landscapes is for the ethno-nationalist hegemonic perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country.

Legend of map Figure 5.1			
Name	Category	Name	Category
<b>I Mathale district</b>	District	L1 Lakegala	Mountain
<b>II Badulla district</b>	District	R1 Ravana Cave	Cave
<b>B1 Ballangoda</b>	Area	R2 Ravana Ella (Ravana Falls)	Waterfall
<b>I1 Isthripura caves</b>	Caves located on mountain	R3 Ritigala	Forest reserve, including archaeological Buddhist site
<b>K1 Kataragama</b>	Area	S1 Sigiriya	Rock fortress, archaeological site
<b>K2 Kurugala</b>	Area		



**Figure 5.1:** Map of Sri Lanka with locations of sites and areas that are related to Ravana's alleged kingdom in Sri Lanka. As the imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom is very fluid, this map is only an exploration made by the author. Except for Kurugala (K2) I have visited all these sites myself.

## 5.1 Sri Lanka and Ravana's Imagined and Religious Landscapes

The distinction between the imagined landscape and the religious landscape is one I draw for my own interests and aims. To my knowledge, no overviews or lists of different sites allegedly related to Ravana have been made by Sinhalese Buddhist with an interest in Ravana. What I present is thus a selection of sites based on my fieldwork, and I have grouped them together in subsections about two different landscapes. Some sites seemed at first glance far more important to the recent interest in Ravana than others, but the relevance of sites for a local community should not be underestimated and merits further research.

## 5.2 The Imagined Landscape of Ravana's Ancient Kingdom in Present-day Sri Lanka

Within the Ravana discourse, claims of Ravana's connection to Lanka are not only made by referring to allegedly ancient records (as I have discussed in the previous chapter) but also by alleged archaeological evidence related to physical locations. As the president of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* (see Box 1.1) explained (translation):

The things we use as proofs in history could be historical records like ola leaf books [*puskola poth*], archaeological evidence, and the last is folklore [*jana shruthi*]. There is a lot about Ravana in folklore [...]. It is not that there is not any archaeological evidence; there is. We can show you those.<sup>588</sup>

In this section, I primarily explore the relevance of the second and third 'sources of evidence' for 'Ravana research': 'archaeological' sites and folklore – the latter discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Sometimes these two intermingle. Raj Somadeva, an archaeologist affiliated with the postgraduate institute of archaeology of Kelaniya University (see Box 4.1), has conducted research in the areas of Ballangoda and Kurugala (see Figure 5.1).<sup>589</sup> In Ballangoda, Somadeva excavated caves and found stone implements. As he explained:

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<sup>588</sup> Interview with PR1, March 19, 2017. Jalitha Amarasinghe, the president of another popular Ravana research group explained that he made a YouTube programme (*Hela vanshaya*, see Box 4.1) in which archaeological areas allegedly related to Ravana were shown. Interview with Jalitha Amarasinghe, May 11, 2016. Examples of sites discussed in *Hela vanshaya* are the Ravana Falls and the Ravana cave. *Hela Wanshaya* (2013, September 26), [TV series], Derana TV, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oq6Sl38mgk> (retrieved December 2, 2020). Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Srutu,' 640.

<sup>589</sup> This survey in Kurugala was partly funded by Sumangala Thero, the chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (see Chapter 6). Interview with Raj Somadeva, May 2, 2016.

- Raj: The important thing is there are a lot of stories, legends, folklores you can collect around Bolthumbe Devalaya, around Ballangoda, lot of stories about Ravana and Hanuman and everything. So as an archaeologist what I observed is we found at least hundred, hundred-twenty-five archaeological sites with stone implements and [...] stones. So all the identified sites in the Ballangoda area [are] associated with the places that have Ravana legend[s].
- D: How do you know that? How can you see that it is related to Ravana?
- Raj: No, no, no, we visited all those locations and we interviewed people. We have audio recordings and everything.<sup>590</sup>

According to Somadeva, there is sufficient evidence to prove that people lived in Sri Lanka 6,000 years ago and that these people already used metal. As he told me, he is of opinion that the iron-melting technology strongly relates to Ravana. Interestingly, as the above conversation indicates, he relates his findings to local legends, which fits his idea that he regards it as his responsibility 'to probe the folklore archaeologically.'<sup>591</sup>

The map of sites of Ravana's alleged ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka presented above (see Figure 5.1) is based on multiple interviews and informal conversations that I have conducted with Sinhalese Buddhists who expressed an interest in Ravana. This map is only a suggestion because, to my knowledge, no lists of sites of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka are published.<sup>592</sup> From what I have been able to tell, Sigiriya (Figure 5.1, S1) has become the most important site related to Ravana over the years, and I explore the relevance of this famous world heritage site for *Ravanisation* in more detail in Section 5.2.1. I here first make some tentative remarks on why caves and tunnels are of specific interest to people with an interest in Ravana.

### Tunnels and caves

In 2016, I interviewed a news reporter who was working on a Ravana documentary. He himself was interested in Ravana, as well, and he explained that he and his team were adopting a scientific approach for this documentary. As an example of this allegedly scientific approach, he mentioned (in addition to traditional medicine; see Section 4.3.1) the tunnel system in the country as evidence of Ravana's existence and his civilisation in Lanka (translation):

When doing a research on Ravana, there was a tunnel system in Sri Lanka. One of the main tunnels is Isthripura. I have gone into the Isthripura tunnel for some distance. These tunnels had openings in several places in Sri Lanka. One is in Kankasanturai in Jaffna area. Others are in Welimada, Nuwara-Eliya, Kandy, Ampara. These tunnels emerged from all over Sri Lanka [...] There is this folklore [*janaprawada*] that in history [*ithihasaya*] there was a generation [*paramparava*] in a

<sup>590</sup> Interview with Raj Somadeva, May 2, 2016.

<sup>591</sup> Interview with Raj Somadeva, May 2, 2016.

<sup>592</sup> Except for Kurugala I have visited all these sites myself.

village that built these tunnels in Sri Lanka. We do not have written history about Ravana but in 1400s, when the Dutch were here, there was a prince, Veediya Bandara in Kotte. He has asked the people of this generation to build a tunnel in Kotte. This is mentioned in the *Mahavamsa*. So we could say that there was really a generation that built tunnels.<sup>593</sup>

The Isthripura caves (see Figure 5.1, I1; Figure 5.2; Figure 5.3) were mentioned by the news reporter as one of the entrances to the tunnel system. This tunnel system allegedly connects several places in the country and there are multiple entrances throughout the country – for instance, in the areas of Ampara, Welimada, Kandy, and Nuwara Eliya.<sup>594</sup>



**Figure 5.2** (left): One of the entrances of the Isthripura caves.

**Figure 5.3** (right): The tunnel system behind the entrance of the Isthripura caves. Pictures taken by author, Welimada area, Isthripura caves, April 17, 2016.

A Buddhist monk living in the close vicinity of the Isthripura caves also referred to them as belonging to Ravana.<sup>595</sup> Several people with an interest in Ravana explore the entrance to this tunnel system via Isthripura. They suggest that this cave is one of the entrances to a complex underground tunnel system dating back to Ravana's time.<sup>596</sup> In the process of *Ravanisation*, these caves and tunnels are referred to as evidence for the

<sup>593</sup> Interview with RA., news reporter Sirasa, March 29, 2016.

<sup>594</sup> Interview with R., March 29, 2016.

<sup>595</sup> Informal conversation with Buddhist monk, Welimada area, April 17, 2016.

<sup>596</sup> In the context of *Ramayana* tourism in post-war Sri Lanka, this cave is referred to as one of the places where Sita was kept hidden by Ravana. For this, reference is made to the creative etymology of the name of the cave: woman (*sthri*) and city (*pura*). See on *Ramayana* tourism in Sri Lanka: De Koning & Henry, Ravana and Rama in Sri Lanka. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Stri,' 717.

presence of Ravana in the country and the level of technology mastered by the inhabitants of Sri Lanka in Ravana's time: they were able to create an underground tunnel system that connected several important sites of Ravana's kingdom. These sites thus materialise the abstract ideas of a Hela civilisation and the glorious days of the past that are central to the Hela-Ravana representation of the past (see Section 4.1.2, Section 4.2.3, and Section 4.3.2).

Caves and tunnels are important to Sinhalese Buddhist with an interest in Ravana for another reason. I have mentioned in Section 4.2.1 that the Jesuit de Queiroz noted in *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon* that there was the belief in the seventeenth century that Ravana had been wounded in the war and hid himself in the mountains. This idea continues to be present in Sri Lanka, and indeed it has been revitalised in the post-war period. For example, in 2016 a young woman went in search of Ravana's body. Her expedition was broadcast by News1st on Sirasa TV on March 29, 2016. According to the news story, a group of eight people went into a cave to resurrect King Ravana. In a dream, Ravana showed this young woman the location where he was hidden. The woman explained that she had a vision of Ravana and that he was holding some kind of treasure in his hands. After this dream, the woman went with others who claimed to be 'direct' descendants of the Ravana generation to the Karandagolla caves in the Ravana Ella area (Figure 5.1, R1). People from this area interfered in the expedition and, as a result, the expedition turned out to be unsuccessful.<sup>597</sup> I met several people from all over the country at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya who also explained to me that Ravana's body is preserved in a cave or tunnel somewhere in the mountains of Sri Lanka.<sup>598</sup>

### Reflection: Caves and tunnels in the process of *Ravanisation*

Caves and tunnels are of relevance to the process of *Ravanisation* for a number of reasons. First, as part of the larger imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka, caves and tunnels materialise the representations of Ravana as king of Lanka and of the glorious Hela civilisation, both of which are central to the Hela-Ravana representation of the past (see previous chapter). In the words of Stuart Hall: the sites are

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<sup>597</sup> NewsFirst Sri Lanka (2016, March 29), *News1st prime time News English Tv 01 29th March 2016 clip 10* [video], YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzMakn5lexU&feature=youtu.be> (retrieved July 12, 2016); *Ravana Guhavedi Naruniyata Penvu Venath Margaya* [Women goes in search for King Ravana], (2016, March 30), *Hiru News*, <http://www.hirunews.lk/129687/woman-goes-in-search-for-king-ravana> (retrieved July 12, 2016).

<sup>598</sup> In addition to the expedition of this girl, I once met a man at the Buddhist temple site where I conducted in-depth research (see Chapter 6), who claimed that Ravana's body lied buried in the tunnels of the lands that he owned in Badulla area. Informal conversation with DP5, visitor of Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 8, 2018. Another visitor of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya elaborated upon the idea of Ravana lying in an unconscious state and what is going to happen in the future. He argued that if the story of Ravana was not true people should have found his body. Then he continued to explain that when Ravana wakes up, India is going to be in trouble. Informal conversation with DP4, visitor of Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 4, 2018. In Box 6.4, I discuss the representation of Ravana who is believed to return with reference to the *bodhisatta* ideal.

constitutive of the representation of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka. Sites, including tunnels and caves, make the past present in the here and now. Second, as physical markers in the landscape, sites make possible the multi-sensory experience of the past in the present. In Section 3.2.2, I mentioned with reference to the religious studies scholars Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead that there is a close connection between (religious) emotion and materiality, and that these emotions are bound up with the landscape. I have joined some Sinhalese Buddhist in their expeditions to Ravana related sites in Sri Lanka and have noticed how these sites appealed to their emotions. Third, a segment of the majority Sinhalese Buddhist also relate the tunnels and caves to the awakening of Ravana. That is to say, they related caves and tunnels to the belief that Ravana will allegedly return in the future (an idea present in Sri Lanka throughout the centuries). The tunnel system represents the ethno-nationalist characteristic of the lost days of the glorious past but also its revival. Although most Sinhalese Buddhist with an interest in Ravana did not explicate what will happen when Ravana awakes from his comatose state, some explicitly mentioned that it will do good to Sri Lanka and bad to India. In general, the death of Ravana was often brought forward in the context of India's efforts to claim power, distort history, and deteriorate Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese-Buddhist counternarrative to this – i.e., of Ravana in an unconscious state and the belief that he will return – contains a promise for the future: a regeneration of Sri Lanka (and degeneration of India). The ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka's past and present superiority over other countries is very central to *Ravanisation* and converges in the tunnel system of Ravana's imagined landscape in Sri Lanka.

### 5.2.1 The Ancient Treasure Sigiriya

In this section, I explore some of the perceptions of Sigiriya's origin as a rock fortress and the relevance this world heritage site has for *Ravanisation*. In recent times, the alleged connection of Ravana to Sigiriya has found its way into (international) tourism promotion and has been criticised in several (academic) publications. For this reason, I include this world heritage site in my thesis. Sigiriya was never a site of my in-depth research, however, and what I explore here is mainly why Sigiriya is relevant to (the spatial dimension of) *Ravanisation*. My explorations of Sigiriya as part of the imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka are mainly based on topics discussed in interviews and informal conversations with Sinhalese Buddhists in the Ravana discourse.

I start this section with a brief general introduction of Sigiriya and some accounts of the archaeological research that has been conducted at and around Sigiriya in the twentieth century. I then introduce some of the ideas of Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana about Sigiriya based on my fieldwork. I continue with perceptions of Sigiriya grounded in the *Mahavamsa*, which became dominant in twentieth-century Sri Lanka. I provide two examples of critique against Ravana's alleged connection to Sigiriya given by Sinhalese who hold (academically) influential positions. From there, I reflect on what is at stake in the debates. I conclude with my explorative answers to the question why Sigiriya is of specific relevance to the recent interest in Ravana.

### An introduction to the ancient treasure Sigiriya in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Sri Lanka

Sigiriya is a rock fortress located in the Mathale district (see Figure 5.1 for its location). In 1982 Sigiriya was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.<sup>599</sup> At present, it is part of the cultural triangle that includes the ancient cities Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa.<sup>600</sup>



**Figure 5.4:** Sigiriya rock and the path with the remains of ponds and pools leading to the main stairways. Picture taken by author, Sigiriya, January 26, 2015.

<sup>599</sup> Cooray, J. N. (2012), *The Sigiriya Royal Gardens* [doctoral dissertation, Delft University of Technology], BK Books, 63. <https://books.bk.tudelft.nl/press/catalog/book/isbn.9781480030978>

<sup>600</sup> When I visited Sigiriya in 2015, the main story of my general guides (*Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide to Sri Lanka*) was that Sigiriya was created by king Kashyapa I and that the frescoes could be either *apsaras*, Kashyapa's concubines, or representations of a *bodhisatta* (the idea of the maidens as *bodhisattas* was recently introduced by De Silva; see note 601). At present, the Lonely Planet website offers alternative tours to Sigiriya that frame Sigiriya as crafted by Kuvera and inhabited by his relative Ravana. 5-Day Tour of The Last Battle of Ravana, *Lonely Planet*, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/sri-lanka/the-ancient-cities/sigiriya/tours/5-day-tour-of-the-last-battle-of-ravana/a/pa-tou/v-8021P192/357459> (retrieved December 11, 2020). The development of *Ramayana* tourism in post-war Sri Lanka – a type of special interest tourism that aims to attract Hindus from India to visit several sites in Sri Lanka where events of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana* allegedly took place – might have been conducive to a broader acceptance of this alternative perception of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka's Tourism industry (see on *Ramayana* tourism in Sri Lanka Section 1.1.2 and De Koning, & Henry, Ravana and Rama in Sri Lanka. In a travel report, Annine van der Meer has explored the 'alternative history' of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka. In this report she noted Sigiriya as well as a bronze-coloured statue of the *dandu monaraya* at Galle Face hotel in Colombo: Van der Meer, A. (2019), *Sri Lanka, Parel van de Indische Oceaan* [Sri Lanka, Pearl of the Indian Ocean], [http://www.annine-pansophia.nl/annine\\_van\\_der\\_meer/wp-content/uploads/Sri-Lanka-reisverslag-januari-2019-DEF.pdf](http://www.annine-pansophia.nl/annine_van_der_meer/wp-content/uploads/Sri-Lanka-reisverslag-januari-2019-DEF.pdf) (retrieved December 11, 2020).



According to Nilan Cooray, who wrote a PhD thesis about Sigiriya from a landscape design perspective and presently works as international conservation specialist, Sigiriya's dominant identity is a royal complex, although it was also used for monastic purposes before and after its royal phase (recently Raja de Silva referred to Sigiriya as primarily a monastic complex).<sup>601</sup> I refer to the third chapter of Cooray's thesis for an overview of the recent studies on Sigiriya. I here discuss some general characteristics of Sigiriya and some of the more prominent archaeologists from the nineteenth and early-twentieth century who conducted extensive research at Sigiriya and to whom reference is made by people with an interest in Ravana.

As Cooray has described, Sigiriya rock rises 180 metres above the surrounding plain (see Figure 5.4). The rock is surrounded by ramparts. Two large rectangular precincts are located within this area of fifteen hectares.<sup>602</sup> The main gateway to the rock is marked by ponds, fountains, streams, and bathing pools. This is followed by several terraces that lead to the base of the rock.<sup>603</sup> A pathway leads to what is popular known as the 'mirror wall,' which contains poems and graffiti of visitors of the site from the sixth century to approximately the fourteenth century.<sup>604</sup> Two other outstanding features of Sigiriya are the massive forepaws of the so-called Lion-Staircase-House and a collection of frescoes of the Sigiriya maidens (see Figure 5.5).<sup>605</sup> At the rock's summit are remains of what has become interpreted as a palace. These remains can still be witnessed today.



**Figure 5.5:** Selection of the frescoes of the Sigiriya maidens. Picture taken by author, Sigiriya, January 26, 2015.

<sup>601</sup> Cooray, *The Sigiriya Royal Gardens*, 39. De Silva, R. H. (2002), *Sigiriya and its Significance: A Mahayana-Theravada Buddhist Monastery*, Nawala: Bibliotheque.

<sup>602</sup> Cooray, *The Sigiriya Royal Gardens*, 64.

<sup>603</sup> Cooray, *The Sigiriya Royal Gardens*, 66, 70.

<sup>604</sup> Cooray, *The Sigiriya Royal Gardens*, 74. The graffiti has been discussed in detail by several scholars, but because it is not relevant to *Ravanisation* I do not discuss it here.

<sup>605</sup> Cooray, *The Sigiriya Royal Gardens*, 74, 77.

Sigiriya was rediscovered by the British civil servant Jonathan Forbes who accidentally noticed it in the 1830s. According to his *Eleven Years in Ceylon*, some local people knew of Sigiriya but it was at that time covered with trees (and he elaborated extensively in his Sigiriya account on a leopard that he has seen there). He also included an extensive story – with explicit reference to the *Mahavamsa* – about how this rock fortress was created and inherited in the fifth century by King Kashyapa I (see Section 5.2.1.2).<sup>606</sup>

Archaeological excavations were conducted at Sigiriya from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. Introductions to Sigiriya often mention two commissioners of archaeology in Sri Lanka who were central to the (archaeological) research on Sigiriya: the British civil servant and first commissioner of archaeology in Sri Lanka H. C. P. Bell (commissioner of archaeology from 1890-1912) and the commissioner of archaeology and epigraphist Senarath Paranavitana (commissioner of archaeology from 1940-1956). I explore here several of their remarks on Sigiriya, which were referred to by some Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana.

In the annual *Report on the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon 1905*, Bell described in detail the progress of the archaeological endeavours undertaken under his commission at Sigiriya. Between the descriptions of progress made to restore access to the site and the restorations of stairways, he noted with reference to the *Mahavamsa* that King Kashyapa I made Sigiriya his capital in the fifth century.<sup>607</sup> He also described the frescoes in the gallery, saying that '[...] the Ceylon figures are not in full length, but cut off at the waist by cloud effects – no doubt to economize space.'<sup>608</sup> His interpretation of the frescoes of the Sigiriya maidens was that they are the queens and princesses of the fifth-century King Kashyapa I who are on their way to a Buddhist temple (hence the flowers in their hands). The different skin colours indicate their ranking: from queens and princesses to some lower-ranking maidens.<sup>609</sup>

It is with reference to the same frescoes of the Sigiriya maidens that the commissioner of archaeology and epigraphist Senarath Paranavitana gave another interpretation of the function of Sigiriya in the past. According to the anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere, Paranavitana was the first scholar to focus in detail on the cosmic significance of Sigiriya as heavenly abode.<sup>610</sup> This cosmic city, he claimed, was modelled on the basis of Kuvera's palace.<sup>611</sup> For this, Paranavitana made reference to the *Mahavamsa* in which it is stated that Sigiriya was like *Alakamanda*. *Alaka* is mentioned in the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*

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<sup>606</sup> Forbes, J. (1840), *Eleven Years in Ceylon: Comprising Sketches of the Field Sports and Natural History of that Colony, and an Account of its History and Antiquities* (Vol. 2), London: Richard Bentley, 1-20.

<sup>607</sup> Bell, H. C. P. (1909), *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon: North-Central, Central, and Northern Provinces, Annual Report 1905*, Colombo: H. M. Richards, Government Printer, 7.

<sup>608</sup> Bell, *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, 16, 17.

<sup>609</sup> Bell, *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, 16, 17.

<sup>610</sup> According to Cooray, Paranavitana's idea that Sigiriya was modelled as a heavenly abode was followed by others (for instance, J. S. Duncan and A. Seneviratne). See: Cooray, *The Sigiriya Royal Gardens*, 46-51, 88.

<sup>611</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 149.

as Kuvera's city or abode.<sup>612</sup> Sigiriya was, in his view, the residence of King Kashyapa I as the 'god-king.'<sup>613</sup> The frescoes of the Sigiriya maidens provided further evidence for his idea that Sigiriya was meant to symbolise a heavenly abode because on his interpretation the maidens – whose upper bodies appeared out of the clouds – were *apsaras* or celestial nymphs.<sup>614</sup> I here continue to focus on the representation of Sigiriya as Ravana's fortress in the process of *Ravanisation* and the *Mahavamsa*-related perception of Sigiriya's past.

### 5.2.1.1 Ravana-related Perceptions of Sigiriya

In this section, I explore some of the representations of Sigiriya that were brought forward in the Ravana discourse at the time of my research. I have never conducted extensive research on Sigiriya, but it seems to me that in recent years Sigiriya has become increasingly prominent for the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. Despite the limitations of my research, I present here some representations of Sigiriya as elaborated upon in the Ravana discourse. I start with Ravana's connection to Sigiriya as propagated by one of the main instigators of the Ravana interest among Sinhalese Buddhists: Mirando Obeyesekere (see Box 4.2).

In the 1980s, Mirando Obeyesekere wrote the book *The Cultural Heritage of King Ravana*. In the book, he argued that Sigiriya is the Chitrakuta palace known from the *Ramayana* and that it was the residence of Ravana and his brothers Kuvera and Vibhishana. The fifth-century King Kashyapa I only renovated the palace.<sup>615</sup> As evidence for this claim, he cited Sinhala folk verses that relate the splendour of Sigiriya to Ravana:

Who made the pond on mount Sigiri?  
Who had drawn the paintings on Sigiri Rock?  
Who are the damsels on these beautiful paintings?  
Please reply to these questions.

Reply:  
God Ravana made the pond on Sigiri Rock.  
Visvakarma had drawn the paintings on Sigiri Rock.  
Queen Mandodari and her helpers are the beautiful  
damsels on Sigiri Paintings.<sup>616</sup>

<sup>612</sup> Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'alaka,' 94; *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa: Adi Parva* (Sections I-XI; P. C. Roy, Trans.), (1883), Calcutta: Bharata Press, 258; Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Alaka,' 50.

<sup>613</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 139.

<sup>614</sup> De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 75; Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 141. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Apsara,' 37; Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'apsaras,' 59.

<sup>615</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Cultural Heritage of King Ravana*, 22.

<sup>616</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Cultural Heritage of King Ravana*, 21.

When I discussed the relevance of Sigiriya to Ravana's kingdom with Mirando Obeyesekere in 2016, he mentioned that Sigiriya first belonged to Ravana's half-brother Kuvera:

Sigiriya was his [Ravana's] residence. His palace was Sigiriya. Not only his palace, his father also lived there. His step-elder [sic] brother, King Kuvera also lived there. And King Ravana came to Sigiriya after Kuvera.<sup>617</sup>

In his book *Ravana King of Lanka*, he objected to Paranavitana's position (see previous section) that the famous frescoes of the Sigiriya maidens are of the eighth, ninth, or tenth centuries. According to Mirando Obeyesekere, the *Ramayana* says that Kuvera lived in Sri Lanka thousands of years prior to that and that Kuvera used Sigiriya as one of his palaces.<sup>618</sup> Like Mirando Obeyesekere, several people with an interest in Ravana explicitly referred to Sigiriya as a palace that originally belonged to Kuvera or to Ravana's father, an idea that relates to the story of the fight between Ravana and Kuvera over the city of Lanka as recounted in the *Uttarakanda* of the *Ramayana*. Only later did it become the palace of Ravana.<sup>619</sup> Others explicitly equated Sigiriya with Lankapura (city of Lanka; see Section 4.1.2).<sup>620</sup>

In the primetime *Ravana* series broadcast on Derana TV from 2018 onwards, the first episode starts with an extensive elaboration of who inherited Sigiriya and how this place was central to the conflict between the (half) brothers Ravana (representing the Hela) and Kuvera (representing the Indians). It tells that there lived three main tribes (*yakkha*, *naga*, and *deva*) in the Hela world 4500 years ago and that Ravana's grandfather Sumali was the leader of the *yakkhas*. He inherited the *giri* (rock) fortress (when this is told, Sigiriya is shown on the screen). Sumali was defeated by the *suras* of India with the help of the *deva* clan of Kuvera. Therefore, Sigiriya became known as King Kuvera's sky-palace.<sup>621</sup> A *rishi* (seer, sage)<sup>622</sup> prophesies that the Hela land will be rescued from Kuvera's cruel reign by the arising of the wheel-turning King Ravana.<sup>623</sup> This primetime series has further contributed to the interest in Sigiriya as Ravana's/Kuvera's palace among Sinhalese Buddhists.

According to the folk verses published by Mirando Obeyesekere in the 1980s, the ruins on top of Sigiriya and the frescoes of the maidens serve as 'evidence' that Sigiriya was

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<sup>617</sup> Interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, March 3, 2016.

<sup>618</sup> Obeyesekere, *Ravana King of Lanka*, 2, 3.

<sup>619</sup> For instance: informal conversation with DO15, volunteer Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, April 21, 2016; interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, February 28, 2016.

<sup>620</sup> The equation of Sigiriya with Lankapura was made in a group conversation that included a man who was doing research in his spare time on the exact location of the ancient Lankapura in Sri Lanka: group conversation TY. and SA. March 5, 2018.

<sup>621</sup> Clough translates the concept *sura* as deity or god. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Sura,' 698.

<sup>622</sup> Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'rishi,' 226; Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Rishi,' 83.

<sup>623</sup> TVDerana (2018, November 27), *Ravana* Episode 1 [video], YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty4Bp5WUhdU> (retrieved December 15, 2020).

the creation of Ravana and his family members. The ruins on top of Sigiriya, which are considered the remains of a palace, appeal to the imagination of Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana. As one author mentioned:

Sigiriya is his [Ravana's] father's place also. Where his father lived, his palace is Sigiriya. King Kasyapa ruled in Sigiriya for twelve years. Within twelve years' time nobody can develop such a huge [palace]. It is initiated by Ravana, not only initiated, they developed it, they constructed it [...] actually it is our eight wonder.<sup>624</sup>

The palace on top of this massive rock is considered a world wonder constructed in Ravana's time.<sup>625</sup> The splendour of the ancient Sigiriya rock fortress is in the Ravana discourse equated with that of the earliest civilisations, such as the Inca and Maya civilisations.<sup>626</sup> This triad is also part of the murals of the Ravana shrine at the Buddhist site the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (see Figure 5.6; on the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya see Chapter 6).

A specific technological marvel related to Sigiriya indicates the greatness of the ancient Hela civilisation: an elevator. As the president of one of the popular research groups on Ravana explained, some workmen digging in the surroundings of Sigiriya told Gunasekara about their findings related to this elevator, and one of them suddenly went blind.<sup>627</sup> The president of this Ravana research group also initiated a 3D animated movie of Sigiriya that aims to show how developed Sigiriya was in ancient times (see Figure 5.7).<sup>628</sup> An *angampora* student explained to me that there was an elevator made out of gold in Sigiriya and that a 'white person' tried to smuggle it back to his country.<sup>629</sup> The story of Sigiriya's elevator is recounted by Mirando Obeyesekere as well:

Stone structures and stands both on the top and bottom of this 'route-hole' [at Sigiriya] are believed to be places on which the wooden lift had been fixed. King

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<sup>624</sup> Group conversation at Buddhist site in Colombo that included a Buddhist monk and an author, June 3, 2017. Several websites (not limited to Ravana related websites), mention that 'locals' refer to Sigiriya as the eighth wonder of the world: Sigiriya Rock, The Travel Specialist, <https://www.thetravelspecialists.net.au/sigiriya-rock/> (retrieved December 14, 2020); or even that UNESCO declared Sigiriya the eighth wonder of the world: The Eighth Wonder Of The World, *Culture Trip*, <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/sri-lanka/articles/the-eighth-wonder-of-the-world/> (retrieved December 14, 2020).

<sup>625</sup> Suriya Gunasekara explained that according to an inscription (found in Iraq) the hanging garden of the Babylonians were modelled on a hanging garden located on a lion rock in the lion's people country – which he considered to be Sigiriya. Interview with Suriya Gunasekara, April 5, 2017.

<sup>626</sup> This was also mentioned, for instance, by an *angampora* student. Interview with AN1, March 28, 2017. In addition to the Inca and Maya civilisations, the Babylonian civilisation was also sometimes mentioned.

<sup>627</sup> Interview with Sri Mal, April 23, 2017. In this interview I was told that the story of Sigiriya's elevator was derived from Suriya Gunasekara's work.

<sup>628</sup> Interview with Sri Mal, April 23, 2017.

<sup>629</sup> Interview with AN1, *angampora* student, Maharagama, March 28, 2017.

Rawana's period was famous for woodcraft and they used a 'lift' too, for day-to-day work in the fort.<sup>630</sup>



**Figure 5.6:** The caption of Sigiriya rock in this mural in the Ravana *mandiraya* at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya Buddhist temple site in Pannipitiya (see Chapter 6) says 'Ravana civilisation' (Ravana *shishtacharaya*). The two other stone structures on the mural represent the Maya and the Inca civilisations. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, June 6, 2017.



**Figure 5.7:** Animated Sigiriya movie produced by the president of a popular Ravana research group. Sigiriya includes a parking area for the *dandu monaraya* (Ravana's airplane). Maduwantha, S. (2015, November 18). The Kingdom of Ravana [video]. Youtube, <https://youtu.be/D3SD7Ue4Wl0> (retrieved February 26, 2019).

<sup>630</sup> Obeyesekere, M. (ca. 2009), Historical Evidences, in N. C. K. Kiriella (Ed.), *Ramayana and Historical Ravana*, n.p.: Cybergate Services, 72-76, 74-75.



Although I have not discussed the frescoes of the Sigiriya maidens in detail, one of the maidens of the frescoes mentioned in the folk verses in Mirando Obeyesekere's publication is identified as Ravana's (main) Queen Mandodari. Nagoda Ariyaratne, the author of the book *Sri Lanka Ravana Rajadaniya saha Sigiri Puranaya* (see Box 4.1), has argued that Sigiriya fort was created at the time of the *yaksha* era and that one of the maidens on the frescoes was Mandodari and another one Ravana's sister Shurpanaka.<sup>631</sup> Also, one of the murals in the Ravana shrine at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Pannipitiya depicts a king and his wives belonging to the four different 'tribes.' The bodies of the four wives emerge from the waters and, like the frescoes of the Sigiriya maidens, we only see their upper bodies. The wives on the mural show close similarities with the frescoes of the Sigiriya maidens in style (see Figure 5.8). They are depicted with large breasts, one of them caresses her own breast, and the others keep flowers and plates in their hands. I now discuss the *Mahavamsa*-related perception of Sigiriya's past in more detail with a specific focus on two publications in which the Ravana-related perceptions of Sigiriya are contested.



**Figure 5.8:** Mural with subscript at the inner wall of the Ravana *mandiraya* at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Pannipitiya (see Chapter 6). This mural depicts a king and his wives belonging to the four different 'tribes.' Part of the subscript says: *yaksha, raksha, naga, deva siv helage gotra*. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, June 6, 2017.

### 5.2.1.2 The *Mahavamsa*-related perception of Sigiriya's past

In Chapter 2, I referred to several scholars who have argued that the *Mahavamsa* has become the most famous Sinhalese Buddhist chronicle in twentieth-century Sri Lanka and

<sup>631</sup> Seneviratne, A. (2014), *Sri Lanka Ravana Rajadaniya saha Sigiri Puranaya* [Sri Lanka Ravana Kingdom and Sigiri Legend], Hettigama: Samanthi Publications, 284.

that it contains a mythistorical account of part of the history of Sri Lanka. The earliest sections of the *Mahavamsa* were written in the sixth century by the Buddhist monk Mahanama and since then it has been updated several times (see also Section 2.3.1.1). One of those updates contains a mythistory about the origin of Sigiriya as rock fortress. This narrative can be found in Chapter 38 and Chapter 39 of this twelfth-century sequel to the *Mahavamsa*.<sup>632</sup> I briefly summarise it here:

Dathusena, the father of Kashyapa I, underwent at a young age the ceremony of world-renunciation. While meditating, someone threw dung at his head, but he remained undisturbed. His extraordinary behaviour was noticed by his uncle who protected him. Dathusena fought against several kings and won the throne. During his kingship he had multiple *viharayas* built as well as tanks and reservoirs. Dathusena had two sons, Kashyapa I and Moggalana, and one daughter. He gave his daughter in marriage to his sister's son, but the latter mistreated the daughter. Out of wrath, King Dathusena burned his sister naked. The nephew caused Kashyapa I to hate his father Dathusena and imprisoned Dathusena. Kashyapa I, upon asking his deposed father about his wealth, was taken to the Kalaveva water reservoir. When Dathusena explained that this was his whole wealth, Kashyapa I was angered and disappointed and let his father be killed. It is explained that King Dathusena deserved to die in this unfortunate way because – when he was constructing the Kalaveva reservoir – he disturbed a monk who was meditating there. Kashyapa I also wanted to kill his brother, but his brother fled to India. Kashyapa I settled himself at Sigiriya. The *Culavamsa* mentions that he cleared the walls and that he constructed a lion-staircase. The translation of the *Culavamsa* then says: '[t]hen he built there a fine palace, worthy to behold, like another Ālakmandā and dwelt there like (the god) Kuvera.'<sup>633</sup> It goes on to describe several of the good deeds of King Kashyapa I. After eighteen years of reign, Kashyapa I is attacked by his brother. They fight in a battle and King Kashyapa I notices a swamp in front of his elephant. He then chooses another path, which makes his troops think that their king had fled. They leave King Kashyapa I and, when he notices the misunderstanding of his troops, the king commits suicide.<sup>634</sup>

That the fifth-century King Kashyapa I developed Sigiriya during his eighteen years of reign in Sri Lanka eventually became the dominant perception of Sigiriya's past. However, as I have mentioned, the function of Sigiriya to his kingdom remains a topic of debate. A recent academic investigation about Sigiriya and the connection of King Kashyapa I to Sigiriya – based on fieldwork conducted in 1987 – was published in 2018 by the renowned Sri Lankan anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere. His account on 'Sigiriya Narratives' includes several remarks that are of relevance to my research and I briefly summarise and criticise some of his remarks.

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<sup>632</sup> Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 4; Some refer to the extension of the *Mahavamsa* as the *Culavamsa*. Grant, *Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*, 46.

<sup>633</sup> *Culavamsa: Being the More Recent Part of the Mahāvamsa* (W. L. Geiger and C. M. Rickmers, Trans.), (1929), London: Pali Text Society, 42-43.

<sup>634</sup> Chapter 38 and 39 of the *Culavamsa*. In: *Culavamsa* (Geiger & Rickmers, Trans.), 27-50.



At the beginning of the chapter 'Sigiriya Narratives: Tellers of Stories, Writers of Histories,' Obeyesekere declared his intent to question conventional notions of history, story-telling, and myths of King Dhatusena, King Kashyapa I, and Sigiriya by discussing stories that he collected in 1987 from villagers in and around Sigiriya.<sup>635</sup> For him, these stories came 'from a tradition of myth that has circulated in this isolated forest region for a long historical time.'<sup>636</sup> In other words, he argued that it is very likely that the stories told by his informants unveil an ancient tradition of storytelling predating the tenth century. And for that reason, he employed these stories to make a general point of 'the antiquity of the popular traditions.'<sup>637</sup>

One of the main stories he discusses tells of the unfortunate death of King Dathusena at the Kalaveva tank by looking at the recurring theme of the throwing of dung or earth at meditating monks. There is, according to Obeyesekere, a 'hidden discourse' about earth and killing, and he uncovered details about it in the oral tradition of villagers living in the surroundings of Sigiriya. With reference to several village stories, he explained that at the time King Dathusena built the Kalaveva tank, he buried a monk who was meditating there because projects involving earth required human sacrifice to Bhairava (the god of the underworld). The killing of King Dathusena at the Kalaveva tank by his own son was based on his karmic misdeed of once sacrificing a monk for his project.

A second effort of Obeyesekere to 'rescue the *Mahavamsa* story'<sup>638</sup> – or here specifically King Kashyapa I – is his argument that King Kashyapa I ruled longer than eighteen years (the number of years mentioned in the *Mahavamsa*). That King Kashyapa I developed Sigiriya over a period eighteen years is, according to him, impossible. Instead, he argued that the number eighteen is symbolic, citing several examples from Buddhist traditions as evidence. A Chinese reference to the embassy to China in 527 CE, for example, mentions that King Kashyapa I was still alive at that time. And on that basis, Obeyesekere argued that King Kashyapa I ruled longer than eighteen years and that '[...] he also could have constructed Sigiriya during his lifetime, and we have to be large-minded enough to grant Kashyapa I the magnificence of his creation.'<sup>639</sup>

Obeyesekere went on to criticise the idea that Kashyapa's brother was a *yaksha*, which was introduced by the 'myth-provocateur' Paranavitana. Paranavitana's ideas are, according to Obeyesekere, related to the idea '[...] that Sigiriya itself was the origin of a great civilisation headed by one of our five-headed ancestors, Ravana (Ravana). And this must surely remind us that history writers are also tellers of stories and perhaps there is more history to our village story tellers than there is among our history tellers.'<sup>640</sup> Interestingly, Obeyesekere further mentioned that at the time of his fieldwork (1987), popular

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<sup>635</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 109.

<sup>636</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 117.

<sup>637</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 125.

<sup>638</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 136.

<sup>639</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 138.

<sup>640</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 132. During my fieldwork, Ravana was never referred to as 'five-headed.' Some Sinhalese Buddhists equated Ravana with Kataragama, a deity who is in the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon depicted with six heads (see note 548). In some temple sculptures in India, Ravana is

stories 'of Sigiriya as the home of our five-headed ancestor Ravana' circulated.<sup>641</sup> He then set out to correct 'outright non-sense' of Mirando Obeyesekere as presented in the popular book *Ravana King of Lanka* and in the newspaper *Mawubima*. For Gananath Obeyesekere, Mirando Obeyesekere's ideas about Ravana, dubbed *Ravanaism*, have regrettably taken possession of a section of an educated but ignorant middle-class audience.<sup>642</sup>

Although Gananath Obeyesekere laid out at the very start of the chapter his aim to question conventional notions of history and story, it seems to me that his main agenda was to 'rescue' the *Mahavamsa*-related version of Sigiriya's past. He employed fieldwork stories to place King Kashyapa I in a more favourable light and to provide the *Mahavamsian* account (of Sigiriya) with more accuracy and consistency. He did not, however, give equal value to stories of his informants. He took the stories about King Kashyapa I collected in the remote areas as authentic and unspoiled, but he deemed the stories of Sigiriya as home to the 'five-headed' Ravana as 'popular.' His elaborate defence of the King Kashyapa I narrative of Sigiriya's origin as a rock fortress, and his fierce response to Mirando Obeyesekere, indicates to me that Obeyesekere was (perhaps is) not open to the idea that there might have been a multiplicity of stories projected on Sigiriya in past and present, including an alternative representation of Sigiriya as belonging to Ravana or one of his relatives (Kuvera).

Some scholars affiliated with the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka (RASSL) have also openly criticised the recent interest in Ravana. Susantha Goonatilaka, the director of the RASSL, organised a seminar in 2010 about the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka.<sup>643</sup> He organised this seminar because some inscriptions in Sri Lanka were changed with paint to indicate that Ravana was in Sri Lanka, and he noticed an interest among the Sri Lankan Tourist Authorities to promote *Ramayana* tourism in Sri Lanka.<sup>644</sup> In 2014, Malini Dias, vice-president of the RASSL, wrote the article 'Distortion of Archaeological Evidence on the Rāmāyaṇa' in which she mentioned that several of the inscriptions were changed or misinterpreted to argue that Ravana was in Sri Lanka. She mainly criticised Kiriella, the chairman of the *Ramayana* Trail Executive Committee, who was invited to the seminar

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displayed with five heads, but this is exceptional, and it is sometimes explained that the other five heads are assumed to be on the back side of the three-dimensional sculptures. For an example of a temple sculpture in which Ravana is displayed with five heads, see: Williams, J. (1996), *The Two-Headed Dear: Illustrations of the Rāmāyaṇa in Orissa*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 73. I assume that Gananath Obeyesekere's reference to Ravana as 'five-headed' was a mistake.

<sup>641</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 144.

<sup>642</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 145. In 2017, I visited Gananath Obeyesekere to discuss my research findings about Ravana with him. I am not sure if he invented this neologism before or after my visit.

<sup>643</sup> For more on the seminar initiated by the director of the RASSL Susantha Goonatilake, see: Wickramasinghe, *Producing the Present: History as Heritage in Post-war Patriotic Sri Lanka*, 17. Jonathan Spencer has also referred to the same seminar organised in 2010: Spencer, *Anthropology, Politics, and Place in Sri Lanka*, 9-10. For more on this seminar as well as the paper written by S. Goonatilake himself, see: Goonatilake, S. (2014), Introduction to the Issue on the Rāmāyaṇa, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka*, 59(2), 1-21.

<sup>644</sup> Goonatilake, Introduction to the Issue on the Rāmāyaṇa, 1.

but did not show up. As Chairman of the *Ramayana* Trail Executive Committee, Kiriella was tasked with adducing empirical evidence in support of the historical claims of promoters of *Ramayana* tourism. Malini Dias argued that Kiriella has interpreted the inscriptions incorrectly. Though she did not reference any (distorted) inscription for Sigiriya, she argued that the idea of Sigiriya as Chitrakota palace of Kuvera, as propagated by Kiriella, is based on a misunderstanding of the *Mahavamsa*. As mentioned earlier, the *Mahavamsa* equates Sigiriya with the city of the god Kuvera, and Kiriella has argued with reference to the *Mahavamsa* that Sigiriya is the actual city of the god Kuvera. Dias has further argued that it is historically true that King Kashyapa I from the *Mahavamsa* was the architect of Sigiriya.<sup>645</sup> I continue here with a reflection of why Sigiriya might be of special relevance to *Ravanisation*.

### Reflection 5.2.1: Explorations of the relevance of Sigiriya to *Ravanisation*

While I discuss the general relevance of several sites in Sri Lanka (including Sigiriya) for *Ravanisation* at the end of this chapter, I present here my explorative answers to the question why Sigiriya might be of specific relevance to *Ravanisation* – primarily based on what I have noticed in the critiques offered by Gananath Obeyesekere and Malini Dias.

Obeyesekere and Dias have strongly opposed the Hela-Ravana representation of Sri Lanka's past in the public (academic) sphere. That their heated debates revolve around Sigiriya, I contend, relates to the broader relevance of the imagined landscape. Eck has shown that the imagined landscape is far from imaginary: '[i]t is lived landscape that may focus on a particular temple, hillock, or shrine but sets it in a wider frame. Landscape is relational, and it evokes emotion and attachment.'<sup>646</sup> In the process of *Ravanisation*, Sigiriya is framed as a palace that is part of the imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka. The site is charged with emotions because it is now envisioned not just as an outstanding rock-formation but as a reminder of the glorious days of the Hela. For Obeyesekere and Dias, Sigiriya is – as we read in their harsh critique – also charged with emotion. Their strong stance against the Hela-Ravana representation of Sigiriya illustrates what is at stake in the Sigiriya debate: while 'popular stories' about Ravana circulating among Sinhalese Buddhists are tolerated, they are declared 'non-sense' and opposed in harsh words when the *Mahavamsa* is challenged. Both authors have argued that King Kashyapa I built Sigiriya and that the Ravana projections on Sigiriya are distortions. For them, the world heritage site of Sigiriya is a symbol of the cherished *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of the recent past that became broadly accepted in the twentieth century – also among academics – as normative for the Sri Lankan history. That the *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of the past is important to them becomes explicit in the lines of argumentation: the entire contribution of Gananath Obeyesekere is written to 'rescue' the 'incomplete' *Mahavamsa*-based perception of Sigiriya as the palace of King Kashyapa I. Dias 'disproves' the Hela-Ravana representation of the past in her article by

<sup>645</sup> Dias, M. (2014), Distortion of Archaeological Evidence on the Rāmāyaṇa, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka*, 59(2), 43-54, 52.

<sup>646</sup> Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*, 11.

explaining the misinterpretations of inscriptions. When it comes to Sigiriya she simply suggests that people have misread the *Mahavamsa* – thus indirectly claiming that her reading of the chronicle is normative for the perception of Sigiriya’s past.

My explorations of Sigiriya illustrate that multiple (ethno-nationalist) perceptions of the origin of Sigiriya as rock fortress have co-existed and competed in past and present. Based on my explorative research, I contend that Sigiriya is of specific relevance to the imagined landscape of *Ravanisation* because this national treasure was throughout the twentieth century charged with a *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of the past. The inclusion of this ancient treasure in the imagined landscape of Ravana’s ancient kingdom challenges the *Mahavamsa*-inspired view of Sigiriya’s past that has been broadly accepted by many academics within and beyond the borders of Sri Lanka. As long as the Hela-Ravana representation of the past remains in the periphery, it is most probably not considered an actual threat. But this changes when a prominent UNESCO world heritage site is confiscated by people who promote an alternative representation of the past. As the critiques of Obeyesekere and Dias indicate, the inclusion of Sigiriya in the imagined landscape of Ravana’s ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka is considered an ‘assault’ on the *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of Sri Lanka’s recent past. That such critiques revolve around a physical site indicates that when abstract ideas are materialised – or in this case bounded up to the landscape – they are extensively charged with emotions.

### 5.3 The Religious Landscape of Ravana in Sri Lanka

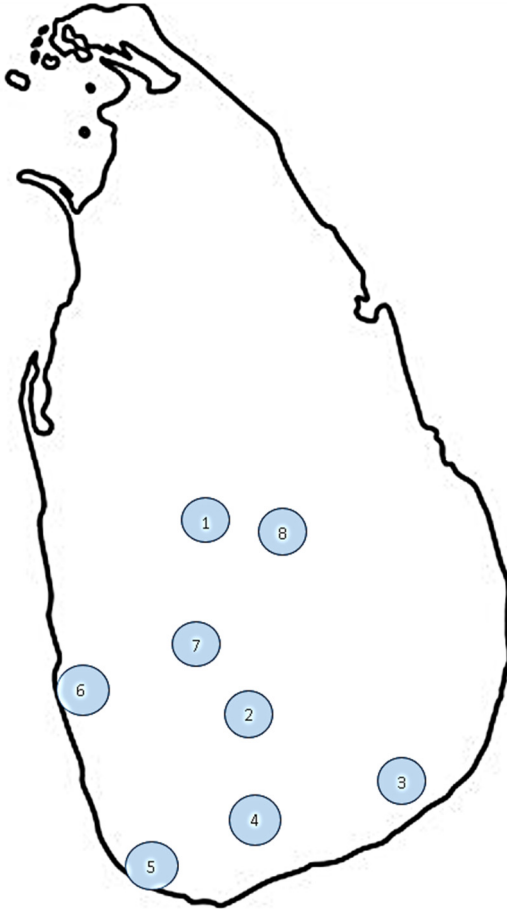
In this section, I explore the religious landscape of Ravana in Sri Lanka. My particular focus is on public Ravana shrines and statues that are constructed at Buddhist sites or places owned by Sinhalese Buddhists, thus mainly on the materialising and not the ritual use of the statues and shrines. The aim of this section is to explore why and how the materialising of Ravana in shrines and statues might be of relevance to *Ravanisation*. In addition, this section indicates that the shrines discussed in the following chapters are not exceptions: multiple Ravana shrines and statues are erected throughout Sri Lanka.

This section is even more explorative than the previous sections as only a selective group of people (mostly those people living in the surroundings of the sites) knew about the Ravana shrines or statues. It was thus not possible to discuss the specific sites in the broader context of my research in interviews and informal conversations, nor was I able to look for details about these shrines in popular Ravana books or even on the internet. For a detailed analysis of the relevance of two Ravana shrines and statues for specific localities and local communities, I refer to Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of this thesis.

#### 5.3.1 Ravana Shrines and Statues

The map of Figure 5.9 provides an overview of the Sinhalese Buddhist ‘Ravana shrines’ in Sri Lanka that existed at the time of my research. I have visited these sites myself to gather some information about the shrines and statues, as there were to my knowledge

no publications about most of these 'Ravana shrines' (or these publications had a limited impact, as I could not find them) when I conducted research in Sri Lanka. I present here a brief overview of six of the eight 'Ravana shrines.' The other two shrines are discussed in the following chapters.



**Figure 5.9:** Simplified map of locations of Sinhalese Buddhist Ravana-shrines in Sri Lanka.

- 1 Rambodagalla
- 2 Bolthumbe
- 3 Kataragama
- 4 Katuwana
- 5 Rumassala
- 6 Pannipitiya
- 7 Dolosbage
- 8 Lakegala

### **Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya**

A small Ravana shrine is located on top of a flat rock that is part of the Buddhist temple site Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya. The Buddhist site is famous for the construction of a massive Buddha statue out of a rock of 67.5 feet in height (see Figure 2.3). According to the chief incumbent of the Buddhist site, the construction of this Buddha

statue was started in 2002 after the blasting of the ancient sand-stone statues in Afghanistan. In 2009, the statue was officially inaugurated.<sup>647</sup>



**Figure 5.10** (left): Statue of ten headed Ravana at Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya.

**Figure 5.11** (right): 'Ravana-shrine' at Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya. Pictures taken by author, Rambodagalla, March 2, 2016.

The middle part of the official name of the temple site allows the site to be related to Ravana. The meaning of monaragala is 'peacock rock,' and Mirando Obeyesekere has argued (in a newspaper article written by S. K. Bandara) that this rock was used as a stopover place for Ravana's *dandu monaraya*.<sup>648</sup>

The chief incumbent explained that he had no particular interest in Ravana. The Ravana shrine at his site was constructed by a group of 'outsiders.' Those people had conducted some research at the place prior to the construction of the shrine.<sup>649</sup> According to the monk, the shrine was recently constructed around 2015, and Jalitha Amarasinghe

<sup>647</sup> Fieldwork visit Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya and interview with chief incumbent of the Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya, Rambodagalla, March 2, 2016.

<sup>648</sup> Bandara, S. K. (2017, May 28), *Ravanage dandumonaraya guvan yana vargayak* [Ravana's *dandu monaraya* is a type of aircraft], *Lankadipa*, 7.

I was told by Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, lecturer in mass communication at Kelaniya University, that the rock at Rambodagalla Viharaya appears like an airfield on which a spacecraft could land. Interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, February 28, 2016.

<sup>649</sup> Interview with chief incumbent of the Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya, March 2, 2016.

(see Box 4.1), the president of a popular Ravana research group from the surroundings (Kurunegala), is the initiator of it.<sup>650</sup>

The small shrine contains a bronze-coloured statue of the ten-headed Ravana of between 40 and 60 centimetres in height (see Figure 5.10). It is placed in a glass box, and the structure makes it complicated to conduct extensive rituals because the statue cannot easily be bathed or dressed. No regular rituals seem to be conducted to Ravana at the site, although there is room for visitors to offer some flowers and oil lamps (see Figure 5.11).

The statue of Ravana with ten heads is rather exceptional compared to the other Ravana shrines constructed at Buddhist sites. An indirect explanation of the depiction of Ravana with ten heads was given by Jalitha Amarasinghe:

We call Ravana's real name [...] *yagu korana manthaka dasa sirsapati lankeshvara Ravana*. Not talking only one word for him. *Dasis sirsapati* mean[s] not ten heads, right. He [is] controlling ten dimensions, [for instance] travelling flying machine.<sup>651</sup>

The sign of the shrine includes parts of this extensive name: *yagu korana manthaka sri Ravana vimanaya* which combines Sanskrit-derived concepts and most probably *yaksha* language (as elaborated upon by Manawe Wimalaratana *Thero*; see Section 1.3).<sup>652</sup> Also, on the stone structure we find several carvings of symbols and depictions of Ravana that are prominent in the process of *Ravanisation* – for instance, a *svastika*<sup>653</sup> and the depiction of a standing one-headed Ravana keeping a sword and a book, surrounded by stars (very similar to the design of the copperplates of Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.4).

### **Bolthumbe**<sup>654</sup>

Bolthumbe is located in Ballangoda area, the area where Raj Somadeva, the famous archaeologist in the Ravana discourse (see Box 4.1), has conducted some of his research. Bolthumbe is located relatively close to the famous pilgrimage site Sri Pada. The deity

<sup>650</sup> Interview with chief incumbent of the Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya, March 2, 2016; Interview with Jalitha Amarasinghe, May 11, 2016.

<sup>651</sup> Interview with Jalitha Amarasinghe, May 11, 2016.

<sup>652</sup> In the article written by Darshana Mapa Pathirana it is mentioned with reference to the *Vargapurnikava* of Manawe Wimalaratana *Thero* that '[i]n the *Varaigapaūraṇaikaā* leaf book, King *Ravana* is introduced as '*Yagu Kaurana Mantaka Dasha Shirshapathi Sri Ravana*.' The meaning of that according to ancient *Yakkha* language, is 'One who completed all the requisites.' In: Pathirana, *Folklore Study*, 3.

<sup>653</sup> One of the interpretations of the connection of the *svastika* with Ravana is that the four arms symbolise the four tribes. Another explanation is that the four arms symbolise the four forces of energy that *rishis* focused on in ancient times. Informal conversation with PR1, March 21, 2017. The *svastika* was used as a symbol to commemorate Ravana: interview with Manawe Wimalaratana *Thero*, April 25, 2017. It seems to me that Jalitha Amarasinghe, the man who initiated the shrine, was inspired by the ideas of Manawe Wimalaratana *Thero*. On the *svastika* see also Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'Svastika,' 1283.

<sup>654</sup> The fieldwork research at Bolthumbe was conducted together with Krishantha Fedricks. He published about this site in the article Sanmugeswaran, Fedricks, & Henry, *Reclaiming Ravana in Sri Lanka*.

Saman is considered the guardian of Sri Pada.<sup>655</sup> At Bolthumbe there is an extensive Buddhist site located on a mountain. The site is referred to as the Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya, named after its main attraction: a large Saman *devalaya*. Next to the Saman *devalaya* is a small Paththini shrine. A Ravana shrine is located in the backyard of the site. The building is approximately 5 square metres and is locked with a door (see Figure 5.12). The Ravana statue inside the building is made of grey-stone and has multiple heads. It is covered with a cloth.<sup>656</sup> The exterior wall contains a copperplate of the one-headed Ravana keeping sword and scripture (see Figure 4.2).



**Figure 5.12:** Ravana shrine at the backyard of the Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya. Picture taken by author, Bolthumbe, May 6, 2016.

The Ravana shrine at this Buddhist site seems a recent construction, although it is not indicated on the shrine when it was constructed and by whom.<sup>657</sup> At the entrance of the site stand several signboards, and one of them is about the history of Ravana (*Ravana ithihasaya*). It contains the phone number of the popular research group the *Hela Ravana Padanama* (the Hela Ravana Foundation). The signboard also mentions that the place is a historical kingdom of the glorious heroic *sakvithi* King Ravana who ruled Sri Lanka around 5,000 years ago. The discovery of the human skeletons in Balangoda dating back to prehistoric times is the best evidence that an ancient civilisation once existed here. In addition, the specific site is praised as the victory ground of Ravana, a place where

<sup>655</sup> De Silva, P. (2013), Reordering of Postcolonial Sri Pāda Temple in Sri Lanka: Buddhism, State and Nationalism, *History and Sociology of South Asia*, 7(2), 155-176, 159.

<sup>656</sup> Fieldwork visit Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya, May 6, 2016. The monk was absent at the time I visited the site.

<sup>657</sup> According to the people living next to the site, the Ravana shrine was constructed around the year 2015. Informal conversation with people living next to the Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya, May 6, 2016.



Rama's military entered into battle with Ravana. The name Balangoda can be 'translated' as the place where King Ravana's forces were. A creative etymological explanation is given for this: *balaya* (force) and *goda* (land).<sup>658</sup>

Weekly *pujas* to Ravana are conducted on Saturday mornings at this site.<sup>659</sup> A Sumana Saman procession takes place annually in August, and rumour has it that a piece of the Ravana flag is taken around in this procession.<sup>660</sup>

### Kataragama

The – to my knowledge – oldest and still existent Ravana shrine at a Buddhist site in Sri Lanka is located at the famous pilgrimage site Kataragama. It is located in the forest surrounding the Kiri Viharaya close to one of the roads leading to this famous *stupa* (see Figure 5.14).<sup>661</sup> The Ravana shrine was constructed in the 1980s under Premadasa (1978-1989 prime minister; 1989-1993 President of Sri Lanka). At that time, the late Hela representative Arisen Ahubudu was working as presidential language consultant (on Arisen Ahubudu, see Section 4.2.1).<sup>662</sup> According to one of the residing Buddhist nuns at Kataragama, another nun came to Kataragama in the 1970s. She had seen Ravana in dreams and offered a piece of land to Premadasa. Though Premadasa at first had a conflict with her, he eventually changed his mind, and according to the story it was under his government that a Ravana statue was installed at Kataragama. This Ravana statue was modelled after the nun's visions and built on the land she donated to Premadasa.<sup>663</sup>

Since the inauguration of the shrine in 1987, a *kapu mahaththaya* (lay custodian) has been in charge of the shrine. This *kapu mahaththaya* continues to perform rituals on re-

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<sup>658</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Godā,' 168.

<sup>659</sup> Since Bolthumbe is located in an area that was affected by floods several times, I was not able to visit the site to participate in one of the rituals myself during my fieldwork periods. That there are weekly Ravana rituals conducted at the site was confirmed by the person in charge of the Ravana rituals at Bolthumbe: phone conversation with the person in charge of the Ravana rituals at Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya, Colombo, May 29, 2017. On the internet the site is also promoted as such: Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya, *AmazingLanka*, <http://amazinglanka.com/wp/bolthumbe-saman-devalaya/> (retrieved December 17, 2018 & March 22, 2019).

<sup>660</sup> The local legends of the Ravana flag and its connection to Ballangoda area were explained to me by the archaeologist Raj Somadeva (and others). Interview with Raj Somadeva, May 2, 2016. In addition, the flag was mentioned on the signboard at the entrance of the site. The people living close to the site referred to the Ravana flag as well, but they also said that they had never seen it. Informal conversation, people living close to the Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya, May 6, 2016.

<sup>661</sup> Fieldwork visit Kataragama, April 17, 2018.

<sup>662</sup> Informal conversation with lay-custodian Ravana *devalaya* at Kataragama, Kataragama, April 17, 2018.

<sup>663</sup> Informal conversation with residing Buddhist nun, Kataragama, April 17, 2018. Another personal experience related to the site was explained to me by a member of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi*. He worked in the 1980s under Premadasa and he was told to light a lamp in front of a tree at Kataragama. He was summoned to do so because it was believed that this tree was part of the herbal garden of Ravana. This is how he – the member of the *Ravana Shakthi* – started to believe in Ravana. Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 13, 2018. He also confirmed that the Ravana shrine was constructed under Premadasa at the behest of a nun.

quest. According to him, an annual ten-day programme is organised in January and February, and monks participate in this.<sup>664</sup> There is a tree next to the shrine with a structure for lighting oil lamps. Also, a poster on another tree next to the shrine shows a song in praise of Ravana and includes the contact details of someone from Moratuwa (a suburb of Colombo). A small stone slab mentions that the Ravana shrine was built by Ranasinghe Premadasa. A white signboard attached to one of the outer walls of the Ravana shrine tells that Ravana lived at the time of Kashyapa Buddha, that he was a great king, and that he is the next Buddha who is expected to come in the future.



**Figure 5.13** (left): Statue of Ravana enshrined at Kataragama.

**Figure 5.14** (right): Ravana shrine in the forests close to the Kiri Viharaya at Kataragama. Pictures taken by author, Kataragama, April 17, 2018.

The Ravana statue in the shrine is approximately 3 or 3.5 metres high (by far the largest Ravana statue I have seen in Sri Lanka; see Figure 5.13). It shows Ravana with one head, adorned with jewellery, including a crown with multiple small heads, and holding a sword and a book in his hands. It looks very similar in design to the statue and banner of Ravana modelled on request of Arisen Ahubudu in 1987 (see Figure 4.1). These particular depictions of Ravana (with several adaptations) from the 1980s are being duplicated in the process of *Ravanisation*.

<sup>664</sup> Informal conversation with lay custodian Ravana *devalaya* at Kataragama, April 17, 2018. The organisation of an annual ten-day festival was confirmed by one of the residing nuns: informal conversation with residing Buddhist nun, Kataragama, April 17, 2018.

### Katuwana

The Ravana statue at Katuwana is located on semi-private property, but it is worth mentioning here because it plays an important ritual function. The statue is kept in a glass box and placed in a cave that is locked with a door. The cave has to be entered on bare feet, indicating the ‘sacredness’ of the cave as a shrine, and a cobra allegedly protects the cave. The only person who owns the keys of the cave is an *angampora* master who is also involved in traditional medicine (*vedakama*; see also Section 4.3.2). The cave is located near his house and his *angampora*/medical treatment centre, and to find the cave one has to climb down the rocks.



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Figure 5.15 (left): Ravana statue in the cave-shrine in Katuwana, picture taken by research assistant, Katuwana, May 14, 2018.

Figure 5.16 (right): Announcement of annual Ravana procession festival in Katuwana from 2018, including the route of the Sri Ravana procession.

The statue of Ravana is gold-coloured and is in a seated position of approximately 30-50 cm high. Modelled in a different position compared to the other enshrined Ravana statues, this statue depicts Ravana as a *rishi* in meditational position including a top knot

and a *mudra* (positions or intertwining of the fingers, hand gesture; see Figure 5.16).<sup>665</sup> According to the *angampora* master, Ravana should be considered a *rishi* because Pulasthi (Ravana's alleged grandfather) was a *rishi*. *Rishis* were, according to him, people with special knowledge: they could see (*rishi* is derived from 'to see'), for instance, what illnesses people had.<sup>666</sup>

Since 2016 or 2017, an annual Ravana *perahera* has been organised in Katuwana.<sup>667</sup> They start the festival with chanting *pirith* (recitation for protection) for several days in a temporary structure in front of the cave.<sup>668</sup> In the days prior to the main *perahera*, some small *peraheras* are organised to announce the events. The main *perahera* takes a route of approximately nine kilometres all the way to the Dutch fort in the city centre of Katuwana. At the time of the festival, blessed water is distributed among the people from the village to cure their illnesses. After the *perahera* there is an almsgiving ceremony, and villagers are served a particular dish that has been offered to the gods. It is believed that this food contains healing powers.<sup>669</sup>

In addition to the performance of *angampora* in the *perahera*, they take the Ravana statue around on a palanquin. When the palanquin passes by, flowers are offered and drum groups play the *ranabera* (war drum; see also Chapter 6) and other drums to announce the arrival of (the) Ravana (statue). The *perahera* is organised in the period May-June-July.<sup>670</sup> In 2018, the main *perahera* of the festival was held on the *poson* full-moon day (see Figure 5.17).

## Rumassala

Rumassala is a natural pier located close the popular tourist destination and world heritage city Galle. Several tourist spots are located at the end of the pier. There is also a Buddhist site: the Vivekaramaya Viharaya. This site benefits from the popularity of the area among tourists.

Rumassala is one of the sites that have been developed in the context of *Ramayana* tourism. It is promoted as one of the five locations in Sri Lanka where Hanuman dropped a part of the Himalaya mountains on his way to bring a healing herb to cure the wounded of the war. In the middle of the T-junction at the end of the pier stands a large statue of Hanuman keeping a piece of the Himalaya.<sup>671</sup>

In addition to Buddha statues, a *stupa*, and a relic, several statues of *Ramayana* related characters are placed at the Vivekaramaya Viharaya. The most outstanding *Ramayana*

<sup>665</sup> Fieldwork visit Katuwana, May 14, 2018. Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'mudrā,' 822.

<sup>666</sup> Interview with *angampora* master, May 14, 2018. The *angampora* master himself collected money for the procession, and no monks are involved. The *perahera* was broadcasted on ITN (national TV channel).

<sup>667</sup> I do not know whether the processions have taken place after my fieldwork research in 2018.

<sup>668</sup> *Pirith* is derived from the Pali word *paritta* which means protection. See: Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Paritta,' 475; Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Pirita,' 356.

<sup>669</sup> Interview with *angampora* master, May 14, 2018.

<sup>670</sup> Interview with *angampora* master, May 14, 2018.

<sup>671</sup> Fieldwork visits, Sri Vivekaramaya Viharaya, Rumassala, February 9, 2015, and April 6, 2016.



related spot is the ‘Sita cave’ (Sita devi *guhava*).<sup>672</sup> It is a dark and extremely small cave that contains a statue of a reclining Sita (see Figure 5.17).<sup>673</sup> Outside the small cave, there is a statue of Hanuman carrying a ‘piece’ of the Himalaya and a bronze life-size statue of Ravana. It is a statue of the one-headed Ravana in a warrior position, adorned with jewellery and holding a bow and arrow. The sign says ‘King Ravana’ both in English and Sinhala (see Figure 5.18). The statues of Sita, Hanuman, and Ravana seem to be placed at the site not to arouse devotion but (mainly) for tourist purposes: they are not enshrined and it is difficult to get close to the statues of Hanuman and Ravana.<sup>674</sup>



**Figure 5.17** (left): The Sita ‘statue’ in the imitation cave for Sita at the Sri Vivekaramaya Viharaya (Rumassala).

**Figure 5.18** (right): Green/bronze coloured statue of Ravana in warrior position at the Sri Vivekaramaya Viharaya (Rumassala). Pictures taken by author, Rumassala, February 9, 2015, and April 6, 2016.



The young Buddhist monk who was around at the time of my visit explained that the Buddhist site itself dates back to the 1970s but that the statues of the *Ramayana* related characters are more recent (approximately 2000).<sup>675</sup> I got the impression that most of the statues were of rather recent date. The sign boards of the statues of Hanuman and Ravana are in Sinhala and English and were placed there after 2015. The sign board in the Sita shrine, indicating that Sita was kidnapped by Ravana and kept at Rumassala, was present in 2015 but removed in 2016.

<sup>672</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Guhāva,’ 166.

<sup>673</sup> The young monk explained that he was only recently involved at the place, and he knew no details of the Ravana, Sita, and Hanuman statues at the site. Informal conversation with Buddhist monk at Sri Vivekaramaya Viharaya, Rumassala, April 6, 2016.

<sup>674</sup> Fieldwork visit, Sri Vivekaramaya Viharaya, Rumassala, April 6, 2016.

<sup>675</sup> Informal conversation with monk at Sri Vivekaramaya Viharaya, April 6, 2016.

## Dolosbage

Dolosbage is a small village located in the mountains at the border of the Sabaragamuwa province and the Central province. There are several tea plantations in the surroundings where Hindus work, and there are plenty of Hindu temples in the area.<sup>676</sup> It is a remote area that was hard to reach at the time of my visit in May 2017.

The person who oversees the Ravana shrine in Dolosbage referred to it as a hermitage (*asapuwa*).<sup>677</sup> He operates from an office which itself has a separate room that contains a lot of statues and other religious paraphernalia (see Figure 5.19). It is not obvious that the small building is in use as a shrine. The laycustodian also explained that the shrine inside the building is closed for the villagers.



**Figure 5.19:** Room within the Dolosbage office building that is used as a shrine. A statue of the multiple-headed Ravana is placed on the left side behind the white garland and the multi-coloured garland. The statue is adorned with jewellery. Picture taken by author, Dolosbage, May 4, 2017.

The man in charge of the ‘monastery’ explained that the (office) building was constructed around 2000 and was later devoted to Ravana. He holds the opinion that Ravana and his younger brother are historically connected to the area and that the area should be considered a *yaksha* area. He considers himself a member of the Ravana generation, and he explained that his family name, Pathirana, is derived from Kuvera pathi Ravana. He related his name to an ancient *yaksha* lineage and according to him the *Vargapurnikava*

<sup>676</sup> Interview with PA., May 4, 2017. I was told by a member of the *Ravana Shakthi* that there was a Ravana shrine in Dolosbage. The members of the *Ravana Shakthi* had never visited the difficult to access remote village. Phone conversation with DO2, member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Colombo, April 24, 2017.

<sup>677</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Asapuwa,’ 60.

(the palm leaf book held by Manawe Wimalaratana *Thero*) provides evidence about the heritage and the faith in Ravana that was present in Sri Lanka in ancient times.

Weekly rituals are conducted in Dolosbage on Sundays. They start the preparations on Saturday evenings and chant to the Buddha. On Sunday mornings, they wake up at 3:00 a.m. and chant several mantras. They then take out some statues from the building to anoint them (*nanumura*). These include statues of Vishnu, Kataragama, and Paththini. They also bring out the jewellery of Ravana. The jewellery is anointed once a year and villagers are allowed to touch the jewellery only once a year.<sup>678</sup> The jewellery normally hangs around the neck of a statue of a multi-headed Ravana that is placed among the other paraphernalia in the shrine (see Figure 5.19).

## 5.4 The Relevance of the Imagined Landscape and Religious Landscape for *Ravanisation*

In this concluding section, I reflect on the relevance of the imagined landscape and religious landscape for *Ravanisation*. I first look at the more general relevance of the spatial dimension to the recent interest in Ravana, and then make some tentative remarks about the Ravana representations related to the two landscapes and their specific relevance to *Ravanisation*. In addition, I reflect at the end of this chapter on to what extent *Ravanisation* is revitalisation based on what I have set out in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Because I have visited the sites discussed in this chapter only one, two, or three times, my remarks are tentative and more research – especially about the actual use of the shrines and statues – is needed.

My explorative research reveals that the spatial dimension is relevant to *Ravanisation* because it materialises the alleged connections of Ravana to territory (Sri Lanka), Sinhalese Buddhism, and the marvels of the Hela civilisation. In Chapter 3, I argued with reference to Stuart Hall that materialising can function as a system of representations and that materialising is constitutive of ideas and values. In Chapter 4, I argued that Sinhalese Buddhists' claims that Ravana was the king of Lanka reveal the extent to which Ravana is integrated in the Sinhalese Buddhist timeframe and worldview. I have also argued that most of the recent interpretations of pre-existing concepts aim to construct a representation of a glorious Hela past. The imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka and the religious landscape together 'represent' several of these abstract ideas in the present. Actual physical features in the landscape are 'the palace of Ravana' or the 'tunnel system of Ravana's Kingdom,' and statues of Ravana make him present in the context of (sometimes devotional) Sinhalese Buddhism. The imagined and religious landscapes are thus of specific relevance to *Ravanisation* as these materialise/represent abstract ideas of Ravana's alleged connections to Sri Lanka and to Sinhalese Buddhism which – as I have argued in Chapter 4 – are key to the process of *Ravanisation*.

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<sup>678</sup> Interview with PA., May 4, 2017.

The materialising of Ravana's connection to Sri Lanka and Sinhalese Buddhism – either by projection onto existing sites or by the construction of statues – creates the possibility for Sinhalese Buddhists to relate themselves in the present to Ravana in a multiplicity of ways. In Box 1.2, I mentioned with reference to Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger that statues make Ravana permanently present in the landscape and invite people to actually relate to Ravana. The latter is an important characteristic of materialising that is of specific relevance to this emerging phenomenon of *Ravanisation*. Both landscapes have emerged from and continue to appeal for (individual) practices related to Ravana in the present. Throughout the country, several men (some belonging to popular Ravana research groups) have constructed Ravana shrines and consider themselves the proud initiators or lay custodians of these shrines. Processions or other rituals are regularly organised around many of these shrines, and people go on expeditions to explore and 'reclaim' the ancient kingdom of Ravana. In addition to this, each landscape has its own specific functions for *Ravanisation*. I now turn to the relevance of the religious landscape to *Ravanisation* as I did not reflect on this landscape at the end of Section 5.3.

In Chapter 4, I argued that in the Ravana discourse efforts are undertaken to place Ravana in a Sinhalese Buddhist worldview and timeframe. The actual construction of Ravana shrines at Sinhalese Buddhist sites throughout Sri Lanka takes this effort to a next level: Ravana is not only placed in a Sinhalese Buddhist timeframe, he is also presently materialised at Buddhist sites placing him in a Sinhalese Buddhist devotional framework. The multiple Ravana statues introduced in this chapter all have very diverse iconographic features: Ravana as a king, warrior, *rishi*, and *dasis* Ravana. Despite the diversity in the designs and iconography of the statues there is, I suggest, a common denominator: the statues are deliberately placed at sites where Sinhalese Buddhists come to pay reverence. In Chapter 2, I mentioned that deities in Sri Lankan Buddhism often follow the process of post-mortem deification. In this process, a person who allegedly lived once, turns after his death into a deity (see Box 2.3). The imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom, which mostly (but not exclusively!) relates to the representation of Ravana as ancient king of Lanka, and the religious landscape, which frames Ravana as worthy of veneration in the present (at some places even as an aspirant-deity; see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7), are two sides of the same coin. In Chapter 3, I referred to the religious studies scholars Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead in order to argue that in the sphere of religion emotions are bound up with sacred places, temples, shrines, and landscapes. The relevance of the religious landscape, and especially the materialising of Ravana in statues at Buddhist sites, might be that it gives people the opportunity to affectively and emotionally relate to Ravana in the present. At some places, the Ravana statues seem subject to (extensive) ritual activity (in Katuwana, Bolthumbe, and Kataragama, for instance), where people come to pray and offer to Ravana, but at Rumassala the Ravana statue seems not to be used for religious devotion. In the following chapters, I examine in more detail the role these shrines play in the recent interest in Ravana in an urban and rural context.

The imagined landscape of *Ravanisation* – of which I have explored only some sites in this chapter – mainly relates to the alleged ancient presence of King Ravana in Sri Lanka.



This landscape materialises several of the key characteristics of ethno-nationalist representations of the past discussed in Chapter 4, mainly the former days of glory and the ancient civilisation of the Hela. The tunnel systems and Sigiriya are used to argue that there was a well-developed ancient Hela civilisation in Sri Lanka; the sites materialise the glorious Hela civilisation.

Sigiriya provides us with some case-specific insights into the relevance of imagined landscapes that are worth mentioning here. I have argued that the *Mahavamsa*, which tells of how the fifth-century King Kashyapa I developed Sigiriya as a rock-fortress, provides the normative perception of Sigiriya's origin in twentieth-century Sri Lanka. Most (Sri Lankan) academics have accepted this *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of Sigiriya's origin as rock fortress. But as I have shown, based on my reading of the work of both Mirando Obeyesekere and Gananath Obeyesekere, there were in the 1980s other voices saying that Sigiriya was created by Ravana or his half-brother Kuvera. It seems, however, that the *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of Sigiriya's origin as rock fortress has pushed this alternative representation further to the margins. In post-war Sri Lanka, several Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana started to publicly propagate that Sigiriya was Ravana's palace, and this has been noticed in academia. The case of Sigiriya indicates that multiple perceptions of the past among the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists compete over an actual site and that actual sites might be of specific relevance to evoke competition. In Section 3.3.1, I referred to Anthony Smith to argue that conflict situations are critical to reassertions of ethnic myths. I argue that the post-war interest in Sigiriya in the process of *Ravanisation* is a serious attempt of some Sinhalese Buddhists to challenge the specific *Mahavamsa*-inspired perceptions of the past that do not relate several of Sri Lanka's major sites to a time prior to foreign invasions. Both mythologies of Sigiriya's origin as rock fortress relate to Sinhalese-Buddhist ethno-nationalist perceptions of the glorious past of the Sinhalese and 'ownership' of this ancient treasure. This Sigiriya case illustrates that in post-war Sri Lanka multiple mythological imaginations co-exist to make these claims. Following David Rampton, this illustrates that the Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country is both hegemonic and heterogenous among diverse Sinhalese strata of society. The post-war competition over Sigiriya's origin as rock fortress also indicates that we deal here with an alternative Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist mythological imagination that does not – as back in the 1980s – operate in the margins anymore but seriously challenges the *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of Sigiriya's past.

Whereas Sigiriya provides an example of competition over a world heritage site invoked by the heterogeneity of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perceptions of the past, the tunnels and caves from the imagined landscape indicate a multiplicity of voices from within. I have shown that several Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana frame the tunnels as material remains of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka. Others hold that the caves and tunnels are where Ravana is lying in a comatose condition. In Section 4.1.2, I mentioned that the belief among Sinhalese Buddhists that Ravana lies only in an unconscious state was also reported in 1680s by the Jesuit Fernão de Queiroz in his *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*. Here the two landscapes seem to collide because

(following the process of post-mortem deification) Ravana needs to die in order to be deified, while he is still alive according to those who believe that his body is conserved within a tunnel or cave. Since I have not investigated in detail the activities performed for Ravana at the Buddhist sites explored in this chapter, my remarks on these colliding Ravana representations remain tentative. What is clear, however, is that a multiplicity of Ravana representations co-exists in post-war Sri Lanka in the iconographic features of the Ravana statues: Ravana as king, warrior, *rishi*, and *dasis* Ravana. In the following chapters I focus in more detail at the multiplicity of Ravana representations at the two sites of my in-depth research.

### Reflection on *Ravanisation* as revitalisation

To conclude the second part of my thesis, I here frame *Ravanisation* as revitalisation with reference to the topics explored in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. In Section 1.1.3, I distinguished two (overlapping) levels of revitalisation in the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists: the revitalisation of ethno-nationalism (limited in this thesis to the representation of the past) and the revitalisation of the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists.

In Chapter 4, I explored how in the process of *Ravanisation* pre-existing concepts and ideas derived from diverse texts and traditions are selectively employed. A common denominator was that for the post-war representations of Ravana, Ravana's Lanka, the Hela, and the *yakshas* are selectively employed to construct a representation of a glorious past of the Sinhalese. In addition to this, indigenous ancestry and ancient inhabitation of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka are central to the post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past for which multiple texts and traditions are selectively employed. In the imagined landscape explored in Chapter 5, these key characteristics of ethno-nationalist representations of the past have materialised in the landscape (in the form of tunnel systems, for example) and serve as evidence for the belief that the Hela had an outstanding civilisation and that Ravana and the ancient Hela lived in Sri Lanka.

In my conceptual framework – especially in Section 3.3.1 – I referred to several ethno-symbolist theorists who argue that revitalisations of ethno-nationalism often take place at or after a period of stress (Wallace), that these are triggered by warfare, immigration, religious and cultural competition, and economic disruptions (Hutchinson), and that conflicts are critical to the reassertion of identities (Smith). At times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations, pre-existing myth-symbol complexes are employed to construct new sets of ideas. Though my exploration of these processes is limited to the representation of the past, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 follow such theories as those mentioned above and explore how Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka employ pre-existing myth-symbol complexes to create a specific representation of a glorious past. I have argued that key characteristics of ethno-nationalist representations of the past – for example, indigenous and ancient inhabitation and a glorious civilisation – are central to this post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past. These elements are not prominent (or even absent) in the *Mahavamsian* perception of the past that has dominated Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist

ideology in the twentieth century. The post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past gives fuller credentials to the perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country based on the assumption that the (ethnic) group who made the country into a habitable civilisation is the rightful owner of the country. I have, based on my exploration of how and why Sinhalese Buddhists have constructed an extensive Hela-Ravana representation of the past, come to the tentative conclusion that the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists is part of a resurgence or revitalisation of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism in the post-war period. The Hela-Ravana representation of the past appeals to feelings of post-war triumphalism and provides a strong(er than the *Mahavamsa*) mythistorical backbone for the ethno-nationalist claim of Sinhalese ownership of the country. In the following chapters, I explore in more detail how this is disclosed at two particular localities in the country.

The second reason to characterise *Ravanisation* as revitalisation is based on the waves of interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists that were present in Sri Lanka prior to the post-war interest in Ravana. In Chapter 4, I mentioned that in the 1680s, for instance, the Jesuit de Queiroz reported on the belief among Sinhalese Buddhists that Ravana did not die. My investigation of the Hela movement (Section 4.2.1) indicates that in the 1940s an alternative Hela perception of the past was propagated among a group of language loyalists. In addition, though more research is required to determine specific details, it seems that there was an extensive interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in the 1980s (especially around 1987, the time of the Indian intervention in the civil war; see Section 2.1). The construction of the largest Ravana statue at Kataragama in 1987 indicates an interest in Ravana on a political level under Premadasa. Miranda Obeyesekere published in 1980s the book *Ravana King of Lanka*, and the late Hela representative Arisen Ahubudu staged in 1987 the play *Sakvithi Ravana*. In addition, the anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere noted that people in the surroundings of Sigiriya in 1987 drew a connection of Ravana to Sigiriya. It seems that with the increased conflict of the civil war, the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists 'paused.' But in the post-war period, the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists has re-emerged and the belief in Ravana is revitalised in a multiplicity of ways. That most of the Ravana shrines are recently constructed and that they are spread throughout the country illustrate that the interest in Ravana in post-war Sri Lanka has evolved as a heterogenous and widespread phenomenon. I focus in the third part of my thesis on two sites where this interest in Ravana in post-war Sri Lanka has taken shape in a multiplicity of ways.



## PART III: CASE STUDIES OF RAVANISATION

In the third part of my thesis, I present my analyses of *Ravanisation* at the two sites I have selected as case studies to investigate *Ravanisation* in detail. In Chapter 5, I provided a selection of my exploration of sites in Sri Lanka that are allegedly related to Ravana. The two sites to be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 were selected from among the sites visited during the explorative phase of my research (mainly in 2016). I investigated *Ravanisation* at these two localities in detail in 2017 and 2018. I did not aim to study the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (discussed in Chapter 6) or Lakegala (discussed in Chapter 7) in detail but rather to focus on those processes that were related to Ravana. For each site, I developed specific units of analysis, and I discuss the function of the sites for the process of *Ravanisation* by looking at the diverse and multiple representations of Ravana that have emerged at and around these sites. These diverse and multiple Ravana representations illustrate the heterogeneity of the emerging phenomenon of *Ravanisation* and the popular appeal of Ravana among different strata of Sinhalese Buddhist society in post-war Sri Lanka.

Chapter 6 presents my analyses of multiple Ravana representations that have emerged and taken shape at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, a Buddhist temple site in a suburb of Colombo. This Buddhist site contains the largest Ravana shrine in Sri Lanka, and Ravana rituals are regularly performed at this site. Therefore, I have mainly concentrated on the material and ritual dimensions of *Ravanisation* at this specific locality. Several of the Ravana representations central to the rituals relate to specific (ethno-nationalist) perceptions of the Sinhalese Buddhist past and present in Sri Lanka, and I extensively explore this connection of Ravana representations to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country.

Chapter 7 presents my analyses of multiple Ravana representations related to specific perceptions of Lakegala, a mountain located in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. My focus in this case is mainly on the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation* and its dynamics with and within lore. I aim to answer the question how rural lore is employed for the post-war interest in Ravana and what it reveals about *Ravanisation*. Again, I relate several of my findings to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country. In addition, because not every Sinhalese Buddhist with an interest in Ravana has a nationalist agenda, I explore for both sites what the functions of Ravana's alleged connections to the localities might be for local communities and visitors.



## CHAPTER 6

# ***Ravanisation at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya: The Ritualising and Materialising of Ravana at a Buddhist Temple Site***<sup>679</sup>

In this chapter, I present and discuss in detail the ritualising and materialising of Ravana at a particular Buddhist temple site in Colombo: the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Pannipitiya.<sup>680</sup> In 2017 and 2018, I conducted extensive fieldwork research at this site. I became part of the community and volunteered in preparations for the annual festival week and several of the other rituals at the site (see Section 1.2.2).

I have selected this site as one of the two case studies to investigate *Ravanisation* in detail because this particular Buddhist site contains the largest Ravana temple in Sri Lanka and several extensive Ravana rituals are performed here. This chapter explores the multiple Ravana representations that I found emerging in the materialising and ritualising of Ravana at this Buddhist site. The central questions that I address in this chapter are:

- *What kinds of Ravana representations have taken shape in the materialising and ritualising of Ravana at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya?*
- *What is the relevance of the materialising and ritualising of Ravana representations at this Buddhist site for Ravanisation?*

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<sup>679</sup> Parts of this chapter were previously published as journal article in *Religions*. See: De Koning, The Ritualizing of the Martial and Benevolent Side of Ravana.

<sup>680</sup> In Pali *vihara* stands for a dwelling, habitation or lodging of a Buddhist monk. Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Vihāra,' 712. The Maha Viharaya part of the temple's name indicates that the recently established temple complex is considered to stand in the line of Sri Lanka's (orthodox) Theravada Buddhist fraternity (see Section 2.2). Devram indicates that the temple site is a place pleasant to the gods. In a small booklet on the temple site, it is mentioned that the name of the temple site can be explained as a place pleasant (*ramya*, Sinhala for pleasing) to gods and goddesses (*divya*, Sinhala for celestial). *Sri Devram Maha Vihara Varuna* [The Beauty of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya], (2006), Pannipitiya: Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, 3. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Diwya,' 245, 'Ramya,' 527. An additional meaning of Devram Viharaya is that it '[...] is a reference to the ancient Indian residence of Gautama Buddha by the same name [...].' See: Sanmugeswaran, Fedricks, & Henry, Reclaiming Ravana in Sri Lanka, 797-798. Devram Viharaya is thus associated with a monastery allegedly visited by the Buddha, as mentioned in the seventeenth-century Sri Lanka chronicle the *Rajavaliya* (see Section 4.1.2). The *Rajavaliya* describes that the Buddha returned to the monastery of Devram (*devuram vehera*) after his second visit to Lanka. See: *The Rajavaliya* (Suraweera, Trans.), 16. This twofold interpretation of Devram was also given by one of the main caretakers of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. He explained that in addition to the monastery inherited by the Buddha, the name of the temple also could mean that the area is pleasant to the gods. Interview with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 13, 2018.

- *How are some of the Ravana representations at this Buddhist site related to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country?*

The theoretical concepts that are of central importance to this chapter are – in addition to representation – materialising and ritualising. In Chapter 3, I have suggested that rituals and materiality are in themselves constitutive of representations (see Section 3.2.1 and Section 3.2.2). I consider the ritual and material dimensions thus of central importance to investigate the multiplicity of Ravana representations that have emerged in post-war Sri Lanka.

There is not always a clear-cut division between the material dimension and the ritual dimension. The anthropologist Webb Keane has included rituals, offerings, and icons under the heading of materialisation (see Section 3.2.2.).<sup>681</sup> According to the ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes, it is hardly possible to think of a ritual without its attendant material culture.<sup>682</sup> I employ in this chapter his definition of ritualising: '[...] the act of cultivating or inventing rites.'<sup>683</sup> For Grimes, ritualising is more conscious and intentional than ritualisation, which he defined as the unformed out of which rites or rituals emerge. Ritualising involves the aspect of consciousness and intentional invention (see Section 3.2.2).<sup>684</sup> Similarly, I employ here the term materialising over materialisation to point out the emerging and processual nature of it.

In Chapter 1, I explained that I developed what Yin coined as an embedded, multiple case design (see Section 1.2.2.). This means that I have focussed on the processes related to Ravana at the locations selected as case studies. Despite this particular focus, I introduce in the first part of this chapter (Section 6.1) some general information on the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya to place the process of the ritualising and materialising of Ravana within the specific context of this urban Buddhist temple site. As, to my knowledge, no in-depth research has been conducted by others, the description of the site is mainly based on the data that I collected myself by participating in the activities organised at the site and by discussing the topics with members of the community. This section also includes miracle stories. I have deliberately included these stories since they help us sense how this particular Buddhist site increased in popularity in a brief time period.

The second part of this chapter (Section 6.2) discusses several of the multiple Ravana representations that I found emerging at this site. I first briefly introduce the Ravana temple (Section 6.2.1) and then focus on the ritualising and materialising of the representation of Ravana as (aspirant) deity (Section 6.2.2). I explore the framing of Ravana as healer in Section 6.2.2.1. Then I continue with the representation of Ravana as warrior king of the Sinhalese Buddhists (Section 6.2.3). In the final Section (6.3), I reflect on how

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<sup>681</sup> Keane, *On the Materiality of Religion*, 230.

<sup>682</sup> Grimes, *Ritual*, 77.

<sup>683</sup> Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 193.

<sup>684</sup> Grimes, R. L. (2000), *Deeply into the Bone*, California: University of California Press, 28, 29. See on Grimes' definitions of the following terms rites, rituals, ritualising, and ritualisation Section 3.2.2.



several Ravana representations relate to post-war Sinhalese Buddhist triumphalism and the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country.

## 6.1 The Sri Devram Maha Viharaya

In this section, I introduce the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Colombo. I have participated in several of the activities organised at the temple site to familiarise myself with what the people attached to the site and the chief incumbent considered to be important. For details of certain rituals and activities I was frequently directed to the chief incumbent.<sup>685</sup> I start with a brief introduction of the temple site and this monk. Then I describe my exploration of the site with a focus on the section where the shrines are located.

### 6.1.1 History and Development of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya

The Sri Devram Maha Viharaya is a Buddhist complex located in Pannipitiya, one of the suburbs of Colombo. The chief incumbent, venerable Kolonnave Siri Sumangala *Thero*, initiated the construction of the site (see Section 6.1.2).<sup>686</sup> He came from Matara to Colombo in the late 1990s.<sup>687</sup> According to the temple website, a piece of land was donated to him. He built a small temple on this land, but this was not sufficient for the religious and social activities that he had in mind. He then started to meditate and allegedly received a vision that he should extend the site.<sup>688</sup> On September 24, 1999, the foundation stone of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya was laid, and within one year several standard fixtures of a Buddhist site were constructed, for example the Bodhi tree and the stupa.<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>685</sup> Also, most of the objects, offerings, and attributes used in rituals remained covered, and several rituals were performed behind a closed door. When I asked the organisers for the details of certain rituals or objects, I was frequently told that 'it is a secret.' Secrecy about rituals and objects is, of course, not limited to this particular Buddhist site: the rituals performed to the tooth relic (of the Buddha) in Kandy are also conducted by specialists who do not give out the details (see also Section 6.2.2.1).

<sup>686</sup> The concept *Thero* is used in Sri Lanka as an honorific for senior Buddhist monks. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Théró,' 228.

<sup>687</sup> Informal conversation with DO6, one of the main people involved in the annual *perahera* who also commented on the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017, Pannipitiya, March 20, 2017.

<sup>688</sup> The History, *SriDevramVehera*, [http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=61&Itemid=132](http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=61&Itemid=132) (retrieved April 30, 2019); informal conversation with DV1, regular visitor of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, April 14, 2017.

<sup>689</sup> The History, *SriDevramVehera*. According to Wickremeratne a typical Buddhist temple contains a *buduge* (house of the Buddha) with Buddha statues, a *stupa* (relic chamber), a Bo tree and often an open hall (*dharmashalava*) for preaching, meditation, and other religious activities, and a living area for the monks. Wickremeratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 49.

The complex was officially inaugurated one year later. Today the site consists of a large compound located on an area of approximately 16 acres.<sup>690</sup>

At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, several social activities are organised, for instance, monthly visits to hospitals to 'pray' for patients, blood donation campaigns, and the distribution of 'gift boxes' among the poor around Aluth Avurudu (New Years') time.<sup>691</sup> At the time of the COVID lockdown in 2020, the temple became a hub for food distribution, and in media stories on social media and national TV Sumangala *Thero* was praised for reaching out to the poor. Several of these activities are initiated by members of the *Budumaga* (path of the Buddha) association. *Budumaga* is an association that according to the website of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya was already started by Sumangala *Thero* prior to the construction of the site. Its main centre was established at the site around the official inauguration of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in 2000.<sup>692</sup> The association has formulated a code of conduct that consists of twelve rules. This list includes that 'homage is paid to parents, teachers and elders regularly,' that 'we shall abandon westernized habits and follow our national way to life,' and that 'we shall strive to restore the land of the Dhamma which we had in the past.'<sup>693</sup>

The *Budumaga* also publishes a monthly magazine. The magazine is an important medium to spread the ideas of Sumangala *Thero* across the country. One of the *Budumaga* magazines (see Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2) shows on the cover the inauguration of the Ravana *mandiraya* in 2013 by Mahinda Rajapaksha, who in 2019 became the prime minister and was at the time of the inauguration the president (2005–2015).<sup>694</sup>

Sumangala *Thero* has 'appointed' people to conduct several tasks at the site. The opportunity to participate in (social) activities is important for the appeal of this particular site to laypeople (on Buddhism in Sri Lanka and laity see Section 2.2.3).

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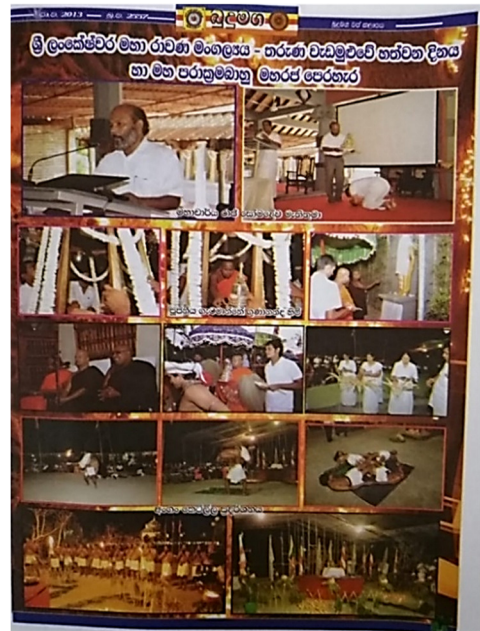
<sup>690</sup> That the current size of the land is 16 acres was mentioned by the main secretary of Sumangala *Thero*. Informal conversation with DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, May 10, 2017.

<sup>691</sup> Kolonnave Sumangala was leader of the Bhodumagga movement (Path of the Buddha movement; Budumaga), an organisation that works for parents and schoolchildren as well as for the protection of Buddhist values and morals. Frydenlund, I. (2005), *The Sangha and its Relation to the Peace Process in Sri Lanka*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, Appendix 3. <http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/16/FrydenlundThe%20Sangha%20and%20its%20Relation%20to%20the%20Peace%20Process%20PRIO%20Paper%202005.pdf>

<sup>692</sup> The Budumaga Association, *SriDevramVehera*, [http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=63](http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=63) (retrieved April 30, 2019).

<sup>693</sup> The Budumaga Association, *SriDevramVehera*. Throughout this chapter, I employ the Pali concept 'dhamma' over 'dharma' because the former was employed at this temple site. However, they used the Sanskrit concept *Tripitaka* over the Pali concept *Tipitaka*, so I use *Tripitaka* throughout the chapter. *Tripitaka* are the three baskets of collections of Buddhist sacred writings. Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'trīpitaka,' 459.

<sup>694</sup> The magazine also includes pictures of the events that took place in that week: the first Ravana *perahera* (procession), a picture of the famous archaeologist Raj Somadeva (see Box 4.1) who gave a lecture in the temple, and the performance of *angampora* (martial arts; see Section 4.3).



**Figure 6.1** (left): Cover of one of the *Budumaga* (path of the Buddha) magazines from 2013 showing the official inauguration of the Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana Raja Mandiraya by Mahinda Rajapaksha.

**Figure 6.2** (right): A collection of photos from the *Budumaga* magazine showing several of the activities organised to celebrate the inauguration of the Ravana *mandiraya*, including a lecture given by the archaeologist Raj Somadeva and *angampora* performances. The magazines are important media to spread the ideas of Sumangala *Thero* and the activities organised by the temple across the country, including Ravana activities.

### 6.1.2 Kolonnave Siri Sumangala *Thero*

Kolonnave Siri Sumangala *Thero* was born on September 24, 1969. He was ordained when he was thirteen years old. He stayed at Matara before he started to develop the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in 1999.<sup>695</sup>

Soon after the inauguration of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Sumangala *Thero* became politically involved. In 2004, he was one of the three leading election candidates of the JHU (Jathika Hela Urumaya, see Section 2.3.2). The JHU was the first political party in Sri Lanka exclusively run by monks.<sup>696</sup> Despite the success of the JHU, Sumangala *Thero* already resigned from the party in the very first year.<sup>697</sup> Instead of a political career, he managed to successfully develop the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. The summit of his

<sup>695</sup> Most Ven.Kolonnawe Sri Sumanagala Thero, *SriDevramVehera*, [http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=57&Itemid=136](http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57&Itemid=136) (retrieved April 30, 2019).

<sup>696</sup> Rahula, Politically Engaged Militant Monks, 380-382; Deegalle, M. (2011), Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya: Buddhism and Ethnicity, in J. Holt (Ed.), *The Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press, 383-394, 383, 388. (Original work published in 2004).

<sup>697</sup> Interview with Sumangala *Thero*, June 5, 2017.

religious career was his appointment as the ninth *maha nayaka* (head of fraternity of monks) of the Siri Sumana chapter of the Amarapura *nikaya*, a subdivision of one of the three major Sri Lankan (Theravada) Buddhist schools.<sup>698</sup>

Sumangala *Thero* is highly venerated by most of the people who visit the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya.<sup>699</sup> When it comes to his outstanding character people often referred to the way Sumangala *Thero* treats the Buddha, his deep meditation, and mind-reading powers.

The central building of the site bears witness to the alleged special relationship of Sumangala *Thero* with the Buddha.<sup>700</sup> The second level of the central building is called the *Sri sarvagna dhathu svarna raja Buddha mandiraya* (blessed parts of lord Buddha's body-golden king Buddha palace; hereafter referred to as the Buddha relic *mandiraya*). This building shows resemblances with the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy. Similar to the upper floor of the Temple of the Tooth, the building has a large space for people to gather and to face at auspicious times a casket that allegedly contains a Buddha relic.<sup>701</sup>

Behind the casket shrine is a room where the (spirit of) the Buddha allegedly resides.<sup>702</sup> On special days, a select group of people was allowed to follow Sumangala *Thero* to this room. The room contains a Buddha statue in standing position, a Buddha statue

<sup>698</sup> Sumangala *Thero* became the ninth *maha nayaka* of this particular school on September 16, 2018, after the eighth *maha nayaka* passed away. Writer, S. (2018, September 16), Chief Prelate of the Sri Sumana Nikaya appointed, *News1st*, <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2018/09/16/chief-prelate-of-the-sri-sumana-nikaya-appointed/> (retrieved May 1, 2019). The eighth *maha nayaka* had been living at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, as well. He passed away on April 8, 2018. Volunteers working at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya explained that the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya belonged to the Siri Sumana *nikaya*, which is one of the sub denominations of the Amarapura *nikaya*, and that the eldest monk around (at that time still alive) belonged to that particular Buddhist school. Informal group conversation DG1, volunteers Mahamaya *perahera* office and DO7, volunteer in charge of sound systems, Pannipitiya, May 31, 2017. Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'Mahānāyaka,' 797.

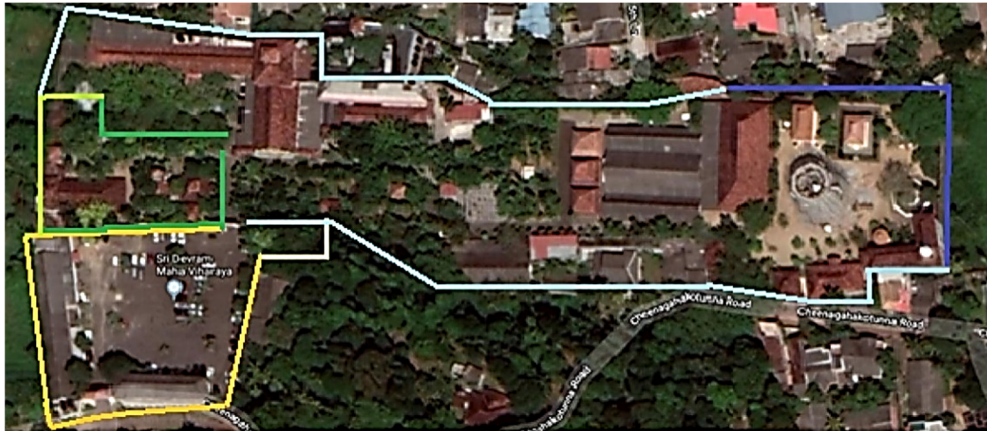
<sup>699</sup> Some believe that Sumangala *Thero* will become a Buddha in the future and referred to him as a *bodhisatta*. I do not give the details of the conversations in which Sumangala *Thero* was referred to as *bodhisatta* as this was considered a secret. One frequent visitor of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya pointed out that Sumangala *Thero* has to fulfil the perfections before becoming a Buddha. Informal conversation with DV1, regular visitor of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 30, 2018. The opinion of Sumangala *Thero* as a *bodhisatta* was often not openly discussed, but the way he was treated and the devotional objects depicting him speak also in that respect.







<sup>700</sup> The central building is located close to the entrance gate, and it contains several rooms and shrines that are not open to public (see Figure 6.4, G). On the ground floor, there is a large meeting hall surrounded by multiple small rooms where people on request are allowed to enter to consult the monks. In addition, there are offices and accommodation for the monks. I was, of course, never allowed to enter these parts of the site. There were between 75 and 100 young monks around in 2017.

<sup>701</sup> See on the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy: Wickremeratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 108. Like the one at Kandy, the relic is connected to rain (see the subsection on the *Medin maha perahera* in Section 6.2.3).

<sup>702</sup> References to private dwelling places of the Buddha, referred to as *gandhakuti* or perfumed chamber, were according to John Strong (Buddhist studies scholar) never prominent in any canonical text or important *sutra*. However, he provides multiple examples of descriptions of alleged residences of the Buddha in popular texts and a summary of the daily monastic routine of the Buddha in his perfumed chamber at a monastic complex. For details of the perfumed chamber of the Buddha, see: Strong, J. S. (1977), 'gandhakuti': The Perfumed Chamber of the Buddha, *History of Religions*, 16(4), 390-406.

in seated position, and on the right side a statue of a reclining Buddha. The room contains a western toilet and a path for meditational walks.<sup>703</sup> As I was told, only Sumangala *Thero* is able to see (the spirit of) the Buddha in the room.<sup>704</sup> He treats the Buddha 'as if he is a human.'<sup>705</sup>



<b>Map legend:</b>	1 centimetre is approximately 25 meters
	Indication border of the site (less sure)
	Indication of border of the site
	Indication of border of the entrance/parking lot (less sure)
	Indication of border of the entrance/parking lot
	Indication of border of the shrine section (less sure)
	Indication of border of the shrine section

**Figure 6.3:** A satellite view derived from google maps of the area where the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya is located. The lines mark the approximate boundaries of the temple site.

Temple visitors also praised Sumangala *Thero* for his meditation skills. By practicing deep meditation, Sumangala *Thero* is able to let his spirit go to different places. Due to his special mind-reading skills, Sumangala *Thero* is wanted for advice in family and business-related issues. A stylist who only visited the temple for a special occasion mentioned that Sumangala *Thero's* presence made the temple special to her. In addition, she referred to the worship of Mahamaya as a special characteristic of the temple.<sup>706</sup> In the

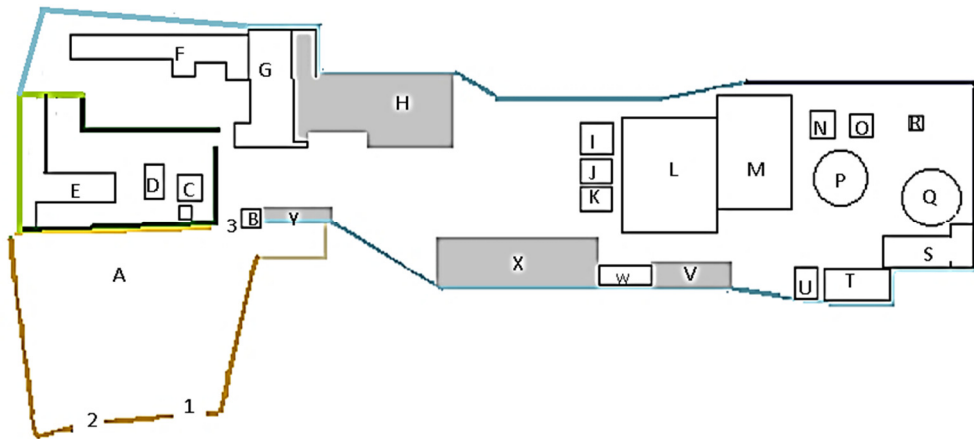
<sup>703</sup> On special occasions a select group of people was allowed to enter the room under supervision of Sumangala *Thero*. The visits never took more than approximately five minutes. I went to see this chamber of the Buddha for instance on March 18, 2017, and March 23, 2018, and was invited a couple of more times but declined because only a limited number of around twenty people were allowed inside.

<sup>704</sup> Informal conversation with DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2017; informal conversation with DO3, volunteer Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, April 7, 2017.

<sup>705</sup> This phrase was used by a regular visitor of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya: informal conversation with DV1, March 30, 2018. The secretary of Sumangala *Thero* told me that Sumangala *Thero* treats the Buddha as if he is still alive: informal conversation with DO1, May 10, 2017.

<sup>706</sup> Informal conversation with DV2, stylist for the *Medin maha perahera*, Pannipitiya, March 24, 2018.

following section I focus on the 'deity' cult at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, including Mahamaya (Buddha's mother) and Ravana.



- |   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | Entrance of parking lot  | M | <i>Dhamma</i> hall  |
| 2 | Entrance of parking lot  | N | Building with large Buddha statue   |
| 3 | Main entrance gate of site   | O | Building for monks to chant <i>pirith</i>   |
| A | Parking lot with shops and accommodation   | P | <i>Stupa</i>  |
| B | Entrance office with volunteers  | Q | Main Bodhi tree   |
| C | Vishnu/Saman <i>mandiraya</i>  | R | Structure built on the spot where Sumangala <i>Thero</i> received a vision to develop the site                              |
| D | Ravana <i>mandiraya</i>  | S | Multi-storied building including <i>sri pada</i> shrine and Thai memorial hall  |
| E | Mahamaya <i>mandiraya</i>  | T | Building that includes space for preparing the Bodhi <i>puja</i>  |
| F | Accommodation for monks  | U | Building with Buddha statue   |
| G | Building that includes meeting hall and rooms for consulting monks (ground floor), and Buddha relic <i>mandiraya</i> (first floor) | V | Structure with sculptures that display some of the events that allegedly happened in the weeks after Buddha's enlightenment |
| H | Building that includes offices and museum  | W | Large reclining Buddha statue   |
| I | Structure with 2600 Buddha statues (to commemorate the 2600th Buddha Jayanti)  | X | Building that includes office spaces, the kitchen, a shop and the hell museum   |
| J | Structure with one granite stone slab that indicates the wish of Sumangala <i>Thero</i> to inscribe the <i>Tripitaka</i>           | Y | Office space  |
| K | <i>Tripitaka</i> office  |   |   |
| L | <i>Tripitaka</i> hall  |   |   |

**Figure 6.4:** A simplified map of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya indicating the structures of the site that are described in Section 6.1.3. It does not display all buildings, Bodhi trees, roads, and structures. What it shows is that the shrine section constitutes only a small part of the site, but it is located at a prominent place next to the entrance.

### 6.1.3 Description of the Site

When a group of people from Anuradhapura came by bus to visit the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (as part of a larger pilgrimage tour), they were addressed at the entrance gate by volunteers who provided them with background information on the site. These volunteers explained that there are several precious relics kept at the site, that it is the only place where Buddha's parents are venerated, and that they could donate 100 rupees for the new *stupa*, which was at that time constructed over the older one.<sup>707</sup> The visitors received a receipt in exchange for the donation and a brick, which they took to the place where the new *stupa* was constructed.<sup>708</sup>

The *stupa* is located at the back of the site after the *dhammashalava* (Figure 6.4, P, M), the hall where the monks preach the *dhamma* (Buddhist teachings) to the laity and *sil* (precepts) are observed on full-moon days.<sup>709</sup> After the large *dhammashalava*, the road is not paved anymore and multiple regular structures present at Buddhist sites can be found.<sup>710</sup> On the right side there are, for instance, roofed structures where people can light candles and structures to put incense.<sup>711</sup> There is a tiled ledge around the main Bodhi tree on which lotus flowers and trays with offerings can be placed as part of the so-called Bodhi *puja* (offering to the Bodhi tree; see on the locations Figure 6.4, Q; see also Section 2.2.2).<sup>712</sup>

There are plenty of Buddha statues at the site. Some of them are enshrined in a building, some are in the open air. Tables or structures for offering flowers and donation

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<sup>707</sup> The *stupa* was not under construction in 2016, but when I conducted extensive fieldwork research in 2017 and 2018 a new *stupa* was constructed over the older one. The new *stupa* was inaugurated in September 2019.

<sup>708</sup> I observed on a regular weekday that two groups of people arrived by a bus (privately hired) to visit the site. The first group came from Anuradhapura. Observation, Pannipitiya, June 9, 2017. All people who visit the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (and who are not volunteers or very frequent visitors) will encounter a group of (female) volunteers at the main entrance gate explaining why the site is so important, what one needs to see at the site, and how one can financially contribute to the development of the site.

<sup>709</sup> On *poya* days people from other temples also came to visit the site. Some of them came just for an hour, but others stayed from sunrise to sunset to observe *sil*. For observing *sil*, people follow on full-moon days eight Buddhist precepts instead of the regular five precepts. They stay inside the *dhamma* hall for the entire day and listen to the *pirith* chanting (Buddhist chants for protection; see on *pirith* chanting: Wickremeratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka*, xv) and lectures given by monks. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya free food is provided on *poya* days. Clough translates *sil* as prescribed duty and *dhammashalava* as hall for *bana* (Buddhist preaching). See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Dharma-sālāwa,' 269, 'Sil,' 685.

<sup>710</sup> One of the people already working at the site for a long time told me that the entrance gate used to be located close to the Bodhi tree. This made sense to me since all the buildings close to the present entrance gate are rather recent. Informal conversation with DO9, electrician, Pannipitiya, June 2, 2017.

<sup>711</sup> According to the stone slab in front of the tree, it was planted on September 24, 1999.

<sup>712</sup> On *Medin poya* day, which was part of the festival week in March 2018, 28 trays with multiple glasses containing different liquids and small baskets with pink lotus flowers were placed on the tiled ledge by 28 women. The trays were placed in front of the immured copperplates of 28 Bodhi trees under which the previous Buddhas allegedly attained *nirvana*. On previous Buddhas, see Section 2.2. On the *puja*, see Section 2.2.2. On present-day Bodhi tree practices in Sri Lanka see: Wickremeratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 157-164.



boxes are placed in front of the statues. There are also multiple places around where visitors can make a 'wish.' For this laypractice of *pandura*, people tie with a cloth a coin – which is cleaned with special water – to a branch of a tree or to the fences as a token of a promise.<sup>713</sup>

There are also some museums located at the temple site, for instance, a 'Thai memorial hall.'<sup>714</sup> In the L-shaped room, life-like statues of nine 'Thai monks' in meditation posture can be seen. In addition, there is a museum where objects like coins, cups, antiques, clocks, and swords can be witnessed (Figure 6.4, H), and a remarkable museum about hell (*apaya*, Figure 6.4, X).<sup>715</sup>

One of the most ambitious projects started by Sumangala Thero is the inscription of the *Tripitaka* (the three baskets of collections of Buddhist sacred writings, the Pali canon) in Sinhala script on granite stone slabs (see Figure 6.5). As mentioned on the website of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya:

Sri Saddharma which was orally delivered to the word over a period of 45 years by (by the Lord Buddha) [sic] and which constitutes the Tripitaka is being recorded by inscribing on stone slabs at the Devram Maha Vihara for the sake of the future generations as a great service to the Sasana. A project to record the Tripitaka on stone slabs was launched at Sri Devram Vehera in the year 2006 in order to preserve the Tripitaka Dhamma in this land of the Dhamma.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>713</sup> As Wickremaratne describes: '[...] *pandura* is a coin washed in saffron water for ritual purifying, tied in a clean white cloth, and offered to the god as a token of a promise when asking for a wish or sometimes as a token of goodwill [...]' Wickremaratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 260. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Paṇḍuru,' 'Paṇḍura,' 314.

<sup>714</sup> The Thai memorial hall was built by devotees from Thailand to honour the monks who dedicated their lives for the upliftment of Theravada Buddhism. This is mentioned on the signboard at the entrance of the hall.

<sup>715</sup> In Pali *apaya* means a transient state of loss and woe after death. See: Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Apāya,' 63. In Sinhala *apaya* translates as hell. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Apāya,' 38.

<sup>716</sup> The Project of Inscription of Tripitaka Dhamma on Stone Slabs, *SriDevramVehera*, [http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=56](http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56) (retrieved May 14, 2019); [http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=56&Itemid=133](http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56&Itemid=133) (retrieved April 21, 2021). For more on the process of inscribing the *Tripitaka*, see the official website. According to the website, one stone slab costs 300,000 rupees (the price has probably increased over the years) and approximately 1100 stone slabs are needed to inscribe the entire *Tripitaka*. The *Tripitaka* hall is attached to the *dharmashalava* (Figure 6.4, L, M), and one row contains twenty-one granite stone slabs inscribed at both sides (and each side has a separate number). Each stone slab is approximately 2.25 meters in height and 0.92 meters wide and one row of twenty-one stone slabs is approximately 35 meters. Under the stone slabs, the names of the people who have donated them are mentioned. In 2017, eleven rows with twenty-one stone slabs were erected (thus up to number 462, since they are inscribed at both sides). Observation *Tripitaka* hall, Pannipitiya, May 27, 2017. One of the volunteers explained in 2017 that they finished two parts of inscribing the *Tripitaka* and the third part of the *Tripitaka* still had to be inscribed. Informal conversation with DO10, volunteer *Tripitaka* office, Pannipitiya, June 3, 2017.





**Figure 6.5:** The path in the middle of the *Tripitaka* hall with rows of granite stone slabs on which the Tripitaka is inscribed. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, May 27, 2017.

The ambition to preserve the *dhamma* for further generations resonates with some of the rules of the code of conduct of the earlier mentioned *Budumaga* association. Twelve goals are also listed on a poster that hangs close to the entrance of the site (translation):

- (1) protecting the Sinhala race/nation/people (*jathiya*) and the rights of all races/ethnicities; (2) introducing the great dynasty of kings to the youth and offering them salutation; (3) reviving our agriculture; (4) making people accustomed to the Hela customs and traditions; (5) uplifting the Hela Ayurveda; (6) protecting our language; (7) preserving age-old *shanthikarmas*, dances, and singing; (8) extending a helping hand to our innovations; (9) strengthening with virtues and wealth to create a generation of Bosath (*bodhisatta*; exemplary/ virtuous) children; (10) extending support for the education of virtuous and intellectual children; (11) protecting the elder generation with economic difficulties who have once contributed to the nation; (12) strengthening the youth possessing our values.<sup>717</sup>

Several of these goals are materialised in the shrines, statues, and museums at the site, and ritualised in rituals and other events organised at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (see also Box 6.1). The apotheosis of Ravana at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya can be understood against the background of some of these goals as well. Before explaining the details of how this happens at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, I introduce here the section of the site where the Ravana *mandiraya* is located.

<sup>717</sup> Observation, Pannipitiya, June 9, 2017. According to Bruce Kapferer the *shanti karma* are anti-sorcery rites that seek the blessing of the gods. Kapferer B. (1997), *The Feast of the Sorcerer: Practices of Consciousness and Power*, London: The University of Chicago Press, 46, 358. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Jātiya,' 193.



**Figure 6.6:** Sumangala Thero walking around one of the massive cooking pots in which a herbal medicinal mixture (*osupen*) is boiled. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, February 25, 2018.

#### Box 6.1: The *Osupen* Ritual at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya

On regular weekdays, there are not many visitors at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. This is just the opposite on *poya* days (full-moon days) and other festival days. An example of an extensive ritual organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya was the *osupen* (medicinal herbal mixture) ritual.<sup>718</sup> The ritual was organised in 2018 by people of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya at the temple area of a neighbouring temple. The event started at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, and some volunteers from both temples – including myself – walked in procession to the neighbouring temple. There, part of the temple site was turned into an *osupen* preparation place. Sumangala Thero walked around the massive cooking pots and added herbal ingredients into the mixture (see Figure 6.6). This was followed by a couple of lectures during which people of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya added herbs to the boiling *osupen*. At the end of the afternoon, people took bottles and cups out of their bags and these were filled with the *osupen*.<sup>719</sup> Sumangala Thero had meditated prior to this event, and the liquid served on that particular day was believed to contain healing powers by his chanting.<sup>720</sup> Also, because the mixture was made out of herbs, it was referred to as Sinhalese medicine. Through this ritual ‘Sinhalese medicine’ was revived and brought as close to the people as possible as they could take it home to consume it. In addition, the event contributed to a wider dissemination of Sumangala Thero’s special status as it stressed his meditational skills.

<sup>718</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Osu,’ 90

<sup>719</sup> Observation, Pannipitiya, February 25, 2018.

<sup>720</sup> Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, February 25, 2018.

### 6.1.3.1 The Shrine Section<sup>721</sup>

The structures mentioned in the previous sections are located on the right side of the main entrance gate (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4). When one enters the site, there is a fence on the left side that separates this section from the area that contains the shrines of several deities and semi-divine beings (most often the word *mandiraya*, which means palace or mansion, is used for the shrines). This section constitutes only a small part of the temple site, but it is located at a prominent place: next to the main entrance gate. The Ravana *mandiraya* is located at this particular part of the site. I briefly mention here some of the other buildings, structures, and statues that have relevance for the materialising and ritualising of Ravana.

The largest statue at the shrine section is a massive bronze statue of Natha *bodhisatta*. This statue was constructed in 2007 and meant by Sumangala *Thero* to be Ravana (see the next section; on the location of the statue, see Figure 6.7, J).<sup>722</sup>

Two large buildings located at the left side of the walking path are the Ravana *mandiraya* and a building shared by Saman and Vishnu (officially called the Sri Upulvan Vishnu *deva mandiraya*; Figure 6.7, Q). The story of this building is that at the time they wanted to construct some buildings at the site, a well was discovered at that particular spot. The water of the well seemed noxious. But when Sumangala *Thero* himself looked into the well he saw fish swimming, so the water could not be poisonous.

He believed that this well has a connection with the *naga loka* (the realm of the snakes) and decided to construct a shrine upon the spot.<sup>723</sup> The shrine was first meant to be for Saman, but in order to show the people that there is no conflict between Ravana and Vishnu, the shrine is now mainly dedicated to Vishnu. Saman is believed to reside on the upper floor of the building.<sup>724</sup> Every Sunday evening, a cup of water is taken from this particular well and used to annoint the Ravana statues.<sup>725</sup> This is the only shrine at the site that has a ritual function in the Ravana *puja* (offering; see Section 6.2.2).

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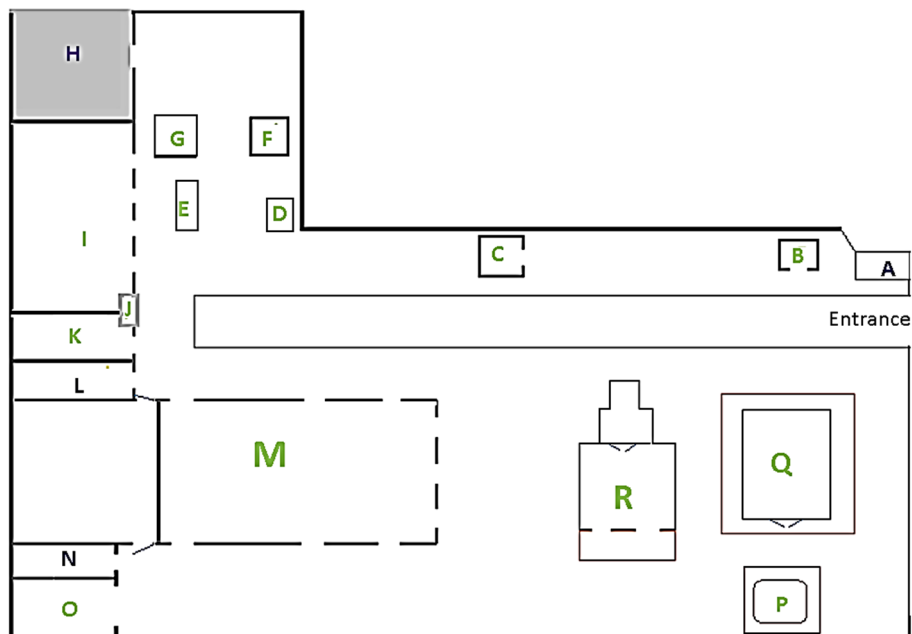
<sup>721</sup> I wrote this section after extensive fieldwork conducted at the site mainly in April and May 2017.

<sup>722</sup> On the right side of the paved path leading to the Natha *bodhisatta* statue are some small shrines: one for Kali and one for 'Sri Gambara *deva*' (both shrines are around eight square meters; Figure 6.7, C and B).

<sup>723</sup> The Sanskrit word *loka* has multiple meanings. It for instance means 'wide space or world.' See: Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'loká,' 906; or division of the world: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Loká,' 553.

<sup>724</sup> Interview with Sumangala *Thero*, June 5, 2017. Informal conversation with DO11, volunteer Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 17, 2017.

<sup>725</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, June 4, 2017. This Vishnu/Saman shrine is approximately the same size as the Ravana *mandiraya*. In contrast to the Mahamaya and Ravana *mandirayas* this shrine cannot be entered by laypeople and no congregational *pujas* are performed.



### Map Legend

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>A Office next to entrance gate of the shrine section</p> <p>B <i>Gambara deviyo mandiraya</i></p> <p>C <i>Kali mandiraya</i></p> <p>D Structure to crash coconuts</p> <p>E Structure to light candles</p> <p>F Open structure with statue of <i>Gana dev</i> (<i>Ganesh</i>)</p> <p>G Open structure with statues representing the nine planets</p> <p>H Room with storage cabinets with for instance ingredients and attributes used in rituals</p> | <p>I Building with six small shrines inside</p> <p>J Large bronze-coloured statue of <i>Natha bodhisatta</i></p> <p>K <i>Pathhini</i> shrine</p> <p>L Kitchen for preparing <i>puja</i> ingredients</p> <p>M <i>Mahamaya mandiraya</i></p> <p>N Kitchen for preparing <i>puja</i> ingredients</p> <p>O <i>Kataragama</i> shrine</p> <p>P Roofed structure under which the <i>Ravana ratha</i> (chariot) is parked</p> <p>Q <i>Vishnu/Saman mandiraya</i></p> <p>R <i>Ravana mandiraya</i></p> |
|---|---|

**Figure 6.7:** Simplified map of the shrine section of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya.

### Mahamaya devotion

Since a similar process of ritual creativity for Mahamaya and Ravana takes place at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and Mahamaya devotion is rather prominent, I pay attention to some of the rituals conducted to her in this section.<sup>726</sup> The *Mahamaya mandiraya* is the largest building constructed at the shrine section (see Figure 6.7, M and Figure 6.8). It was inaugurated in the month of *Medin* in 2010, and as pointed out frequently by the

<sup>726</sup> A (co-published) article about Mahamaya rituals based on my fieldwork at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya will be published likely in 2022.

people around, the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya is the only place in Sri Lanka where Mahamaya is venerated.<sup>727</sup> There is a black granite Mahamaya statue in the inner sanctum of the *mandiraya* and a furnished space for Mahamaya where she allegedly resides (the latter considered to be a secret).<sup>728</sup>

Sumangala *Thero* is of the opinion that Mahamaya and the goddess Paththini are the same (see on Mahamaya and Paththini also Section 6.2.3).<sup>729</sup> Prior to the construction of the Mahamaya *mandiraya*, an annual *perahera* has been organised since 2008 to commemorate Buddha's parents: Suddhodana and Mahamaya. According to the temples' website, this *perahera* is a blessing for society as a whole because it not only invokes respect for Buddha's parents but also 'lead[s] to the worship of one's own parents.'<sup>730</sup>



**Figure 6.8:** The largest building at the shrine section: the Mahamaya *mandiraya*. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, May 2, 2017.

<sup>727</sup> Information derived from the stone slab explaining the details of the Mahamaya *mandiraya*. That the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya is the only place in Sri Lanka where Mahamaya is venerated was explained, for instance, by the volunteers who addressed the group of visitors from Anuradhapura. See the introduction of Section 6.1.3.

<sup>728</sup> In contrast to the alleged residence of the Buddha, this room is only opened and cleaned once a year by the main caretakers of the site and – as far as I noticed – not visited by others. I participated plenty of times in the Mahamaya *puja*, and I never saw groups of people entering the inner sanctum or the room where Mahamaya allegedly resides on regular Saturdays.

<sup>729</sup> Building dedicated to Mathru Divya Raja, *SriDevramVehera*, [http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=60](http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60) (retrieved August 10, 2020); [http://www.sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=134](http://www.sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=134) (retrieved April 21, 2021).

<sup>730</sup> Madin Maha Perahera Meritorious Activity, *SriDevramVehera*, [http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=152&Itemid=187](http://sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=152&Itemid=187) (retrieved August 10, 2020).

The major *pujas* at the shrine section are the Mahamaya and Ravana *pujas* conducted every Saturday evening and Sunday evening, respectively.<sup>731</sup> These rituals are not often attended by monks but are performed by lay custodians according to the instructions given by Sumangala *Thero*. The Mahamaya *puja* is held weekly on Saturday evenings. Like in the Ravana *puja*, the Mahamaya statue is anointed, dressed, and presented with food (rice and *muruthen bath* – sticky rice sweetened with jaggery and honey). This part of the ritual is followed by the congregational chanting of Mahamaya songs by the lay priests and the laity. These songs were composed by Sumangala *Thero* and published in his book on Mahamaya. After the chanting, the offering plates are taken out of the inner sanctum and the food is served.

The focus in the Mahamaya *puja* is on the family, especially (pregnant) women and small children.<sup>732</sup> At the end of some of the *pujas* I attended, people came forward with babies and children. The babies and children were taken by the lay custodians to the Mahamaya statue to ask her to bless the child.<sup>733</sup> Lay custodians blessed pregnant ladies by anointing their hair with oil from the candle placed in front of the inner sanctum.<sup>734</sup> People were invited to see the Mahamaya statue up close only on special occasions.

The congregational *pujas* at the shrine are attended by laypeople and most often sponsored by them. Mahamaya and Ravana are both popular at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. They aim to attract different audiences. Whereas the focus in the Mahamaya devotion is on femininity and parenthood, Ravana embodies in addition to a benevolent side a martial side. I focus on that in more detail in Section 6.2.3.

### Reflection 6.1: The Sri Devram Maha Viharaya

In this section, I have explored the prominent role of Sumangala *Thero*. I have shown that there is a strong mutual relationship between him and the laity: the monk is involved in the lives of laypeople by giving them blessings and advice (through insight gained by his mind-reading skills), and the laypeople are invited to be actively involved in temple activities (through the *Budumaga* association, for instance). These activities often serve to highlight Sumangala *Thero's* special status.

I have also indicated some of the revitalisation projects initiated by Sumangala *Thero* – the code of conduct of the *Budumaga* association, for instance, and the temple goals. Central to these goals and the code of conduct are the strengthening of Sinhaleseness by promoting the glorious past of the Hela and by bringing Buddhism close to the people

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<sup>731</sup> On Monday evenings, for instance, a Kali *puja* is performed. This *puja* is attended by a handful of volunteers.

<sup>732</sup> Although some of the volunteers explained that they consider Mahamaya to be in male form now, there is a strong focus on children, parenthood, and femininity in her devotion. Informal conversation with DO10, June 3, 2017; informal group conversation DG1, May 31, 2017. One of the volunteers at the site explained that Mahamaya devotion was especially recommended for barren women and that miracles happened in the past. Informal group conversation DG1, May 31, 2017.

<sup>733</sup> Informal conversation with DV3, attendant of the Mahamaya *puja*, Pannipitiya, May 20, 2017.

<sup>734</sup> The blessing of the babies after the Mahamaya *puja* happened, for instance, on May 20, 2017 and May 27, 2017.



by promoting certain values that they can practice in their daily lives. These goals take shape in several of the rituals and materialisations that I have described: the *osupen* ritual (see Box 6.1), which is aimed to revive Sinhalese traditional medicine, as well as the stone inscription of the *Tripitaka*, which materialises a collection of scriptures central to Buddhism but often limited to the sphere of Buddhist monks. The Mahamaya devotion ritualises the rule of the code of conduct to pay homage to parents, teachers, and elders regularly. Both the child (the Buddha) and the parents are portrayed as exemplary, and the Mahamaya devotion reminds people to practice Buddhism in everyday life (to start with their own families). The particular focus on family life – including the Buddha’s – contributes to the appeal of this recent temple complex to laity.

Another central theme is that materialising makes possible multi-sensory relationships with otherwise ‘abstract’ entities. The Buddha and the deities are abundantly represented at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in statues, shrines, and rituals. Section 3.2.2 referred to Hughes (who has studied the Mesoamerican practice of cradling images of deities) to show that nurture and tender attention are emotions that researchers should be attentive to. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, affectionate care is given to the Buddha (also to the relic and the Bodhi tree, both of which function as his representations), his mother, and deities. The materialisations create the possibility to ritually nurture them. Of special importance are the furnished rooms for the Buddha and Mahamaya because these further make it possible to nurture them as if they are living (human) beings. Through these materialisations, the monk is able to ritually provide for the alleged needs of the Buddha and Mahamaya in the present, and laypeople are also encouraged to affectively relate to the Buddha and Mahamaya through offerings and prayers.

## 6.2 Ravanisation at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya

In this section, I discuss *Ravanisation* at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya by presenting a selection of Ravana representations that I found emerging there in the materialising and ritualising of Ravana. Also, I make some tentative remarks about what the relevance of the materialising and ritualising of several Ravana representations might be for the recent interest in Ravana.

In Section 6.2.1, I introduce the *mandiraya* because it is central to the rituals and because an extensive materialisation of multiple Ravana representations can be found there. The description of the Ravana *mandiraya* sets a stage for my elaboration on several specific Ravana representations: Ravana as (aspirant) deity and *bodhisatta* (Section 6.2.2), Ravana as healer (Section 6.2.2.1), and Ravana as warrior king of the Sinhalese (Section 6.2.3). Boundaries between those representations are not clear cut. Also, the representations discussed are based on my selection and interpretations. I could have discussed the representations of Ravana as *rishi* or as belonging to the sun dynasty, as well, but

they seemed less central to the ritualising and materialising of Ravana at this Buddhist temple site than the other representations.

### 6.2.1 The Ravana Mandiraya

In the previous chapter, I discussed that at several Sinhalese Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka Ravana statues can be found. The Ravana *mandiraya* at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya is the largest structure in Sri Lanka that is exclusively devoted to Ravana. I discuss here a selection of the murals and statues that can be found in the Ravana *mandiraya*.

Whereas at most Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka the term *devalaya* is used to refer to a building for deities,<sup>735</sup> at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya the term *mandiraya* is preferred. Sumangala Thero mentioned that he prefers to call the Ravana building a *mandiraya* since this concept denotes a palace. This fits his idea that Ravana should be considered a king who has not attained the status of a deity (or *bodhisatta*) yet. I discuss in the next section that this distinction between deity and king fades, however, when we look at the ritual function of the building and the objects in the building.<sup>736</sup>



**Figure 6.9:** The Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana Raja Mandiraya (left side). On the right side: one of the Ravana chariots. This chariot is taken around in the annual *perahera* organised by this Buddhist temple. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, June 6, 2017.

<sup>735</sup> Gombrich and Obeyesekere point out that '[a] Sinhala building for gods (*deviyō, deyyiyō*), whether or not it is on the premises of a Buddhist temple, we call a shrine (*dēvālaya, dēvāle*).' Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, xvi.

<sup>736</sup> Interview with Sumangala Thero, June 5, 2017. *Mandira* in Sanskrit denotes a dwelling, abode, house, mansion, palace, or temple. See: MacDonell, A. A. (1893), *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 'mandir,' 218. The Sinhala word *mandiraya* is translated as royal palace, house, mansion, temple. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Mandiraya,' 459. *Mandira(ya)* thus has a broader connotation than the concept *devalaya*.



The Ravana *mandiraya* is the second largest building devoted to a single being located at the shrine (see Figure 6.7, R). The platform on which the *mandiraya* is built is approximately 80 square metres, and the *mandiraya* itself is approximately 70 square meters with stairs outside the *mandiraya* leading to the doors (see Figure 6.10).

At the corners of the premises of the Ravana *mandiraya*, there are four granite stone slabs (equal to the size of the stone slabs on which the *Tripitaka* is inscribed). The stone slabs are inscribed on both sides and contain fragments derived from Ravana publications by Suriya Gunasekere, Mirando Obeyesekere, Arisen Ahubudu (see respectively Box 4.1, Box 4.2, and Section 4.2.1), and Sumangala *Thero*. Different topics from these publications are discussed – that there were different types of airplanes, for instance, that the Sinhalese were worshippers of the sun, and that Ravana did not die but that he is only unconscious.

According to the granite plaque in the front wall, the *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana Raja Mandiraya* was formally inaugurated on September 19, 2013, by Mahinda Rajapaksa (see also Figure 6.1). Several of the volunteers at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya already had an interest in Ravana prior to the building of the *mandiraya*. One of the main caretakers of the site explained that he became interested in Ravana when he worked in the 1990s under former president Premadasa (1989-1993; who had a Ravana statue constructed at Kataragama; see Section 5.3). Together with a member of *Budumaga* association, this caretaker started to conduct rituals to Ravana at the site from around 2005/2006 onwards. This caretaker had earlier suggested to Sumangala *Thero* to build a Dutugemunu shrine, but Sumangala *Thero* rejected this idea. He then suggested to construct a Ravana shrine. This caretaker, who is also member of the Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* (see Box 1.1), continued to conduct rituals to Ravana with some other people. Then Ravana allegedly revealed to them that he did not like the place where they had been conducting the rituals and that he wanted a shrine at the spot eventually selected for constructing a Buddha shrine. The caretaker was able to convince Sumangala *Thero* to construct a Ravana *mandiraya*, and soon after that the *mandiraya* was constructed.<sup>737</sup> Nowadays, it is maintained (with reference to a prophecy of Mirando Obeyesekere) that the Ravana *mandiraya* is constructed at the spot where Ravana once met one of the previous Buddhas: Kashyapa Buddha.<sup>738</sup> This prophecy relates Ravana to a Buddhist timeframe which is more in accordance with the Sinhalese Buddhist worldview than events taken from the *Ramayana*.

After the inauguration of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Sumangala *Thero* appointed a volunteer to oversee the *mandiraya*. This lay custodian, some of the main caretakers of the site, and helpers appointed by the lay custodian are allowed to enter the inner sanctum to conduct rituals. Others are only allowed to enter the hall that leads up to the inner sanctum, and when the rituals are performed women even have to wait outside the *mandiraya*.

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<sup>737</sup> Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2017; interview with DO2, March 13, 2018.

<sup>738</sup> Interview with Sumangala *Thero*, June 5, 2017.

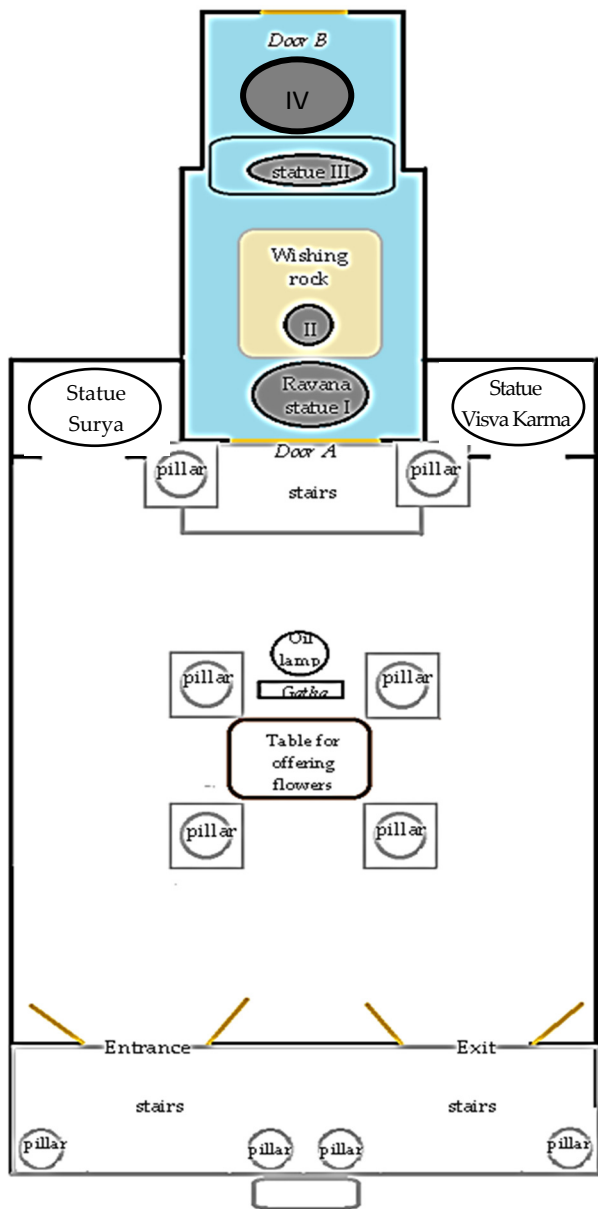


Figure 6.10 (left): Simplified map of the Ravana mandiraya.

Figure 6.11 (top right): Table within the Ravana mandiraya to offer flowers, signboard with the Ravana gatha and the oil lamp with a svastika on top.

Figure 6.12 (down right): The tower at the back of the Ravana mandiraya. Pictures taken by author, Pannipitiya, March 22, 2017, & June 6, 2017.

The *mandiraya* can thus be divided into two parts: the inner sanctum (marked in blue in Figure 6.10) and the hall in front of the inner sanctum. I first describe here some of the murals and objects at and around the premises of the Ravana *mandiraya*.

Although there is no lay custodian present on weekdays – and the door leading to the inner sanctum is locked – people can enter the hall. In the middle of the hall is a table for offering flowers (Figures 6.10 and 6.11), and behind this table a Ravana *gatha* (verse, stanza) composed by Sumangala Thero is displayed (Figure 6.11).<sup>739</sup> Most striking are the colourful murals inside the temple, even on the ceiling. The drawings on the ceiling show eight of the great talents attributed to Ravana – his knowledge of justice, medicine, ruling (as world monarch), war craft, aesthetics, and so on (see Figure 6.13). Several of the other murals show Ravana’s capabilities, as well. Some of the drawings display the invention of the *dandu monaraya* and the air-travelling technique mastered in Ravana’s time. These murals materialise the abstract *dasis* Ravana concept (see Section 4.3). In the context of *Ravanisation*, a symbolic interpretation is given to the concept *dasis* (ten-headed): Ravana does not actually have ten heads (and twenty arms), and the murals do not display him with ten heads. The murals show the visitors in which skills Ravana allegedly excelled.



**Figure 6.13:** Selection of paintings of Ravana’s skills on the ceiling inside the Ravana *mandiraya*. From left to right: knowledge of justice, war craft, medicinal science, (*sakvithi*) world ruler, artistic expressions/aesthetics, and knowledge of universal languages. These pictures materialise the representation of *dasis* Ravana. Pictures taken by author, Pannipitiya, June 6, 2017.

<sup>739</sup> Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary*, ‘Gāthā,’ 279; Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Gata,’ 152. There is also a traditional oil lamp with a *svastika* on top instead of a frequently seen rooster or peacock. On the *svastika*, see note 653.

### Box 6.2: The Ravana Mandiraya and the Framing of Ravana in A Buddhist Timeframe and Worldview

The collection of murals in the Ravana *mandiraya* indicates a materialisation of the process of selective appropriation and re-interpretations of multiple texts and traditions in the process of *Ravanisation*. Several murals on the right wall display fragments related to the *Ramayana*: one drawing shows, for instance, that Indrajith (Ravana's son) shot Rama and Lakshman. Another mural shows that Rama shot Ravana. The subscript of this drawing mentions that Ravana's body is still preserved with medicinal oil and kept in an underground place, something not found in the *Ramayana* (see Figure 6.14). The idea that Ravana will wake up is mentioned in a colonial record from the 1680s (*The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, see Section 4.1.2). One mural relates Ravana's era to the Sinhalese Buddhist chronicle tradition with a subscript in which reference is made to Vijaya (known from the *Mahavamsa*). Another mural (also with a subscript) shows that, according to Mahayana Buddhism, Ravana worshipped a Buddha (not specified which Buddha, see Figure 6.15). The devotion of Ravana to a Buddha is mentioned in the Ravana discourse as described in the *Lankavatara Sutra* (see Section 4.1.2).

On the outer walls of the Ravana *mandiraya*, thirteen gold-coloured statues show the royal lineage before Ravana. These statues include Maha Sammata, Pulasthi (or Pulathisi; considered to be Ravana's grandfather), Kuvera (Ravana's half-brother), and Sumali (Ravana's grandfather from mother's side). Iselin Frydenlund mentions that the *Agganna Sutra* of the *Digha Nikaya* (or *Long Discourses of the Buddha*, part of the Pali canon; see also Section 4.1.2) explains that the people on earth selected an outstanding individual or *maha sammata* ('great selected') as their first king.<sup>740</sup> This *maha sammata* is the first king after the birth of Brahma, who stands at the beginning of each *kalpa* (period between creation and recreation).<sup>741</sup> Later, as Frydenlund mentions, kings in Sri Lanka and Burma traced their origin back to Maha Sammata or the first Buddhist king.<sup>742</sup> Whereas in the popular imagination Vijaya was considered the ancestor of the Sinhalese, Gananath Obeyesekere has argued that there are no records of any Sinhalese king, right down to the last king of Sri Lanka Sri Vikrama Rajasinha (1798-1815), who claimed descent from the lion (Vijaya). They instead claimed to descent from the sun (*surya*), which also happens to be the lineage of Maha Sammata of the dynasty of the Buddha.<sup>743</sup> Maha Sammata (here as a name) is also mentioned as first king in the *Mahavamsa* and the alternative chronicle the *Rajavaliya* (see Sections 4.1.2. and 4.2.3).<sup>744</sup> Ravana and his family members are, on the outer walls of the *mandiraya*, thus included in the line of Buddhist cosmology and monarchy that Sinhalese Buddhists are familiar with.

These murals and statues materialise the process of the selective appropriation and re-interpretations of pre-existing story elements and characters derived from diverse texts and

<sup>740</sup> Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Sammata,' 769.

<sup>741</sup> Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'kālpa,' 262. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Kalpa,' 109.

<sup>742</sup> See on Maha Sammata: Frydenlund, I. (2013), The Protection of Dharma and Dharma as Protection: Buddhism and Security across Asia, in C. Seiple, D. R. Hoover & P. Otis (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Security*, London & New York: Routledge, 102-112, 103; see also: *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Walshe, Trans.), 412.

<sup>743</sup> Obeyesekere, G. (2017), *The Doomed King: A Requiem for Sri Vikrama Rajasinha*, Colombo: Sailfish, 242-243.

<sup>744</sup> Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Suriya,' 797.

<sup>744</sup> *The Rājāvāliya* (Suraweera, Trans.), 4-5; *Mahavamsa 2: 1-2. The Mahāvamsa* (Geiger & Bode, Trans.), 10.



traditions to construct a post-war representation of Ravana as a Sinhalese Buddhist hero. It illustrates the process of what the ethno-symbolist Smith coins as the reconstruction of a coherent new set of ideas from pre-existing mythhistories (see Section 3.1.1). In his ‘palace,’ a special effort is made to include Ravana into the Buddhist line of kingship, thus further distancing him from the *Ramayana* tradition.



**Figure 6.14** (left): Mural with subscript that explains that Rama shot Ravana with an arrow and that Ravana’s body is preserved in a boat full of herbs.

**Figure 6.15** (right): Ravana pays respect to a Buddha. The subscript says ‘according to Mahayana Buddhism.’ The murals materialise the selective appropriation and re-interpretation of episodes and characters derived from multiple traditions to construct a representation of Ravana as a Sinhalese Buddhist hero. Pictures taken by author, Pannipitiya, March 6, 2016, and June 6, 2017.

The inner sanctum of the Ravana *mandiraya* is only entered when rituals are performed by the lay custodian, his helpers or assistants, and some of the main caretakers of the site (all male). Since most of the visitors are not allowed to enter the inner sanctum, they were not aware of what is kept inside the *mandiraya*; for them it is only possible to see two of the four Ravana statues and part of a rock that allegedly came from another planet (see Figure 6.16; on the rock, see note 831). The first granite statue gets the most attention from participants in Ravana rituals because it is placed in front of some of the other statues (see Figure 6.17).<sup>745</sup> A small granite statue was placed in the *mandiraya* before the large black granite statue was constructed, but it is now out of sight since the large granite statue is placed in front of it. Another Ravana statue kept inside the inner sanctum but which cannot be seen is a *dasis* Ravana statue made of wood. This statue is kept behind a curtain. The *dasis* Ravana statue is believed to be several hundred years old. A statue of Ravana in a seated position can be seen by visitors when the doors of the inner sanctum are open (see Figure 6.16). This statue was placed in the *mandiraya* at the time of the inauguration.<sup>746</sup> The statue portrays Ravana in meditational position, and he only wears a white cloth around his waist.<sup>747</sup> This particular statue materialises Ravana as a

<sup>745</sup> This statue is produced in India. Informal conversation DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, May 6, 2017.

<sup>746</sup> Informal group conversation with the people conducting the Ravana *nanumura* and *puja* at the time my husband joined, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.

<sup>747</sup> As pointed out this statue portrays Ravana as a *rishi*. Informal conversation with DO2, March 18, 2017.

*rishi*, a representation promoted by Sumangala *Thero*.<sup>748</sup> Because this statue plays no ritual function, I focus on the granite statue(s).

According to Sumangala *Thero*, the design of the granite statue was based on a statue of a *bodhisatta* he noticed at a place in Sri Lanka called Maligavila. This statue is considered by some people to be the *bodhisatta* Avalokitesvara. Avalokitesvara became assimilated with the protective deity Natha in Sri Lanka.<sup>749</sup> In Section 2.2.1, I described how Avalokitesvara turned from a Mahayana *bodhisatta* into a guardian deity in Sri Lanka and how that was reflected in the iconography: from ascetic to royal.



**Figure 6.16** (left): Large granite Ravana statue and the Ravana statue in seated position behind it.

**Figure 6.17** (right): The small Ravana statue, placed on the wishing rock, behind the large granite statue. Both statues are undressed for the weekly *nanumura*. Pictures taken by Martijn Stoutjesdijk, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.

<sup>748</sup> Sumangala *Thero* explained in an interview that the leaders of the different tribes were *rishis* and that because Ravana was born from the daughter of the leader of the *yakshas* he could therefore be considered a *rishi*. Interview with Sumangala *Thero*, June 5, 2017. On Ravana as a *rishi* see also Section 6.2.2.

<sup>749</sup> Interview with Kolonave Siri Sumangala *Thero*, chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, May 11, 2018. When I visited one of the *devalayas* in Kandy and asked about Natha, the lay custodian started to elaborate on Maitreya *bodhisatta*. Informal conversation with lay custodian of one of the *devalayas*, Kandy, March 28, 2018.

<sup>749</sup> Interview with Sumangala *Thero*, June 5, 2017.

The Natha *bodhisatta* statue at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya is also regarded by Sumangala *Thero* to be Ravana since he considers them the same. According to Sumangala *Thero*, they have a similar aspiration: to save all creatures.<sup>750</sup> Some people attached to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya mentioned that Ravana could be considered a (future) *bodhisatta*.<sup>751</sup> The president of the popular research group the *Ravana Shakthi* explained that the *bodhisatta* Ravana is going to attain enlightenment in the future.<sup>752</sup> The leader of an *angampora* group who performed in the Ravana *perahera* explained that the Buddha prophesied that he (that is, Ravana) will return in 5,000 years as the future Buddha Maitreya. The activities of the *angampora* leader and his group are done to prepare the surroundings for the coming of Ravana whom they considered Maitreya.<sup>753</sup>

The representation of Ravana as *bodhisatta* holds the promise that the glorious days of the past will revive in Sri Lanka and that the country will flourish again. In addition, although the idea that Ravana is a *bodhisatta* is not widely shared – or openly discussed – it follows a pattern not alien to Sinhalese Buddhists. Michael Roberts, for instance, has mentioned that (at the time of colonisation) kings in south central Sri Lanka were considered as *cakravarti* kings, *bodhisattas*, and addressed as deities.<sup>754</sup>

One of the remarkable iconographic differences of the large Ravana statue with the Avalokitesvara statue at Maligawila is the absence of *mudras* or hand gestures. Instead, the large Ravana statue shows him holding a book and a sword.<sup>755</sup> As Sumangala *Thero* explained when I asked him about these particular objects (translation):

Majesty is symbolised by the sword [*kaduva*], that he [Ravana] was powerful. It means that there is nothing he cannot do. That is symbolised by the sword [*asipatha*]. These times we gave the sword [*asipatha*] to his hand because the world

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<sup>750</sup> Interview with Sumangala *Thero*, June 5, 2017.

<sup>751</sup> This is a process not exclusive to Ravana. Gombrich and Obeyesekere have referred to some Sinhalese Buddhists who in the 1980s became devotees of the Indian guru Sai Baba and that '[...] some of these devotees hold that Sai Baba is the Buddhist god Nātha. The meaning of this ascription is that Nātha is traditionally considered to be the current incarnation of the next Buddha, Maitreya. These Buddhists have thus assimilated Sai Baba into the Buddhist pantheon and made him a Bodhisattva.' See: Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, 53.

<sup>752</sup> Interview with PR1, president *Ravana Shakthi*, Colombo, March 19, 2017.

<sup>753</sup> Informal conversation with AN2, leader of *angampora* group, Pannipitiya, May 1, 2016.

<sup>754</sup> Roberts, *Language and National Identity*, 81.

<sup>755</sup> Ravana also holds these two objects in the depiction designed by Arisen Ahubudhu, and this depiction has become common in Sri Lanka (see Section 4.2.1). A Sri Lankan deity keeping a sword and an *ola* leaf book is Suniyam (Huniyam) or *Gambara deviyo*. On Suniyam and these objects, see: Kapferer, B. (2006), *Beyond Rationalism, Rethinking Magic, Witchcraft and Sorcery*, New York: Berghahn, 122. The *ola* leaf book and the sword are also attributes belonging to a very popular Mahayana Buddhist *bodhisatta* Manjushri: 'Mañuśri wields a Vajra sword to cut through the entanglements of ignorance, conquering all doubt and confusion [...] his sword is in Mahāyāna literature a symbol for discriminating insight and knowledge, and for slicing through all discriminations and their snares. [...] along with the sword, which is generally held in his right hand, Mañuśri often carries a scroll of text in his left hand [...]' See: Leighton, T. D. (2012), *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expressions: An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism* (Rev. ed.), Sommerville: Wisdom Publications, 110.

is full of injustice, unfairness and evil. All of those things must be destroyed and ended. That is why for the black stone statue in the present day, we gave the sword [*asipatha*]. [The book symbolises] justice, fairness and law as well as medicine [...] all intelligence; because we cannot keep the brain in the hand, we give the book.<sup>756</sup>

Most of the visitors of the Ravana *mandiraya* did not notice these two attributes – nor any of the other iconographic elements of the statue – and I only received answers about the meaning of these attributes by showing them pictures of the statue. Some gave multiple interpretations like the monk, while others had no idea. People frequently mentioned Ravana’s knowledge on medicine or medical spells when I asked them to specify what knowledge the book represented.<sup>757</sup> The sword is also open to multiple interpretations like justice, power, bravery, fighting and kingship.<sup>758</sup>

In Chapter 3, I referred to the religious studies scholar David Morgan. He has mentioned that scholars should not limit their studies to iconography or style but investigate how objects are used in a particular context and how people respond to them. My exploration shows that iconic elements are often of limited relevance to most laypeople. Some of them only noticed these objects when I showed them the picture. What is of relevance, however, is the function of the statue and the *mandiraya* in rituals. I discuss that in detail in the following sections.

### Reflection 6.2.1

I have introduced the Ravana *mandiraya* and the main statue in the *mandiraya* as starting points to discuss some Ravana representations in more detail in the following sections. Since most of the Ravana rituals take place within the *mandiraya*, this building is of central importance to my exploration of *Ravanisation* at this Buddhist site. Also, the *mandiraya* is located very close to the main entrance, and the hall with the colourful murals is on day-time open to visitors.

In the section on ethno-nationalism in Chapter 3, I mentioned one of Anthony Smith’s core ideas that ethno-nationalists reconstruct a new set of ideas derived from pre-existing myth-symbol complexes. The Ravana *mandiraya* and its objects illustrate this ethno-nationalist dynamic at work in the material sphere. The murals illustrate the eclectic appropriation of several texts and traditions: characters known from the *Mahavamsa*, the *Ramayana*, and (indirectly) the *Lankavatara Sutra* are mentioned and displayed. Out of this eclectic appropriation emerges a representation of Ravana as heroic king of the Sinhalese.

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<sup>756</sup> Interview with Sumangala Thero, May 11, 2018. He added that they also tried to put, in addition to the *ola* leaf book, a lotus into the hands of the statue as symbol of Ravana’s wish to be a Buddha involved in worldly matters. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Asipata,’ 60, ‘Kaduwa,’ 100; Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, ‘asipathá,’ 120.

<sup>757</sup> Interview with Sumangala Thero, May 11, 2018. On Ravana and medicinal knowledge, see Section 4.3.

<sup>758</sup> These interpretations are examples of answers given by people who were closely involved in the rituals performed to Ravana at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. Their answers show that a variety of interpretations even exists among the people who regularly visit the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya.



When references to the *Ramayana* are made, they are modified such that the text is made to contribute to the apotheosis of Ravana: the ten-headed Ravana is transformed into a ten-skilled Ravana, and his defeat by Rama is turned into millenarian expectations as his body remains preserved and he is believed to wake up. These millenarian ideals are also framed in a Buddhist way by references to Ravana as a *bodhisatta*, and this future expectation fits ethno-nationalist revitalisations.<sup>759</sup>

In general, the Ravana *mandiraya* reveals the effort to embed Ravana in the Sinhalese Buddhist tradition. This is disclosed in the ‘prophesy’ about the location of the *mandiraya* maintaining that the *mandiraya* is built at the spot where Ravana met one of the previous Buddhas (Kashyapa Buddha). Also, on the outer wall Ravana and his family are placed in the line of Buddhist monarchs. The granite stone slabs around the *mandiraya* also contribute to the idea of a Sinhalese Buddhist Ravana ‘tradition.’

### 6.2.2 The Representation of Ravana as (Aspirant) Deity

This section explores the representation of Ravana as (aspirant) deity emerging at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. I first discuss the *puja* and the general function of this ritual in Sri Lankan Buddhism. Then I describe some details of the Ravana *puja* as conducted at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. I continue to reflect on which Ravana representations are materialised and ritualised in the Ravana *puja* and how, and on what the relevance might be of Ravana as (aspirant) deity for the recent interest in Ravana.

#### The *puja* in Sri Lankan Buddhism and the Ravana *puja* as *deva puja*

*Puja* can be translated as ‘offering’ or ‘rite of worship’ and is defined in the context of Sri Lankan Buddhism by Gombrich and Obeyesekere as ‘[...] the formal act of worship carried out before a god or a Buddha image.’<sup>760</sup> The *puja* involves bowing, making offerings (of flowers, candles, incense, etc.), and chanting, and can be conducted at home or at the temple.<sup>761</sup>

I pointed out in Chapter 2 that deities and other semi-divine beings are part of the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon. The deities are considered to be more involved in daily matters than the Buddha. Therefore, laypeople seek their help in life-matters such as employment, examinations, and illnesses. In addition to a *puja* performed at home, they can go to a *devalaya* to conduct a *baraya* (vow) in which they promise to offer merit to the

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<sup>759</sup> I use here the concept millenarian as John Holt employs it in his description of how the Indian guru Sai Baba was considered by some Sinhalese Buddhists as the future Buddha Maitreya. He has mentioned that this equation did not result in millenarian or revitalisation ideals in Sri Lanka. See Section 2.2.1.

<sup>760</sup> Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, xvi. Holt has translated *puja* as ‘rite of worship.’ See: Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 16. In the glossary of *The Buddha in Sri Lanka* the *puja* is referred to as offering: Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 310.

<sup>761</sup> Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 240.

deity if the vow is fulfilled.<sup>762</sup> In the so-called *deva puja*, offerings are also essential (see Section 2.2.2).<sup>763</sup>

Lay custodians or *kapuralas* are in charge of the *devalayas*.<sup>764</sup> The designation *kapurala* denotes the mediating function of this person between the laypeople and the deity: it is derived from the word *kapuva* that means 'go-between'.<sup>765</sup> The statues in the *devalayas* are most often placed behind a plastic screen, and only the lay custodian has the privilege to see them, although exceptions are sometimes made for rich people and also for me as researcher.<sup>766</sup>



**Figure 6.18** (left): Offerings for the Ravana *puja* taken in procession to the Ravana *mandiraya*.

**Figure 6.19** (top right): Plate with pieces of fruit employed as offering in Ravana *puja*.

**Figure 6.20** (bottom right): Large silver cups used to store the different liquids that are used to anoint the statues in the Ravana *nanumura*. Pictures taken by author, Pannipitiya, April 4, 2018, March 21, 2018, & March 22, 2018.

<sup>762</sup> Disanayaka, J. B. (1998), *Understanding the Sinhalese*, Colombo: Godage, 178.

<sup>763</sup> Wickremeratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 223. As Wickremeratne has indicated, the symbolic meal offered to the Buddha in the Buddha *puja* is not eaten whereas the food offered in the *deva puja* is given to devotees because it is considered to be blessed.

<sup>764</sup> Disanayaka, *Understanding the Sinhalese*, 177.

<sup>765</sup> Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, 19. A *kapurala* or *kapu mahaththaya* is defined as the priest of a deity shrine (*devalaya*) or the priest of a deity (*deva*) cult of the Sri Lankan pantheon. Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 374; Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, 3.

<sup>766</sup> Wickremeratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 224. I have seen some statues in *devalayas* behind the curtains but was not allowed to give out the information.

The present lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya* and his wife are in their mid-thirties and are part of the 'Ravana committee.'<sup>767</sup> There are around twelve volunteers on this committee. These volunteers (mainly women) assist on Sundays in the preparations of the Ravana *puja*. Although Ravana is most often referred to as king at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya – and even his shrine is referred to as a *mandiraya* (palace) instead of a *devalaya* (shrine) – he becomes present as (aspirant) deity in the weekly *puja*. Most deities in the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon are considered alleged historical persons who passed away. After that, they have turned into deities by gaining merit through the attention paid to them by devotees.<sup>768</sup> This was mentioned by one of the participants in the Ravana *puja* as the exact reason why Ravana *pujas* should be performed. She explained that (translation):

DP1: [Ravana] ruled as a king, now he is a god. He's currently unconscious. [The monk] does all this to make him into the state of a god [*devathvaya*] [...]. If we worship him we get some kind of a blessing and power [*balaya*] from it.

Res: Do you believe Ravana will wake up?

DP1: Ravana is turning into the state of a god [*devathvaya*].<sup>769</sup>

And as explained by the lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*:

Res: So if you do those *pujas* then...?

DO4: [...] His [Ravana's] power is increasing. That is our target. Our target is increasing his power.<sup>770</sup>

The Ravana *puja* is similar to the *deva puja* in the alleged impact it has on the (aspirant) deity – in this case Ravana. In the following sections I focus in more detail on the interdependence of devotees and Ravana as (aspirant) deity.

### Brief description of the Ravana *puja*

The weekly Ravana *puja* is one of the public Ravana rituals performed under the responsibility of the lay custodian. Although – compared to the annual Ravana rituals organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya – the number of participants is relatively small (between ten and twenty-five people join for the ritual), the ritual itself is rather extensive:

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<sup>767</sup> The present lay custodian explained that he was appointed by Sumangala *Thero* approximately one year after the inauguration of the *mandiraya*. Someone else was in charge of the *mandiraya* prior to his appointment but this person resigned due to personal reasons. Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, April 2, 2017.

<sup>768</sup> Wickremeratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 225.

<sup>769</sup> Informal conversation with DP1, participant in Ravana *puja*, Pannipitiya, May 21, 2017. It is for this reason that I use the word aspirant here.

<sup>770</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, April 2, 2017.

it has to be conducted on Sunday evenings after 6:00pm exactly in the way it is prescribed by Sumangala *Thero*, and it takes around one to one-and-a-half hours.<sup>771</sup>

The preparations start well before the actual Ravana *puja*. The lay custodian and his assistant(s) have to stay vegetarian on Saturday and Sunday,<sup>772</sup> must take a bath, and change their clothes before entering the inner sanctum. They are fully dressed in traditional white clothes (sarong and shirt), cover their mouth and hair when they take the offering plates to the inner sanctum, and have the same appearance as the *kapuralas* (see Figure 6.18). However, they are not referred to as such.<sup>773</sup> I was told that they are only around once a week and that a *kapurala* has to be there more often.<sup>774</sup>

Ideally the Ravana *puja* is sponsored by a devotee. The reasons to sponsor a *puja* are, according to the lay custodian, problems with court cases, and education and exams of children.<sup>775</sup> Also, some of the people sponsoring the *puja* explained that they had made a vow and the family members of a person who had met an accident, came to sponsor the *puja* after he recovered.<sup>776</sup>

The preparations that take place prior to the *puja* are not attended or witnessed by visitors. For instance, the *mandiraya* and the stairs are swept, junior monks chant inside the *mandiraya* (if they are around to do so),<sup>777</sup> the main assistant walks around with burning pieces of coal, lights candles (also to the Ravana chariot),<sup>778</sup> and a drummer comes to

<sup>771</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, April 23, 2017.

<sup>772</sup> Informal conversation with DO16, assistant of the lay custodian, Pannipitiya, April 23, 2017. Also, when I sponsored the Ravana *puja* and my husband went inside the inner sanctum on May 7, 2017, he was asked to stay vegetarian on Saturday and Sunday and I had to get him a white sarong.

<sup>773</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, April 23, 2017.

<sup>774</sup> Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, April 16, 2017. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya the lay custodians have regular jobs and perform with the help of others the duties on the times and days appointed by the *Thero*. The function of the *kapurala* is a hereditary position. Wickremeratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka*, 224. This is not the case with the lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya* as it is a recently developed site and 'new' people are appointed.

<sup>775</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, April 16, 2017. Even if there is no sponsor, the Ravana *puja* has to be conducted. In such cases, the volunteers use ingredients that they have in stock to prepare the required liquids for the *nanumura* (anointing) of the statues, and some volunteers will get fruits and sweets for the offerings. The ritual is smaller than extensive *pujas* sponsored by outsiders although some minimum requirements have to be met. Depending on the sponsor and the number of participants, there are varieties in how long the *puja* takes and what exactly is offered.

<sup>776</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, April 16, 2017. On the day that I sponsored an extensive Ravana *puja* with my husband, a family also came with some *puja* ingredients. These were added to the offerings that I bought. The lay custodian explained that the father had met an accident, and this was the reason for them to sponsor the *puja*. Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.

<sup>777</sup> In 2017, there were a lot of monks around and I noticed a couple of times that they came to chant in the Ravana *mandiraya* prior to the *puja*.

<sup>778</sup> It was only the main assistant of the lay custodian who walked around the Ravana chariot. He explained that the chariot should be treated with respect since Ravana's weapons are taken around on this chariot in the annual *perahera*. Informal conversation with DO16, April 23, 2017.

drum in front of all the shrines at the shrine section.<sup>779</sup> He then continues the drumming in the Ravana *mandiraya* as long as the *nanumura* (anointing of the statues) takes place in the inner sanctum.

The *nanumura* (ceremony of bathing and anointing)<sup>780</sup> is considered the most important part of the ritual and it precedes the Ravana *puja*.<sup>781</sup> For the *nanumura*, approximately eleven liquids stored in large silver cups are used to bathe the statues (see on the substances also Section 6.2.2.1 and see Figure 6.20). In addition to cups that contain milk, king coconut, and water mixed with powders such as rice flour, red and white sandalwood, one empty cup is taken to the Saman/Vishnu *mandiraya* and the water taken from the well inside the *mandiraya* is used to bathe the statues.<sup>782</sup> The cups are taken by the lay custodian, his assistant(s), and sometimes by the male sponsor of the *puja* inside the inner sanctum. There, they undress the first two Ravana statues and the granite statues are rubbed with sesame oil.<sup>783</sup> Then, the cups with liquids are used one by one to bathe the first two Ravana statues. Each liquid is first via a conch shell poured out over the large granite statue, then the same liquid is also via the conch shell poured out over the small

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<sup>779</sup> This drummer is around 35 years old and belongs to a family of traditional low-country drummers devoted to Paththini. Informal conversation with DO18, relative of the drummer, Pannipitiya, March 21, 2017. He and his family members are also involved in some of the rituals in the festival week. In addition to these ‘special ceremonies’ the drummer (without his family members) comes to drum only for Ravana (and not, for instance, Mahamaya). He does not attend the Ravana *puja* but leaves after the *nanumura* is finished.

<sup>780</sup> Gombrich (2009), *Buddhist Precept and Practice*, 400. See on the *nanumura* also Section 6.2.2.1.

<sup>781</sup> Informal conversation with DO16, April 23, 2017. That the *nanumura* is the most important part of the ritual was mentioned on a Sunday evening when one of the monks lost the key to the inner sanctum. The volunteers planned to place the offering plates in front of the door, but they could not perform the *nanumura* which was, as the lay custodian explained, the most important part. Luckily, they found the key. This incident took place on April 23, 2017.

<sup>782</sup> Informal conversation with DO13, February 27, 2018. As he mentioned: ‘normally we are getting the water to get the *maha* Ravana statue from the Vishnu *devalaya* [...] we get the water from this spot from that well and bathe the *maha* Ravana statue and another king coconut water and lake water and other one is water of the rice, water of rice and some herbal things.’ Examples given of the substances used to bathe the statues by the assistant of the lay custodian were (water with) white sandalwood, red sandalwood, turmeric water, and milk: informal conversation with DO16, April 23, 2017. I received a list from one of the main caretakers of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya of all the ingredients they use to bathe the Ravana statues on a regular Sunday evening and for the annual *maha* Ravana *nanumura mangalyaya*. For the regular *nanumura* ritual he wrote down fourteen ingredients (but he did not include the water from the Vishnu/Saman well) and I often counted eleven cups in the kitchen, so there might be slight differences in the actual number of liquids used. He also included sesame oil as the first ingredient, and this is not taken in a cup but from a bottle to anoint the statue prior to the bathing of the statues with the liquids from the cups. The lay custodian mentioned that they use twelve ingredients and also explained that it did not include the water taken from the Saman/Vishnu well. Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, June 4, 2017.

<sup>783</sup> The lay custodian mentioned that they rub the statues with sesame oil prior to the bathing and rub them with sandalwood after the *nanumura*. Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, June 4, 2017. According to my husband, who assisted once in the *nanumura*, they apply sandalwood oil on the statues with the hands after the bathing. Information received from Martijn Stoutjesdijk, observation and participation in the *nanumura*, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.

black statue behind it, and last the liquid is again poured out over the large granite statue. Between the pouring of each liquid, the statues are in similar sequence cleaned with water.<sup>784</sup> Finally the statues are rubbed with sandalwood and dressed in new clothes.

The *nanumura* takes place in the inner sanctum behind a closed door out of the sight of attendants of the ritual. Only the lay custodian, his assistant(s), and the male sponsor of the *puja* are allowed to conduct the *nanumura*, and women have to wait outside the *mandiraya* when the *nanumura* takes place. While they pour out the liquids, they chant *gathas* by which they invite Ravana.<sup>785</sup> Meanwhile the volunteers prepare the offerings: a plate with small cups with three oil lamps (ghee, sesame oil, and mustard oil), baskets with flowers, and two plates with nine different types of indigenous fruits (washed in turmeric water and cut into pieces)<sup>786</sup> and nine different types of sweets (see Figure 6.19).<sup>787</sup> Often *muruthen bath* (brown sticky sweetened rice) was brought from the kitchen and added to the offerings.<sup>788</sup> The plates, covered with clothes decorated with *svastikas*, are then brought in procession from the kitchen to the entrance of the *mandiraya* (see Figure 6.18). Women are allowed to carry these plates, but only up to the entrance of the *mandiraya*. The bringing of the offerings in procession officially marks the start of the Ravana *puja*. After the plates and baskets are placed inside the inner sanctum, the people are invited to sit down on the stairs of the *mandiraya* and liturgies are handed out. Together with the lay custodian (who sits down with his assistants on the floor in the *mandiraya*), they chant the special Ravana songs composed by Sumangala *Thero*. This chanting session lasts for approximately half an hour, and it is followed by a word of thanks to the sponsor of the *puja* by the lay custodian. The plates with food items and three cups of liquids – used for the *nanumura* and collected after that – are taken out the inner sanctum. The people outside the *mandiraya* are then asked to symbolically wash their feet with turmeric water, to enter the *mandiraya*, and to bow in reverence to the freshly anointed and newly dressed Ravana statue(s). After that, the attendants are served the fruits, sweets, some of the liquids, and *muruthen bath* outside the *mandiraya*.

The congregational chanting starts with such well-known Buddhist *gathas* as the mantra to take refuge in the triple gem (Buddha, *dhamma*, *sangha*) and the *Itipiso bagava* in which Buddha's greatness is praised. This general introduction is followed by special Ravana *gathas*, poems, and invocations. These were composed by Sumangala *Thero* around the time of the inauguration of the *mandiraya* and published in 2013 in his first

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<sup>784</sup> This was explained to me by my husband who participated in the *nanumura* on May 7, 2017. There is a water tap inside the inner sanctum to bathe the statues between the different liquids are poured out.

<sup>785</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.

<sup>786</sup> When I sponsored the *puja* on May 7, 2017, I bought ten different types of fruits, including grapes, bananas, and pomegranate. The volunteers left out the avocado since that fruit was considered not indigenous. Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.

<sup>787</sup> The sweets are not candies but often included pieces of gingelly rolls (made out of jaggery and sesame seeds) and *kaju bol* (translated as peanut ball on the package, made out of cashew nut, sugar and glucose).

<sup>788</sup> Informal conversation with DO5, wife of the lay custodian, Pannipitiya, May 21, 2017.

book on Ravana.<sup>789</sup> This section of the liturgy contains approximately twelve different elements and a poetical translation of a selection of stanzas is given here. The first element of the liturgy is the 'Sri Ravana *vandanava*' (the worship of Sri Ravana):<sup>790</sup>

May god Ravana [Ravana *deva*] be worshipped  
The lord of the Yakkha and Gandabbha armies and the whole earth,  
Who sits on a god's throne

I worship god Ravana  
Who's the lord for the land of Lanka  
I worship the heroism and the power of his highness

The '*maha Ravana pujave di gayana kavi*' are invitation poems. All sentences of the nine stanzas end with *deviyo* (god), but multiple other Ravana representations and ideas are formulated in these stanzas as well.<sup>791</sup> I give a poetic translation of a selection of the stanzas from these invitation poems:

- (1) The god [*deviyo*] who arrives on the *dandu monara*  
The god who arrives on the great tusker  
The god who owns the four-fold armies  
May god Ravana arrive
- (2) The great god with ten heads [*his dahayak*]  
The great god with twenty arms  
The great god with ten powers  
May god Ravana arrive
- (3) The great god who's a physician [*veda duru*] and a great king  
The great god who brought prosperity to paddy fields  
The great god who used the light of the sun  
May god Ravana arrive
- (6) The great god who won the whole world  
The great god who gave life to the land of the Hela  
The great god worshipped by the threefold worlds  
May god Ravana arrive

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<sup>789</sup> A girl who came for the Ravana *puja* explained, that she has been around since the construction of the *mandiraya* and that at that time the Ravana *gathas* and *kavis* (poems) composed by Sumangala Thero were already used in the rituals. Informal conversation with DP1, May 21, 2017. Most of the *gathas* are published in the first Ravana book written by Sumangala Thero: *Kolonave Siri Sumangala Thero, Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, 47-58.

<sup>790</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Wandana,' 564.

<sup>791</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Devi,' 256.

- (9) The god who saw the legacy [*urumaya*] of the Hela  
 The god who is the life of the Hela  
 The god who gives life to the Hela people  
 May god Ravana arrive

The '*punya-numodana gatha*' (transferring of merits stanza), which is chanted at the end of the *puja*, praises Ravana's greatness but also shows the reciprocity of giving and receiving of devotees and Ravana as (aspirant) deity (poetic translation):

The great Ravana who empowered the world with the ten powers  
 The heroic great king, Ravana,  
 May he be further empowered and  
 Obtain merits and console the people of the world

### **The materialising and ritualising of Ravana representations in the Ravana *puja***

In the stanzas of the liturgy presented above, multiple Ravana representations are referred to (the concept of *dasis* Ravana, for instance), some are explicitly mentioned (Ravana's alleged ability to travel with the *dandu monaraya*, his capability as physician, etc.), and his heroic deeds as a great king are praised. Remarkable are the references to him as leader of the armies and militaries, indicating that Ravana was as a warrior king. This particular representation is even more explicated in the annual *maha* Ravana *perahera* (see Section 6.2.3). There is also a strong tendency to relate him as king to Lanka and the inhabitants of ancient Lanka: the Hela. In the *puja*, it is explicitly said that Ravana is one of them (the Sinhalese), and this ritual itself with for instance the chanting of Buddhist *gathas*, places Ravana in a Sinhalese Buddhist devotional framework.

Like the suggestion made above to look not only at the iconography but also at how people respond to images and statues, it is important to look at what actually happens at the time of the *puja*, and at how the statues and the stanzas are employed. In this ritual, although Ravana is often referred to as king, Ravana is invited as a deity, he is addressed in the liturgy as a deity (by using the words *deva* or *deviyo*), and he is treated as (aspirant) deity through the anointing and offerings. Moreover, he is believed to gain power through the attention paid to him by people, and the transferring of merit stanza illustrates the reciprocity of Ravana as (aspirant) deity and devotees.

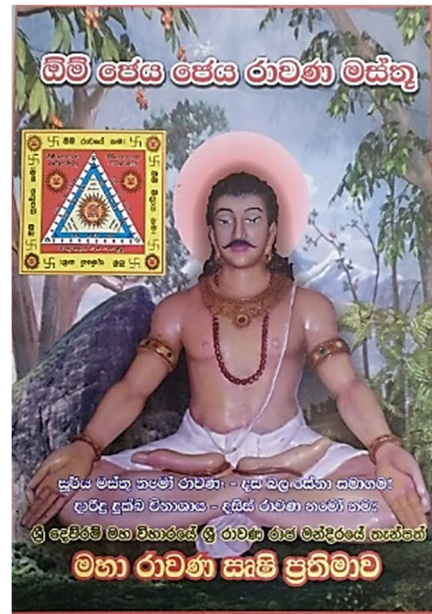
In Chapter 3, I mentioned that rituals primarily relate to human emotions and that they evoke multi-sensorial experiences (see Koster and Nugteren in Section 3.3.2). The main granite statue might be central to evoking these emotions because it represents Ravana himself at the time of the ritual. As the statue remains present in the shrine on weekdays, something should happen to turn the statue into a representation of Ravana as (aspirant) deity at the time of the *puja*. This happens, for instance, through the chanting of the *gathas*, the ritual drumming, the lighting of oil lamps, the bringing of offerings, and so on. Through the sound of drumming and the blowing of the conch, Ravana is invited to be present in the statue(s). The most important part of the ritual, the *nanumura*, is the climax of the ritual nurture of Ravana.



In Chapter 3, I referred to Jennifer Scheper Hughes who has argued that images of deities and statues are often affectionally engaged by devotees.<sup>792</sup> The extensive bathing of the large granite Ravana statue (and the small statue behind it), the rubbing of the statues with different types of oil, the dressing up and adorning of the statues, as well as the chanting and presentation of offerings to Ravana direct our attention to several important functions that the materialising and ritualising of Ravana at a Buddhist site might play: the Ravana statues create the possibility to make Ravana present at the time of the *puja* and to relate to Ravana in the present in multiple ways. In the material form of a statue Ravana can be ritually and affectionally nurtured as (aspirant) deity by his devotees. In this ritual nurturing Ravana’s senses are allegedly pleased by sounds, incense, foods and drinks, oil lamps, flowers, and the bathing. Laypeople, and especially the lay custodians and sponsors of the *puja*, take part in this multi-sensorial experience as they smell the incense, see the oil lamps, hear and participate in the drumming and chanting, and consume several of the offerings. Furthermore, since the *puja* is congregational, the experiences can be shared with other devotees. For instance, a lady who frequently participated in the Ravana *puja* once invited me to join her to pick some jasmine flowers to ‘give’ to Ravana after the *puja*, and we went together to select the best jasmine flowers we could find in the area. We shared the flowers with other devotees who also offered them to Ravana at the end of the *puja*.



**Figure 6.21** (left): Statues of Ravana as sold at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. On the left side is a small statue of Ravana as *rishi* and on the right side a statue of Ravana as ‘Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana.’



**Figure 6.22** (right): Protective card sold at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya that includes a Ravana *gatha*, depiction of Ravana as *rishi* and protective *yantra*(ya).

<sup>792</sup> Scheper Hughes, *Cradling the Sacred*, 106.

The materialising and ritualising of Ravana in a devotional framework creates the opportunity for people with an interest in Ravana to have multi-sensory experiences of Ravana. This is a distinctive function of the ritualising and materialising of Ravana for *Ravanisation* as it opens up the possibility to experience and meaningfully relate to Ravana in the present. In the following subsection I focus on how the materialising and ritualising of the representation of Ravana as healer might bring Ravana one more step closer to his devotees.

### Box 6.3: Ritual Paraphernalia For Sale

Ravana statues have been sold at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya since approximately 2015.<sup>793</sup> There are two designs in different colours (see Figure 6.21): the large statue of Ravana as king available in grey/black stone colour and gold (6,000 rupees) and the smaller statue of Ravana as *rishi* at that time (2017) available in black, white, and gold colour (3,000 rupees).

The two designs are related to two Ravana representations that Sumangala Thero actively promotes. The large statue bears the subscript 'Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana.'<sup>794</sup> This statue shows Ravana with royal adornments and relates Ravana (as king) to Sri Lanka (see on the representation of Ravana as ancient king Section 6.2.3). The other Ravana statue depicts Ravana as a *rishi* or as the subscript says: 'Maha Ravana Rishituma.' This statue shows him dressed in a simple way and holding a cup. Sumangala Thero related Ravana's *rishi* doctrine to healing; Ravana does not want people to fall ill and die.<sup>795</sup> The representation of Ravana as *rishi* as actively promoted at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya discloses Ravana's alleged developed mind and knowledge (healing in particular) which he used to help the people.<sup>796</sup>

The popular Ravana books for sale at the site contain general information on the Hela civilisation. In addition, the final part of the book contains prescriptions to conduct a Ravana *puja*. It prescribes that the triple gem should be worshipped, *pirith* should be chanted, and the five precepts preserved prior to conducting a Ravana *puja*, thus integrating Ravana in a Buddhist devotional framework. The instructions also include a table with the appropriate times to conduct a Ravana *puja*, the ingredients that must be used, as well as the food items, types of flowers, and oil that should be offered to Ravana. Also, it contains the songs composed by Sumangala Thero that are chanted in the weekly Ravana *puja* (see Section 6.2.2.1).

<sup>793</sup> I paid 6,000 rupees for the large Ravana statue. At that time (March 12, 2017) it was approximately 40 euros. Prior to the selling of the Ravana statues in the shops people could ask for the statues as well. Informal conversation with DO14, volunteer working at the new shop, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2017. Mahamaya statues are sold at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya since approximately 2012. Group conversation DG1, March 21, 2017.

<sup>794</sup> *Lankeshvara* translates as lord of Lanka. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Lankēśwara,' 543.

<sup>795</sup> Informal conversation with Sumangala Thero, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2017.

<sup>796</sup> According to Sumangala Thero, men who have meditated and attained a developed mind were called *rishis* in the past. *Rishis* could see the future and predict the problems people would face, including their illnesses. Since they helped people, the *rishis* were organically selected by the people as their leaders. Ravana learned the *rishi* doctrine via his grandfather (*rishi* Pulasthi) and father (*rishi* Vishravasa). Under the leadership of *rishi* Pulasthi thousands of doctors were trained and medical centres were opened. The symbol of these medical centres was the *svastika*, and according to Sumangala Thero the present-day symbol of the red cross is evolved from the *svastika*. Ravana followed the *rishi* doctrine and introduced even certain specific Ayurvedic techniques. Sumangala, *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, 7-13; Interview with Sumangala Thero, June 5, 2017.

In addition to statues and books, protective cards are sold. This card includes a Ravana *gatha*, depictions of Ravana as *rishi*, and a protective *yantra* (or *yantraya* mystical diagram, see Figure 6.22).<sup>797</sup> When I bought a card, one of the volunteers told several stories of how this card has provided protection to other people who bought it.<sup>798</sup>

The ritual function of the statues and the uniqueness of this Buddhist site in producing Ravana statues for sale became prominent when a young man who lived approximately 40 kilometres from Colombo attended the Ravana *puja* on a Sunday evening. Prior to the *puja*, he had bought a Ravana statue in the shop and it was consecrated by placing it in the inner sanctum at the time the Ravana *nanumura* and *puja* took place.<sup>799</sup> The day after, the young man sent me a picture of his home shrine, and it showed the statue with several offerings, including a lamp, flowers, and a herbal mixture called *kola kenda* (see Section 6.2.2.1 on *kola kenda*).<sup>800</sup> This temple not only provides people with the opportunity to conduct rituals to Ravana at the site, but the statues, protective cards, and books reveal the effort of the monk to facilitate devotional engagement to Ravana in general.

### 6.2.2.1 The Representation of Ravana as Healer

I mentioned in the previous section that the *nanumura* or anointing is part of the weekly Ravana *puja*. *Nanumura* is derived from the verb *nanava* that means ‘to bathe.’<sup>801</sup> *Nanumura* (as a ritual) is referred to by H. L. Seneviratne as ‘washing rite,’ ‘bathing of consecrated images’ by John Holt, and by Richard Gombrich as the ‘ceremony of bathing and anointing a Buddha image.’<sup>802</sup> The distinctive element of the ritual is the use of liquids to anoint, wash, or bathe an object.<sup>803</sup>

The *nanumura mangalyaya* or festival of anointing is annually performed at several famous sites in Sri Lanka for instance Kataragama, the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, and Bellanvila Raja Maha Viharaya in Colombo.<sup>804</sup> In *Rituals of the Kandyan State*,

<sup>797</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Yantra,’ 509.

<sup>798</sup> Group conversation DG1, May 31, 2017.

<sup>799</sup> Observation of the Ravana *puja* and informal conversation with DP3, attendant of Ravana *puja*, Pannipitiya, March 12, 2017.

<sup>800</sup> Phone conversation with DP3, attendant of Ravana *puja*, Colombo, March 16, 2017.

<sup>801</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Nánawá,’ 284.

<sup>802</sup> Seneviratne, H. L. (1978), *Rituals of the Kandyan State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 60; Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 184; Gombrich (2009), *Buddhist Precept and Practice*, 400. According to a ritual Gombrich observed, no laymen were allowed to witness the ritual and an exception was made for him as a researcher. As I also noticed, details of the ritual are often not shared with outsiders. At several shrines at Kataragama and Kandy I tried to gather information on the *nanumura*, but most of the lay custodians were reluctant to give out information on this particular ritual. The ones who did stressed that they normally do not share the details with outsiders (fieldwork Kataragama, April 17, 2018; fieldwork Kandy, March 27, 2018, till March 29, 2018).

<sup>803</sup> I observed in one of the rural villages in Sri Lanka that the ritual is not limited to the anointing of (Buddha) images. As part of the annual village ritual (*yakkama*), attributes belonging to multiple deities were taken out of the village shrine to be anointed at the riverbanks (see Section 7.2.2). Fieldwork research on the annual village *yakkama*, Narangamuva, May 17, 2017.

<sup>804</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Nánawá,’ 284, ‘Maṅgalá,’ 450. At the Bellanvila Raja Maha Viharaya, a *nanumura mangalyaya* in the *devalayas* is performed three times per year: in January, around the time they have the annual *perahera*, and with the Sinhala New Year. Informal conversation with BRL,

Seneviratne has described in detail the *nanumura* at the Temple of the Tooth he observed in the 1970s.<sup>805</sup> For the *nanumura*, sandalwood water, sandalwood paste, a substance known as *nanu* (made out of crushed leaves of the shoe flower), and *mimuru* (made by crushing the seeds of the *mee* tree) were mixed together and used by a monk.<sup>806</sup> A mirror was kept in front of the casket whereby the relic was symbolically washed. The monk dipped three fingers in oil and rubbed it thrice on the mirror, then did the same with the *nanu* substance, and then again with water. The remainder of the *nanumura* oil was applied after the ritual to the foreheads of the people.<sup>807</sup>

When I observed the ritual in Kandy in 2018, I noticed that after the *nanumura* was finished a custodian took out one massive bowl that contained a warm, red-coloured substance.<sup>808</sup> The laypeople, who had waited in the queue for more than one hour, were served this substance, and they collected it in the small cups or bottles they had brought for this occasion. They applied the liquid (which is not oil) to their heads, or took it home in a bottle, because they believed that it brings healing and protects them from illnesses.<sup>809</sup> The collecting of liquids for healing purposes also stands out in the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*.

### Description of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*

One of the two annual rituals performed to Ravana at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya is the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* (great Ravana festival of anointing). This ritual immediately followed the annual procession held in March (see Section 6.2.3). When the

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lay custodian of one of the *devalayas* at the Bellanvila Raja Maha Viharaya, Bellanvila, March 16, 2018. The lay custodian of one of the *devalayas* at Kataragama also explained that he conducted a weekly and an annual *nanumura* in his *devalaya*. Informal conversation with KG1, the lay custodian of one of the *devalayas*, Kataragama, April 17, 2018.

<sup>805</sup> Seneviratne, *Rituals of the Kandyan State*, 56.

<sup>806</sup> He added that these four liquids are taken together with the usual *tepic* [*sic*] water. Seneviratne, *Rituals of the Kandyan State*, 59.

<sup>807</sup> This applying of oil relates according to Seneviratne to the Hindu *prasad* and the rituals performed at Buddhist *devalayas*: Seneviratne, *Rituals of the Kandyan State*, 31, 58-60. I was informed by two of the lay custodians of the four *devalayas* in Kandy that they also conduct a *nanumura* around New Year in their particular *devalayas*. Since they were reluctant to give out information, I do not specify to which particular *devalayas* they belong. I also had the opportunity to talk with the person who is in charge of blowing the conch (mentioned by Seneviratne as one of the keypersons in the *nanumura* ritual). He mentioned that his tasks come down from generations and that they have an annual *nanumura* called *khantasnanaya mangalyaya*. Informal conversation with KD2, the one in charge of blowing the conch at the temple of the tooth, Kandy, March 28, 2018. The *khantasnanaya* is also mentioned (as the annual *nanumura*) by Seneviratne: Seneviratne, *Rituals of the Kandyan State*, 60-62.

<sup>808</sup> The *kariya korala* referred to the people from this generation as the *rajakara*. Informal conversation with KD3, *kariya korala*, Kandy, March 28, 2018. Seneviratne mentions the *rajakariya* as a group of people who are paid as 'worshippers.' *Rajakariya* translates as 'duty to the king.' He also mentions the *Kariya karavana rala*: the lay official in charge of the secular administration of the ritual activities. Seneviratne, *Rituals of the Kandyan State*, 26. The *kariya korala*, mentioned that six or seven herbs are used in addition to white and red sandalwood.

<sup>809</sup> Observation of the ritual and informal conversations with the people waiting in the queue, Kandy, March 28, 2018.



procession ended at around 2:00 a.m. extensive preparations began for the *maha* Ravana *nanumura mangalyaya*. By around 4:00 a.m. the liquids used to anoint the Ravana statues and offerings were ready. The bathing of the statues (the one in the front and a small one behind it) then started within the inner sanctum of the Ravana *mandiraya* after a group of people involved in the water cutting ceremony left for the Kelaniya River.<sup>810</sup>

The Ravana *mandiraya* is built with a special drainage system: behind the 'tower' of the *mandiraya* (which contains the sanctum with the statues), there is a small space where the substances were collected during the annual ritual (see Figure 6.23). People anointed their heads with the liquids or collected them in bottles. On a regular Sunday evening, the liquids also drain to this small space, but it is only during the *maha* Ravana *nanumura mangalyaya* that between one hundred and two hundred people queued up in the early morning to collect the liquids from the back.



**Figure 6.23:** People queuing up at the back side of the Ravana *mandiraya* to 'bathe' themselves with the substances used for the *maha* Ravana *nanumura mangalyaya*. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, March 26, 2017.

<sup>810</sup> The water cutting ceremony is conducted in Sri Lanka after special festivities organised at Buddhist temples. In the context of the Kandyan *perahera*, this ceremony takes place at the Ganesh shrine after the final *perahera*. A bowl of water that was kept there for one year is taken out of the shrine and brought in procession to a pond or river where it is emptied. With ceremonial sticks and swords the river water is 'sliced.' The bowl is refilled and taken back to the Ganesh shrine where it is kept until the next year's festival. Younger, P. (2002), *Playing Host to Deity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 71-72.

After the flow of substances was finished, the people – mainly middle-aged women – had to wait for the group that left for the water cutting ceremony.<sup>811</sup> Around 9:30 a.m. this group returned with a cup of water collected at the Kelaniya River. The *kapu mahaththaya* took the covered bowl inside the *mandiraya*. This was followed by a Ravana *puja*. Plates containing oil lamps as well as food items (such as fruits, sticky rice, and sweets) were brought in procession to the *mandiraya* (see Figure 6.24). Similar to the Sunday evening *puja*, the laypeople waited outside and only joined in with the chanting. Then the offerings were taken out of the *mandiraya* and placed on tables temporarily set up at the right side of the *mandiraya*. The people now had to wash their feet with turmeric water and were allowed to enter the *mandiraya*. From the entrance on the left, they walked up to the stairs that lead to the inner sanctum to pay reverence to Ravana by kneeling before the statues. Leaving the *mandiraya* from the door at the right, they got the opportunity to consume the offerings.



**Figure 6.24:** Procession with the plates containing the items for the Ravana *puja* as part of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*. Picture taken by author, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018.

### The ritualising and materialising of the representation of Ravana as healer

According to Sumangala *Thero*, there are multiple reasons for him to organise Ravana rituals at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. For him, they oppose the negativity allegedly brought upon Ravana by the ritual of *dashara*, a festival celebrated by (North) Indians in

<sup>811</sup> Meanwhile they decorated the *mandiraya* with garlands of white jasmine flowers and strings with green twigs. In addition, oil lamps (some of them placed together to create the design of the *svastika*), incense, and torches were lit, and a footcloth was unrolled before the entrance.

which Ravana effigies are burnt to celebrate the triumph of good over evil (see Box 1.2). As Sumangala *Thero* explained (translation):

I do all of these things for Ravana because of the unlimited talents that Ravana had. When billions of people get together and curse him by saying that he is a villain, it is our responsibility to get together and to propagate that Ravana is good. We do all of this tribute to Ravana, because Ravana is not a destroyer of the world. Ravana is a person who keeps the world alive, a person whom the world needs. If Ravana is allowed to come back and is reborn to life and work like this, all of the solutions can be found to all of the problems in the world. Ravana should be respected more than this.<sup>812</sup>

In the annual *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, one skill attributed to Ravana stands out: his medicinal skills. Although the *nanumura* is an existing ritual in Sri Lankan Buddhism (and also sometimes related to healing), this particular *nanumura mangalyaya* is directed to Ravana and as such it has its own specific characteristics. In the remaining part of this section, I focus on how the representation of Ravana as healer is ritualised and materialised in the ritual and what the function of this ritual might be for *Ravanisation*.

On regular Sunday evenings, approximately eleven liquids are used to bathe two of the Ravana statues inside the Ravana *mandiraya*. For the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, more than twenty types of liquids are used to bathe the statues.<sup>813</sup> Also, a larger amount of each of the substances is prepared. For the annual *nanumura*, tubs the size of rain barrels are used. Also, the substances are handed over to the laypeople in a different way: people have the opportunity to anoint themselves with and collect the liquids at the back of the *mandiraya*.

Some of the people who came for the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* referred to the ritual with the term *abhisheka*.<sup>814</sup> *Abhisheka* is a ritual of anointing as part of the crowning ceremony of kings, and it is also used to denote the ritual anointing of statues (of divinities).<sup>815</sup> Sumangala *Thero's* secretary referred to the element of kingship in the ritual (translation):

<sup>812</sup> Interview with Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, June 5, 2017.

<sup>813</sup> On a list that I received from one of the main caretakers of the site in 2017, twenty-three ingredients for the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* were mentioned: sesame oil, rice flour, turmeric powder, raw turmeric, *vada* turmeric, *sandanam*, cows' milk/ buffalo milk, king coconut water, fruit sap, medicinal leaves' juice (*osadha kola isma*), lime juice, river water, lake water, sea water, rain water, *vibuthi*, *kunkuma*, red sandalwood, white sandalwood, scented water (rose water), jasmine water, pure water, and honey. In 2018, the lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya* received a list from Sumangala *Thero* with some additional ingredients for the *nanumura*. So, the actual number of liquids used for the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* varied. *Osadha* translates as medicine and *isma* as juice. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Osadhí,' 91, 'Isma,' 72; Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'ósha-dhi,' 236.

<sup>814</sup> *Abhisheka* was explicitly mentioned by one of the volunteers. Informal conversation with DO8, volunteer Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 24, 2018.

<sup>815</sup> The Sanskrit term can be translated as besprinkling or inauguration (of a king). See: Monier-Williams,

It is a tribute [*upaharayak*] to the king. He [Ravana] is cleaned and it is bathed by twenty-one medicines [*beheth*] [...] the way a king is treated and tributed. People bathe from that medicinal [*beheth*] water [*wathura*]. They believe that if the water touches [the] body it is a blessing [*ashirvadaya*]. Because King Ravana is the one who found medicine [*beheth*].<sup>816</sup>

The ritual of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* mainly frames Ravana as healer. This becomes evident in how the liquids used for the *nanumura* are dealt with and the way the people interpret and employ them. The liquids are believed to get blessed during the ritual because the *nanumura mangalyaya* is done to show respect to Ravana and because the liquids have touched the statues of Ravana, an expert in medicine. The statues – as materialisations of Ravana at the time of the ritual – are central to the empowerment of the liquids according to the assistant of the lay custodian.<sup>817</sup> Also, a layperson who came to the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* explained (translation):

When doing the *nanumura*, the gods [*deviyo*] are pleased [...] and because the gods are pleased, that water gets an energy. So, when we apply it, it is a blessing [*ashirvadhaya*] for us.<sup>818</sup>

Others related the healing power of the liquids directly to the persona of Ravana. In Chapter 4, I showed that Ravana is praised for his knowledge of medicine, whether Ayurveda or ‘traditional Sinhalese medicine’ (see Section 4.3). According to Sumangala Thero, Ravana does not even want people to die in our contemporary world. In one of his lectures given in the festival week in 2017, he set out his ideas on Ravana (translation):

Have people found cures for some sicknesses? Why do they let people die from diseases? Maha Ravana always says ‘people cannot die from diseases in this world.’ These diseased people should be healed [...]. If there are reasons why people get sick, solutions should be found for those. Maha Ravana challenges the world; a dying human in sick bed breathing hard for life; if that person is dying from a disease, he cannot die like that [...]. Children, we are from the same blood as [...] Ravana. In this world what can we not do?<sup>819</sup>

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Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, ‘Abhi-sheká’, 71. MacDonell, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, ‘abhisheká’, 23.

<sup>816</sup> Informal group conversation DG4, 2018. *Upahara* means complimentary gift, present to superior. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Āśīrwāda,’ 66, ‘Upahāra,’ 79, ‘Behetha,’ 430.

<sup>817</sup> Informal conversation with DO16, assistant of the lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2018.

<sup>818</sup> Informal conversation with DN3, attendant of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018.

<sup>819</sup> Speech of Sumangala Thero, Pannipitiya, March 22, 2017. This speech was delivered prior to the procession in blessing of weddings (see Figure 6.25, the programme).



Some laypeople who came for the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* also referred to Ravana's healing capability or his medicinal skills (translation):

RA: What do you expect out of it [the ritual]?

DN7: Sickneses get better; all the sickneses in the entire body get healed.

RA: Why does it get healed by those *nanu*?

DN7: It is a respect [*garu*] for king Ravana, he gave medicine [*beheth*] for sickneses. Even those rays are good for us.<sup>820</sup>

Some of the personal stories of the people who came to collect the liquids related this ritual to healing. Several of the people who came for the ritual suffered from a 'disease': from cancer to childlessness. They came with the expectation that Ravana will cure them.<sup>821</sup> Others attended the ritual to be protected from illnesses and/or were cured in one of the previous years. One of the volunteers, for instance, explained that the first time that she joined for the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* she was sick and that after bathing she felt quite well.<sup>822</sup>

Some people had no idea why the liquids contained healing powers, while others related it to the herbal ingredients used for it.<sup>823</sup> A substance called *kola kenda*, recommended by Sumangala Thero to offer to Ravana and/or to employ to ritually anoint Ravana statues, needs special attention here as it is (to my knowledge) exclusive to Ravana pujas.<sup>824</sup> In the list of ingredients, a substance called *deshiya beheth kola*, local/indigenous medicinal leaves was mentioned.<sup>825</sup> *Kola kenda* translates as 'green or leaf congee,' and it is a green substance made of ten herbal leaves.<sup>826</sup> It is believed that *kola kenda* was used by Ravana to energise himself as a vegetarian.<sup>827</sup> Throughout Sri Lanka, *kola kenda* is promoted as an indigenous, nutritious, healthy smoothie-like drink.<sup>828</sup> It is one of the three liquids collected at the time of the weekly *nanumura* and served to the participants after the Ravana puja.<sup>829</sup> In one Ravana home-shrine (see Box 6.3), I noticed a glass with

<sup>820</sup> Informal conversation with DN7, attendant of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Garu,' 156.

<sup>821</sup> In a group of ladies who came for the ritual one lady for instance suffered from cancer and the other suffered from childlessness. Informal group conversation DN8, attendants of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018.

<sup>822</sup> Informal conversation with DO8, March 24, 2018.

<sup>823</sup> Informal conversation with DN4, attendant of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018. Another person mentioned that the substances were made out of ingredients and liquids bought from different places in the country. Informal conversation with DN5, attendant of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018.

<sup>824</sup> Sumangala Thero, *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, 45. I noticed that 100 grams packages of *kola kenda* could be bought in large supermarkets in Colombo such as the Keells.

<sup>825</sup> *Deshiya* means peculiar or belonging to a particular country. See: Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'Desiya,' 496.

<sup>826</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Kolapata,' 136, 'Kenda,' 140,

<sup>827</sup> Informal conversation with DO5, May 21, 2017.

<sup>828</sup> It has in contrast to most highly sweetened products in Sri Lanka a sour raw green leaves taste.

<sup>829</sup> Informal conversation with DO5, May 21, 2017; informal conversation with DO13, February 17, 2018.

*kola kenda*. The owner of the home-shrine explained that he offered this traditional herbal substance because it relates to Ravana's Ayurvedic skills:

[I put] flowers and Ayurvedic [...] *Kola kenda*, you know *kola kenda*? [...] Ravana is doctor as well. [He invented] Ayurveda and developed Ayurveda so [once in time] I put some Ayurvedic thing like *kola kenda* [and] all these things and worship him.<sup>830</sup>

The representation of Ravana as healer primarily emerges at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in the rituals through the specific liquids used to anoint the statues. In the annual *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, these liquids touch the bodies of the devotees and it is believed that the liquids bring healing to their bodies. In the weekly Ravana *puja*, *kola kenda* is employed. This seems to me the most intense way of ritualising Ravana's alleged healing powers because Ravana is believed to have drunk this herbal mixture himself in the past and it is now ritually employed and offered to laypeople to sip after the weekly Ravana *puja*.

The granite Ravana statues enshrined in the *mandiraya* are again of central importance to the framing of Ravana as healer. The statues are believed to represent Ravana at the time of the *nanumura*, and they empower the liquids used to anoint the statues.<sup>831</sup> For the people in the weekly and annual ritual who are not able to witness the *nanumura* inside the *mandiraya*, the power of Ravana as healer becomes vivid for them when they bathe with the liquids or consume them. The phrase they chant to Ravana, 'the great god who's a physician (*veda duru*) and a great king,' becomes tangible, visible, and edible in the liquids that are poured out on their heads at the time of the annual ritual or when they sip some of the liquids after the weekly *puja*.

The *nanumura* is a ritual that is in other contexts also related to healing. I have mentioned that the liquid served after the *nanumura* of the tooth relic in Kandy is also believed to contain healing powers because the liquids have 'touched' the relic. The empowering of the substances through the touching of the statue is also mentioned for the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*. Another 'reason' given for the claim that the liquids used in *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* have healing power reveals what I assert to be a more general relevance of this ritual for *Ravanisation*. In Chapter 3, I introduced Bruce Kapferer's concept remythologizing: myths of the past and traditions are re-

<sup>830</sup> Phone conversation with DP3, March 16, 2017.

<sup>831</sup> The liquids touch, in addition to the statues, a special wishing rock within the *mandiraya* that Sumangala *Thero* related to Ravana's healing skills as well. This rock was allegedly taken from Laggala (see Chapter 7) and is originally from an external planet. According to Sumangala *Thero*, the rock was used in Ravana's days to make medicine. On the connection between medicine and this rock, see Sumangala, *Sri Lankeshvara Maha Ravana*, 35-37. That the rock came from outer space was also mentioned by the wife of the lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, by one of the assistants in the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, and by a Buddhist nun who regularly visits the site (although the latter pointed out that she herself was not sure about the story of the stone coming from outer space): informal conversation with DO5, May 21, 2017; informal conversation with DO13, February 27, 2018; informal conversation with DV4, March 24, 2018.

invented for present-day purposes. The *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* allegedly revives the ancient traditional Hela medicines. The ritual is believed to provide healing in the present and at the same time constructs a representation of a glorious past. In the process of *Ravanisation*, Ravana's medicinal skills are often referred to as Hela *vedakama* or *rasa vedakama* (see Section 4.3). In general, an elaborated idea of Sri Lankan traditional medicine revolves around Ravana. This idea of indigenous medicine of the Hela, of Ravana as the inventor of Ayurveda and/or Hela *vedakama*, emerges in the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* and the specific substances used in the ritual. In this way, the annual ritual not only celebrates Ravana as healer, but is a re-invention of Hela customs and traditions. This general aim to revive the glorious past of the Hela is mentioned as one of the temple goals (see Section 6.1). This ritual seems to me an extensive local effort to create a representation of a glorious and indigenous Hela past as part of a larger dynamic of resurgence of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism in post-war Sri Lanka. In this ritual and the ritual to be described in the following section the representation of the glorious past of the Hela is taken to a next level.

### 6.2.3 The Representation of Ravana as Sinhalese Warrior King

Both the *maha Ravana perahera* (procession) discussed in this section and the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* discussed in the previous section are part of an annual festival programme organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. This festival takes place in the month of Medin, which mainly coincides with March. The Sri Devram Maha Viharaya organises two major festival 'weeks' each year: one in September and one in March. September is regarded a special month at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya because several key events related to the development of the temple site by Sumangala *Thero* took place in that month (see Section 6.1.1 and Section 6.1.2). It was also in September that the Ravana *mandiraya* was inaugurated in 2013.<sup>832</sup> From 2014 onwards, the Ravana *perahera* has been organised in March together with the Suddhodana Mahamaya *perahera*,<sup>833</sup> which has been organised by people of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya since 2008.<sup>834</sup> The month of Medin was selected because the wedding of Buddha's parents allegedly took place in that particular month.<sup>835</sup> The *theruwan puja maha perahera*, the *maha Ravana perahera*, and the Suddhodana Mahamaya *perahera* became known as the *Medin maha perahera*.

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<sup>832</sup> Informal conversation with DOI, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, March 14, 2017. He actually said 'October,' but the *perahera* was organised around the inauguration of the *mandiraya* which was the end of September. Also, an article on the Ravana *perahera* festival was published on September 29: Visini, L. K. (2013, September 29), Pannipitiya Devram Vehera Maha Ravana Perahera Mangalyaya, *Lakviskam*, <http://www.lakviskam.org/devramveheraravana2013.html> (retrieved June 7, 2019).

<sup>833</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 15, 2017.

<sup>834</sup> Madin Maha Perahera Meritorious Activity, *SriDevramVehera*.

<sup>835</sup> Madin Maha Perahera Meritorious Activity, *SriDevramVehera*; informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 13, 2017.

The name of the festival week indicates that the *perahera* is the most important part: *Medin maha perahera mangalyaya* (the great procession festival of Medin).<sup>836</sup> For the description of the *perahera*, I mainly focus on the year 2017. That year the *perahera* was broadcast live on ITN TV (national TV) and took a long route. Due to the costs, the organising committee reduced the media attention in 2018 and shortened the route.<sup>837</sup>

I first introduce here the *perahera* in Sri Lankan Buddhism. Then I briefly introduce the *Medin maha perahera*, continue with my analysis of how the representation of Ravana as warrior king of the Sinhalese emerges in the ritualising and materialising of Ravana in the annual Ravana *perahera*, and conclude with some reflections on what the relevance of this ritual might be for the recent interest in Ravana.

### The *perahera* in Sri Lankan Buddhism

*Perahera* can be translated as procession. In the context of the famous annual *Asala perahera* organised in Kandy it is also translated as pageant.<sup>838</sup> This *perahera* is annually held in Kandy in honour of the tooth relic of the Buddha. It is believed that the tooth relic of the Buddha came to Sri Lanka around the fourth century.<sup>839</sup>

Paul Younger has argued that the religious and the political were always closely intertwined in the Kandyan or *Asala perahera* and that it became more prominent under the adaptations made to the *perahera* by Kirti Sri Rajasimha. Kirti Sri Rajasimha (r. 1751-1782) included the tooth relic on advice of Siam monks who bemoaned it that the festival

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<sup>836</sup> In 2016, the festival week started on March 20 and ended on the March 28. In 2017, it took place from March 21 till April 1 (or actually till April 2), and in 2018 from March 21 till March 31. There are some slight differences in the programmes, but the activities organised in 2017 and 2018 were almost the same. In 2016, I only watched the *Medin maha perahera*, but I joined in 2017 and 2018. All three years, I received the official invitation for the *Medin maha perahera* with the programme printed on the back side. I mainly focus in this chapter on 2017 and 2018 since I participated in almost all the activities in those years.

<sup>837</sup> In 2019, they only organised a small *perahera* because Sumangala Thero had been appointed *maha nayaka* in September 2018 and the temple was busy organising extensive (and expensive) activities around that time. Due to the COVID crisis, there was only a small *perahera* at the premises of the temple in 2020. In 2021, there was a Medin festival programme. The temple got permission to celebrate the *perahera* on the streets again. Around 300 people (mainly volunteers and people living the neighborhood) participated in the *perahera*. Also, a *maha Ravana nanumura pujava* was held.

<sup>838</sup> Gombrich, for instance, has translated *perahera* as procession, as is common in most academic literature. Gombrich, R. F. (1971), *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 107, 344. Clough mentions that *perahara* (procession) is derived from the Pali word *parihara* or honour. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Perahara,' 375. In a popular book sold at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, it is mentioned that *perahera* in Sinhala means procession, but they also refer to it as a pageant. Dassanayake, M. B. (2014), *The Kandy Esala Perahera (asia's most spectacular pageant)*, Rikillagaskada: Indrani Offset Printers, 14. The concept *perahera* is in Sri Lankan Buddhism not only used for large public processions on the streets but also when for instance monks are walking in procession to the house of a layperson to recite Pali texts (*pirith* chanting). For these occasions they often take a temple relic with them. Gombrich (1971), *Buddhist Precept and Practice*, 107. In Chapter 7, I discuss that it is not even necessary to take a relic or image in a procession to have a *perahera* (see Chapter 7).

<sup>839</sup> Ahir, *Glimpses of Sri Lankan Buddhism*, 185.

was only held to honour the four guardian deities (*hatara/satara varan deviyo*).<sup>840</sup> Prior to the inclusion of the tooth relic, symbols of the deities were carried around in the festival and given the most prominent place.<sup>841</sup> Nowadays the tooth relic is the focal point of the Kandyan *perahera*. The real relic, however, is not taken outside the temple anymore.<sup>842</sup>

Kirti Sri Rajasimha himself also participated in royal splendour in the *perahera* alongside groups of other people representing different regions.<sup>843</sup> As Younger has noted: 'Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha tried to bring the popularity of the older festival symbols into the service of the state and the Buddhist order with which it was allied.'<sup>844</sup>

In the present *Asala perahera* the king is replaced by the *diyavadana nilame* (the chief lay custodian of the Temple of the Tooth) who is dressed in ancient kingly dress. This is an example of how this *perahera* is a '[...] modern ritual articulation of a mythically enhanced theme about traditional political power [...].'<sup>845</sup> Holt has argued that the *perahera* also exemplifies present-day politics. I mentioned earlier that performances of regional groups were central to the *Asala perahera* in the past. In the present *Asala perahera*, the most prominent position is given to Kandyan up-country performers, while other regions and traditions are subordinated to that tradition (on the dominance of the Kandyan dance as the national dance see also Box 1.3). According to Holt, in present-day Sri Lanka the Sinhalese Buddhist character of the *Asala perahera* is stressed, religio-ethnic majoritarianism expressed, and that consequently the annual *perahera* in Kandy increasingly excludes minority communities. Because of this, he has framed the *perahera* as '[...] a ritual expression of the persistence of political Buddhism.'<sup>846</sup> As a public ritual the *perahera* is an excellent medium to express ideologies.

### Description of the *Medin maha perahera*

The crowning event of the *Medin maha perahera mangalyaya* at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya is the *Medin maha perahera*. This *perahera* consisted of approximately 170 elements in 2017 (see note 837 on the *perahera* at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in recent years).<sup>847</sup> It takes place once a year, and it is always held on a Saturday evening, starting around 7:00

<sup>840</sup> Holt, J. C. (2017), *Theravada Traditions*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 92. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Satara-waram-deviyó,' 653.

<sup>841</sup> For more on the connection between politics in the Kandyan state and the changes in the Kandyan *perahera*, see: Younger, *Playing Host to Deity*, 69-79.

<sup>842</sup> Gombrich (2009), *Buddhist Precept and Practice*, 122, 123.

<sup>843</sup> Younger, *Playing Host to Deity*, 75-76.

<sup>844</sup> Younger, *Playing Host to Deity*, 77.

<sup>845</sup> Holt, *Theravada Traditions*, 82.

<sup>846</sup> Holt, *Theravada Traditions*, 126, 129.

<sup>847</sup> From 2014 onwards the annual *perahera* was called the *Medin maha perahera*, and a few days prior to the main *perahera* a *perahera* magazine was handed out. In the magazine the different elements of the *perahera* were listed. In 2014, the *theruwan puja perahera* had 80 elements, the *Suddhodana Mahamaya perahera* 77 elements, and the *maha Ravana perahera* 77 elements. In 2015: 40, 35, and 41 respectively. In 2016: 38, 38, and 56. In 2017: 51, 47, and 71. In 2018: 47, 46, and 61. In general, the number of groups joining in the *Ravana perahera* increased compared to the other *peraheras*.

p.m (see Figure 6.25 on the programme). In the days prior to the *Medin maha perahera* three small-scale *peraheras* are organised on the temple premises.

- Pannipitiya Devram Maha Viharaya  
 "Medin Maha Perahera Mangalyaya 2017"  
 (The festival of the great procession of March 2017)  
 21st March – 01st April
- 21.03.2017–6.00 am – "Kap Situweema" – (Planting of the "Kapa")  
 Commencement of the 9- day Sil observation period
  - 9.00 am – Full overnight pirit chanting
  - 22.03.2017–5.00pm – Sarana mangala Ashirwada Perahera (procession in blessing of weddings)
  - 23.03.2017–5.00 pm – "Gabini Maatha Ashirwada Perahera" (procession in blessing of pregnant mothers)
  - 24.03.2017–5.00pm – "Kiridaru Ashirwada Perahera" (procession in blessing of infants)
  - 25.03.2017–7.00pm – "Medin Maha Perahera" (The great procession of Medin)  
 - "Theruwana Puja Maha Perahera" – (procession offered to the triple gem)  
 - "Suddhodana Mahamaya Perahera" - (procession to commemorate Suddhodana and Mahamaya)  
 - "Maha Ravana Perahera" – (procession for great Ravana)
  - 26.03.2017–4.00 am – "Maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya" – (Great Ravana nanumura festival)  
 -6.00 am – "Diya Kap eem mangallaya, Deva Daanaya" (Water cutting festival, offering to the gods)  
 -5.00 pm – "Pahan Poojaya, Punyanum odanaawa" – (Offering of lights and wishing of merits)
  - 01.04.2017–6.00 pm – Full overnight "Mayama du Shanthikarmaya"
  - 02.04.2017–4.00 am – "Mathru Divya Raja nanumura mangalyaya" (nanumura festival for the mother of gods)



Figure 6.25: The festival programme of the Medin Maha Perahera Mangalyaya 2017. This programme came with the invitation to the *perahera*.

The *Medin maha perahera* started at the temple site itself. In addition to professional groups of drummers and dancers, a large part of the more than 1500 participants in the *perahera* were people attached to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya.<sup>848</sup> For those laypeople it was considered a meritorious activity to join in the *perahera* dressed as kings, queens, and princesses, chanting devotional songs, or to walk around with a flag. They first walked around the temple site, passing the VIPP stage and the section where the main monks had their seats. Then the procession continued for several kilometres around the streets in the area and the programme ended at approximately 1:00 a.m. or 2:00 a.m. at the temple site.<sup>849</sup>

The *Medin maha perahera* started with paying reverence to the relic. This relic of the Buddha is believed to have special powers. Members of the organising committee had to return the casket to the relic chamber in 2015 to let the heavy rains stop, and from that time onwards it has not been taken around on the streets anymore.<sup>850</sup> Instead they took a small relic casket. This casket was the focal point of the first part of the *Medin maha perahera*: the *theruwan puja maha perahera* (the triple gem procession). This *perahera* included several common elements like groups of people carrying Buddhist flags and Sinhalese flags, a tusker with a *peramuna nilame* on his back carrying an ola leaf manuscript, a *gajanayaka nilame* carrying a goad to symbolise his caretaking over the elephants in the *perahera*, and several beautifully decorated elephants that alternated with groups of men playing different types of instruments (mainly drums). The main tusker, carrying the relic casket, followed groups of *udarata* (up-country) drummers and richly decorated Kandyan dancers in the typical *ves* costume.<sup>851</sup>

A remarkable element in this *perahera* was the display of the *Tripitaka*.<sup>852</sup> This *perahera* started with a procession chariot with replicas of the stone slabs on which the *Tripitaka* is

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<sup>848</sup> I was told that in 2017 2741 dancers joined in the *Medin maha perahera*. Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 15, 2017. I suppose that he included all the participants. In 2018 fewer people joined, but still there were over 1,000 people in the *perahera*.

<sup>849</sup> I joined in the Mahamaya Suddhodana *perahera* in 2017 and in the Ravana *perahera* in 2018. In 2017, we walked for around eight kilometres all the way up to Kottawa. In 2018, the route was shortened and the *perahera* remained in Pannipitiya.

<sup>850</sup> Informal conversation with DO1, March 14, 2017. The connection with the relic of the Buddha and rain resembles the popular believe of the sacred tooth relic in Kandy '[...] which Buddhists believe has the magical power to cause rain.' Disanayaka, J. B. (2006), *The Festival of the Sacred Tooth* (The Wonder that is Sri Lanka -2), Nugegoda: Sumitha Publishers.

<sup>851</sup> A foot-cloth was rolled and unrolled over and over again before this elephant during the *perahera*. According to Susan Reed '[t]he archetypal Kandyan dancer is a male dancer adorned in the spectacular *kankariya* dress known as the *ves* costume. The costume consists of a gleaming silver headdress decked with shimmering bo leaves, silver armbands and anklets, a beaded harness, and a lower garment of voluminous white cloths overlaid with a wide, ornamented belt.' In: Reed, *Dance and the Nation*, 11-12. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Wes,' 612.

<sup>852</sup> The twentieth-century revival of Sri Lankan Buddhism perpetuated with the government support to extensively celebrate the special *Buddha Jayanti* in 1956 which commemorated the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Buddha's entry into *nirvana*. The government appointed a committee to organise this event: the Buddhist Council of Ceylon. This committee also translated the *Tripitaka* from Pali into Sinhala. See: Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 75, 79-80.



inscribed at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. Also, part of this *perahera* was an elephant with a miniature (granite) stone slab on its back. The *Tripitaka* procession ended with a group of young men dressed in white carrying banners on which stone slabs were depicted. Groups of monks joined in this part of the *perahera* as well.

The drummers, dancers, flag bearers, and elephants of the *theruwan puja maha perahera* were decorated in white as a sign of respect. As explained on the live broadcasting of the *Medin maha perahera* in 2017, much effort is taken to protect the Kandyan tradition and to preserve its culture in the organisation of this particular *perahera*: no other types of dancers and drummers were allowed in this *perahera* except for the *udarata* performers.<sup>853</sup> By including the relic casket (Buddha), the *Tripitaka* (*dhamma*), and the participation of monks (*sangha*), this *perahera* ritualised the triple gem. The creative expressions of the *Tripitaka* were unique materialisations of this *perahera*, and it ritualised the temple's goal to restore the land of the *dhamma*.



**Figure 6.26:** A group of *angampora* students and their master performing in the *Medin maha perahera* organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya on March 24, 2018. Picture retrieved from: Pannipitiya Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (March 26, 2018), [picture] Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/SriDevramMahaViharaya/photos/pcb.202516917189387/202516050522807/?type=3&theater%20> (retrieved June 15, 2019).

Groups of princesses, queens, and kings dominated the *Suddhodana Mahamaya perahera*. The elephants in this *perahera* did not carry any relics and were decorated in a modest way compared to the elephants in the first *perahera*. The main colour used in the

<sup>853</sup> Comments on the *Medin maha perahera* in the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017.



Suddhodana Mahamaya *perahera* was yellow, and the performers were all from the *sabaramamu* tradition.<sup>854</sup> The climax of this *perahera* was the white carriage pulled by a horse, on which statues of Mahamaya and Suddhodana were placed under an umbrella. These life-like statues are throughout the year placed in glass boxes in the Mahamaya *mandiraya* but play no ritual function there. This carriage was followed by 79 women dressed in white saris: the *kiri ammas* (milk mothers). These women were all volunteers who had given birth to a child.<sup>855</sup> As explained in a meeting prior to the *Medin maha perahera* in 2017, the participation of 79 *kiri ammas* in the *perahera* was done to implement reverence. The *kiri ammas* are normally associated with the goddess Paththini (who was a mother herself), and their inclusion in the Mahamaya Suddhodana *perahera* ritualised Sumangala Thero's idea that Paththini and Mahamaya are the same.<sup>856</sup> The procession of the Suddhodana and Mahamaya statues was meant – in addition to paying respect to Buddha's parents – to encourage children to honour their parents, and this *perahera* thus ritualised the goal to respect the elders (see section *Mahamaya devotion*).<sup>857</sup>

With between 60 and 70 different elements, the *maha Ravana perahera* constituted the largest part of the *Medin maha perahera*. In the *maha Ravana perahera* only low-country dancers and drummers performed. Like the elephants and the whip crackers, they were all decorated and dressed in red (as was the Ravana statue in recent years). The *maha Ravana perahera* contained, compared to the previous *peraheras*, the most spectacular and dangerous performances. Examples of these were groups of fire-ball dancers and groups related to specific village (exorcism or healing) rituals. The *maha Ravana perahera* thus included performances that were not directly related to Ravana. In the monthly *Budumaga* magazine published prior to the *perahera* in 2018 (see Section 6.1.1) an explanation of the *maha Ravana perahera* was given (translation):

[The] *maha Ravana perahera* [...] commemorates maha Ravana *raju* who regardless of his own life safeguarded Lak earth [*polothayala*] and protected the nation [*jathiya*] and legacy [*sasanaya*], and our other ancient kings. Maha Ravana while

<sup>854</sup> The Suddhodana Mahamaya *perahera* is a *perahera* that is organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya only. Comments on the *Medin maha perahera* in the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017.

<sup>855</sup> Langer, R. (2015), *Milk Rice for Milk Mothers* [video], Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/112324566> (retrieved January 22, 2018). In this video E. M. Langer (senior lecturer in Buddhist studies at the university of Bristol) explained that in a way similar to almsgiving ceremonies to monks '[t]he fulfilment of a vow made to Pattini can also take the form of an invitation to seven "milk mothers" (kiri-amma), who are associated with the goddess.' On translation see: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Ammá,' 42, 'Kiri,' 120.

<sup>856</sup> The *kiri ammas* are, just like monks, invited in homes for almsgiving when, for instance, a child is ill. See: Langer, *Milk Rice for Milk Mothers*. Their connection with Mahamaya instead of Paththini at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya becomes also explicit in their number: 79. 79 women are believed to have cared for and fed the Buddha after his mother passed away in the first week after his birth. This was for instance explained by one of the main organisers of the *Medin maha perahera*. Informal conversation with DO6, March 20, 2017.

<sup>857</sup> Speech in *Medin maha perahera* preparation meeting of DO6, one of the main people involved in the organising of the *Medin maha perahera* who also commented on the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017, Pannipitiya, March 15, 2017.

residing in Lak *polova*, was strong enough to control the whole universe with ten kinds of wisdom. Maha Ravana *raju* was the greatest among all of our kings. Because of this, the statue of Ravana was taken on the back of an elephant in the *perahera*.<sup>858</sup>

I analyse how Ravana is framed as warrior king of the Sinhalese by focussing on the colours used in this *perahera*, the soundscape, and objects, some of the performances, and the comments and explanations given by organisers, participants, and audience.

### **The representation of Ravana as warrior king of the Sinhalese in the *maha Ravana perahera***

The use of the colour red in this *perahera* is important for the representations of – what I have combined in the heading of this section – Ravana as warrior king *and* as king of the Sinhalese. As explained by the monk involved in the organisation of the *Medin maha perahera* in the live broadcasting in 2017, the colour red is related to power, blood, and war. It represents in the *perahera* the strength, pride, and power of the nation, the power of the Sinhalese.<sup>859</sup> In an interview he further explained that the use of red in the Ravana *perahera* functioned as a kind of spiritual invitation for Ravana. Red is the colour of blood, and the *yaksha* blood is still running through the veins. He also added that blood stands for bravery and warriorship and that red is the perfect colour to symbolise the bravery of a warrior.<sup>860</sup> Volunteers and people who came to watch the *perahera* also connected the use of red to the great personality of Ravana, his heroism, and to war, strength, blood(-line), and anger.<sup>861</sup> In addition, blood stood symbol for the past-present nexus. Blood – as a live giving substance – connected the Sinhalese to the ancient Hela. This ritual thus not only framed Ravana as king of the ancient Hela but also of the present-day Sinhalese as his statue represented him as king at the time of the *perahera*. I now first explore the representation of Ravana as warrior king in the *perahera* before giving my analysis of the function of the statue and the ritual in general in the process of *Ravanisation*.

In addition to the association of red with blood, the soundscape of the *maha Ravana perahera* and some of the objects taken around contributed to the materialising and ritualising of the representation of Ravana as warrior king.<sup>862</sup> The *maha Ravana perahera* included some remarkable instruments: two enormous shields (*maha paliha*) and giant

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<sup>858</sup> Devram Maha Vehere Medin Maha Perahera (2018), *Budumaga* 4, 18-19. See on the *sasana* concept note 218. *Polova* is a colloquial of *paṭṭhavidhātuwa* (earth). See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Paṭṭhavidhātuwa,' 314.

<sup>859</sup> Comments on the *Medin maha perahera* in the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017.

<sup>860</sup> Interview with DO26, main *Thero* involved in organising the *Medin maha perahera* in 2017, Pannipitiya, April 3, 2017.

<sup>861</sup> Informal conversation with DO4, lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 23, 2018; informal conversation with DO27, volunteer *Medin maha perahera*, Pannipitiya, March 24, 2018; informal conversation with DV4, March 24, 2018.

<sup>862</sup> See also my article: De Koning, The Ritualizing of the Martial and Benevolent Side of Ravana in Two Annual Rituals.

drums placed on red-colour decorated hand carts.<sup>863</sup> The *ranabera* and *maha yuddha beraya* (war drums)<sup>864</sup> were believed to have been used to announce important happenings, especially by kings in ancient times to announce the war.<sup>865</sup> The shields were used as gongs in the *perahera*, creating a heavy noise which carried across the streets.<sup>866</sup> In addition to this, a sound system that continuously played songs in praise of Ravana was taken around in one of the chariots (a replica of the *dandu monaraya*). Together with the poundings of the drums and the shields, the intense drum rhythms and loud exclamations of the *Ravana Brothers'* songs created a powerful soundscape resembling the sound of impending doom and war. The 'war instruments' contributed to the war-like scenery by their visual outlook, and their size also added to the impressive scenery of this *perahera*.



**Figure 6.27:** The Ravana statue taken around in the *Medin maha perahera* organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Pannipitiya on March 24, 2018. Picture derived from: Pannipitiya Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (March 26, 2018), [picture] Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/SriDevramMahaViharaya/photos/pcb.202516917189387/202516587189420> (retrieved June 15, 2019).

<sup>863</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Paliha,' 334.

<sup>864</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Beraya,' 430, 'Viyaguru,' 598. This lemma mentions *yuddhaya* as a colloquial form of *viyaguru*.

<sup>865</sup> Comments on the *Medin maha perahera* in the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017.

<sup>866</sup> In an informal conversation with the lay custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya* he explained that it was a *paliha*, (a symbol of) a shield. When I asked him explicitly why they used a shield for making the sound, he added that it signals that a war was going to start. Another volunteer explained that similar to the drum the shield is a symbol used to gather the army and the soldiers. Informal conversation with DO4, March 23, 2018; informal conversation with DO27, March 24, 2018.

A cluster of performances and groups in this *perahera* that are directly linked to Ravana were the *angampora* performances. In the process of Ravanisation, *angampora* is believed to be one of Ravana's ten skills (see Section 4.3). The *angampora* performances in the Ravana *perahera* mainly displayed the type of *angampora* in which weapons or tools are used. One of the *angampora* groups closely related to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya consists of young men led by a charismatic leader who performed *angampora* in the *perahera* with different types of weapons. He and his students were all dressed in a red skirt and carried weapons and/or shields with a bare torso around (see Figure 6.27). The *angampora* performances related to the tough side of Ravana – as this martial art is increasingly associated with him.

The most omnipresent objects in the *maha Ravana perahera* were weapons. Weaponry was displayed in a variety of ways. In addition to an active use of weaponry in performances, many types of weapons were on display – for example, weaponry as royal ornaments. These ornaments were secretly taken around on the Ravana chariot. The flower garlands hid for the public what was taken around on this chariot: the ornaments of Ravana that are normally kept in the inner sanctum of the Ravana *mandiraya*.<sup>867</sup> These ornaments represented Ravana's kingship. They probably also related to Ravana as deity because – like the symbols of the deities taken around in the Kandy *perahera* – these are the only objects from the Ravana *mandiraya* that were taken around at the time of the *perahera*.

The culmination of the *maha Ravana perahera* was the tenth and final elephant of this *perahera*. This elephant carried a Ravana statue. As the monk involved in the organisation of the *perahera* explained in the live broadcasting of the *Medin maha perahera* on ITN TV in 2017, all kings in the past had royal elephants, and consequently Ravana's statue should be placed on an elephant as well (see Figure 6.28). The audience also rose to its feet to pay respect to this Ravana statue at the time it passed by.

The *maha Ravana perahera* organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya is unique and has its own specific character.<sup>868</sup> It is annually organised to '[...] felicitate Father of the nation King shree Lankeshwara Rawana.'<sup>869</sup> That the *maha Ravana perahera* is unique was often mentioned by its organisers. In several speeches given in the meetings by people involved in organising the *perahera*, the aim of the Ravana *perahera* was explicitly explained (translation):

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<sup>867</sup> Informal conversation with DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, April 1, 2017. Informal group conversation DG4, March 11, 2018. The objects consist of weapons, jewellery, and ornaments. The other chariot that was taken around in the *maha Ravana perahera* is an enormous peacock made of wood and decorated with small lights. This is a replica of the *dandu monaraya*, the flying machine allegedly used by Ravana (see Figure 4.9).

<sup>868</sup> I eventually learned that there is one other Ravana *perahera* annually organised in Sri Lanka. There is no connection between the *maha Ravana perahera* organised at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and this Ravana *perahera* organised in the context of *angampora* (see Section 5.2.3).

<sup>869</sup> Madin Maha Perahera (Procession) 2016, *SriDevramVehera*, [http://www.sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=148&Itemid=185](http://www.sridevramvehera.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=148&Itemid=185) (retrieved January 23, 2018).

Tamil people claim that Ravana belongs to them [...]. Now in this world, the right of the oldest prevailing races in the country is given to the Tamil people. If it is proved that the Sinhalese race [*jathiya*] comes from Vijaya, and if the world accepts this, then Sri Lanka will be a Tamil nation. We cannot let that happen. That is why we built the *devalaya* and started worship god Ravana [*deviyo*]. Ravana is one of us. We try to prove that the Sinhalese race [*jathiya*] comes from Ravana. [...].<sup>870</sup>

And as set out in another speech (translation):

This is a big service that you [addressing Sumangala *Thero*] are doing towards the race [*jathiya*], Buddhism, and country [*rata*]. This *perahara* is not like other *peraharas* that are done. It gives out an important message. When the Ravana *perehera* takes place the strength and pride of our nation is shown. The strength of our ancestors is shown.<sup>871</sup>

In the Kandyan *perahera*, religion (Buddhism), politics, and ethnicity (Sinhaleseness) became closely intertwined when the Kandyan king included the tooth relic in the *perahera* and he himself joined in the *perahera*. At present, the *nilame* in charge of the tooth relic is dressed as a Kandyan king and thereby symbolises the ancient Kandyan monarchy. In the first part of the *Medin maha perahera* – which is claimed by the organisers to preserve Kandyan tradition – a relic of the Buddha is taken around. Similar to the *Asala perahera* the tusker with the casket is followed by the lay custodian of the relic *mandiraya*. However, in contrast to the *diyavadana nilame* in the *Asala perahera*, the principal lay officer of the Buddha relic *mandiraya* was not dressed as king but in traditional white clothes (*sarong*) among a group of men also dressed in white.<sup>872</sup> This first *perahera* concentrates mainly on Buddhism as it ritualises the Buddha, *dhamma*, and *sangha*. Kingship and monarchy are less prominent in this first *perahera* but are extensively put on display in the third *perahera*. There, Ravana is exalted as king and father of the nation. The materialising of Ravana in a statue is again of central importance. By taking around the statue, Ravana is ritualised as king in a Sinhalese Buddhist procession. The life-like statue of Ravana taken around on the back of an elephant aims to provoke different feelings than the granite statues in the *mandiraya* to which people pray and bring offerings. This statue represents Ravana at the time of the *perahera* as king of the Sinhalese and it provides the people with the opportunity to respond to Ravana as king in the present and ‘serve’ him (through, for instance, *angampora*). The statue represents Ravana as king of the ancient Hela and king of the Sinhalese in the present.

<sup>870</sup> Speech delivered by DO28, one of the people involved in organising the *perahera* in *Medin maha perahera* preparation meeting, Pannipitiya, March 11, 2018.

<sup>871</sup> Speech in *Medin maha perahera* preparation meeting of DO6, one the people involved in organising the *perahera*, Pannipitiya, March 17, 2018. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Rata,’ 521.

<sup>872</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Diyavadana-nilamé,’ 244.

Following my explorations of the *maha Ravana perahera*, it seems that the nation, country, and ancient kingship are equated, with Sri Lanka as the country of the Hela and Ravana as its famous monarch. The *maha Ravana perahera* relates to the ethno-nationalist argument that the country belongs to the oldest prevailing race. David Rampton mentioned that Sinhalese nationalism is hegemonic because the Sinhalese nationalist socio-political representation of Sri Lanka that reproduces a hierarchy placing the Sinhalese at the apex is widely disseminated among the social strata of the Sinhalese community.<sup>873</sup> As the *maha Ravana perahera* ritualises ancient monarchy and kingship of the Sinhalese and superiority of the Hela/Sinhalese, it ritualises the hegemonic Sinhalese ethno-nationalist perception that Sri Lanka is the country of the Sinhalese in the public sphere. The alleged superiority of the Hela is ritualised, for instance, by taking around a replica of the *dandu monaraya*. This chariot materialises Ravana's talent of aircraft technology. It was explicated in the comments on this chariot that Ravana used this vehicle together with his water filter system to provide drinking water to people in other countries.<sup>874</sup> In the final section, I focus on the relevance of the materialising and ritualising of Ravana as ancient monarch of the Sinhalese Buddhists in more detail.

### **6.3 Ravanisation and the Ritualising and Materialising of Ravana at an Urban Buddhist Temple Site**

This chapter has described a selection of Ravana representations that I found emerging in the materialising and ritualising of Ravana at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. I have discussed in detail the representations of Ravana as (aspirant) deity, including his representation as healer, and as warrior king of the Sinhalese. I reflect here in more detail on the relevance of the materialising and ritualising of Ravana representations at a Buddhist site for the post-war interest in Ravana (sub-question 2 as mentioned in the first section of this chapter). I do this by connecting my insights to the work of others who have written about the recent interest in Ravana in Sri Lanka (mainly described in Chapter 1 of this thesis) and to the general conceptual insights as set out in Chapter 3. I also reflect on how the materialising and ritualising of several Ravana representations at this Buddhist temple site relate to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country (sub-question 3 as mentioned in the first part of this chapter).

#### **The relevance of the materialising and ritualising of Ravana as the ancient monarch of the Sinhalese**

D. Witharana has argued in 'Ravana's Sri Lanka: Redefining the Sinhala Nation?' that the Sinhala Ravana is distanced from his traditional depiction as presented in the

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<sup>873</sup> Rampton, 'Deeper Hegemony,' 256, 261.

<sup>874</sup> Comments on the *Medin maha perahera* in the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017.

*Ramayana*. For Witharana, two features of the Ravana 'narrative' told in two texts make this clear: the technologically advanced Hela nation (extending its influence across the earth and even beyond) and Ravana as king of Lanka who is the progenitor of the Sinhalese (see Section 1.1.1).

In Section 4.1, I showed that for *Ravanisation* Ravana is related to the Sinhalese Buddhist timeframe and worldview by selectively employing references from Sinhalese alternative chronicles and Mahayana Buddhist texts. This distancing from the *Ramayana* tradition by relating Ravana to other texts and chronicles is materialised in the royal lineage at the outer wall of the Ravana *mandiraya* at this temple site as well as in the murals that shows Ravana's connection to a previous Buddha.

Based on my broader investigation of *Ravanisation*, I consider the ritualising of Ravana in a *perahera* of special relevance to *Ravanisation* because the taking around of a life-like Ravana statue in a procession organised by a Buddhist temple complex places Ravana in a recognisable Sinhalese Buddhist ritual context. This not only distances Ravana from a Hindu/*Ramayana* context but also moves him from the discursive and narrative sphere into the here and now. The life-like statue taken around in the *maha* Ravana *perahera* opens up the possibility to actually pay respect to this ancient monarch in the present. Ravana as king comes close to his people as he goes through the streets of 'his kingdom' and is venerated. Like a real king, he is placed on the back of an elephant. As I have argued, this public ritual takes the representation of Ravana as ancient monarch of the Sinhalese Buddhists to a next level: the statue represents Ravana as king who visibly and audibly makes his appearance as monarch in a Sinhalese Buddhist ritual context that is associated with power and kingship.

In Chapter 3, I referred to Jan Koster to argue that rituals primarily relate to human emotions. Several of the Ravana ritual objects at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya aimed to evoke these emotions as they represented Ravana in the present and – when ritually appropriated – related in multiple ways to the senses. The representation of Ravana as ancient Hela king of Lanka in the *maha* Ravana *perahera* appealed in different ways to the senses compared to the representation of Ravana as ancient Hela king of Lanka in the narrative and discursive sphere. In the *maha* Ravana *perahera*, Ravana was announced as king through the drumming, fighting, and music. The use of the colour red in the Ravana *perahera* aimed to evoke the association of Ravana with power and strength and created a continuum from the past to the present as it symbolised (*yaksha*) blood. As the statue represented Ravana as king, people were given the possibility to pay respect to him. In addition, this ritual created the opportunity for people with an interest in Ravana from all over the country to participate by performing, for instance, *angampora* to 'protect' the ornaments of their king. This ritual seemed to me of special relevance to the recent interest in Ravana as it created multiple opportunities to relate to Ravana in the present: on a local level, people were given the opportunity to get physically involved in, contribute to, and experience with multiple senses the apotheosis of Ravana as ancient monarch. The ritual is also relevant for the broader dissemination of the representation of Ravana as king. The Ravana *perahera* went on a Saturday evening around the streets

of Colombo where thousands of people watched the spectacle. Also, the *perahera* was broadcast on national TV aiming to reach a broader audience.

### **The ritualising and materialising of Ravana in a Sinhalese Buddhist devotional framework**

In Chapter 3, I referred to Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead who have identified a close connection between religious emotion and materiality/rituality. Throughout this chapter I have indicated that the granite statues in the inner sanctum of the Ravana *mandiraya*, provide laypeople with the opportunity to affectively relate to Ravana as (aspirant) deity and healer because these statues allegedly make him present at the time of the *puja* and *nanumura mangalyaya*. The *mandiraya* is of special importance to these rituals and thus for creating an affective bond with Ravana: it is in this building that people are familiarised with the Ravana rituals through congregational rituals. Here, Ravana is integrated into a Sinhalese Buddhist devotional framework as some general Buddhist *gathas* are chanted at the start of the Ravana *puja* and it is required to preserve the five precepts. In addition, people chant together the recently invented Ravana songs composed by Sumangala Thero. The guidelines of Ravana devotion as provided by Sumangala Thero can be practised in the Ravana *mandiraya* with a lay custodian and other Ravana devotees.

Similar to the *maha* Ravana *perahera*, the Ravana *puja* and *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* are rituals that aim to appeal to the senses in multiple ways. The granite statues central to the *puja* and *nanumura mangalyaya* make a multi-sensorial experience of Ravana in the present possible. Ravana can be nurtured through bathing and dressing him, he can be seen, and the chanting of *gathas* and drumming create an audible experience. The offering of flowers, incense, oil, food, and liquids relate to the senses of seeing and smelling, but also to feeling and tasting as some of the offerings and liquids are consumed and once a year ‘bathed’ with. These multi-sensorial experiences give the ancient monarch present-day relevance for his devotees as he continues to be present in their lives and ‘listens’ to their prayers.

The materialising and ritualising of Ravana as (aspirant) deity and healer at this Buddhist site seem to be of specific relevance to the present-day interest in Ravana as these open up the possibility to actively and affectively relate to Ravana in the present. More than the annual ritual in which Ravana is framed as ancient monarch, the representations of Ravana as healer and aspirant deity relate to an allegedly experienced personal and mutual relationship between laity and Ravana. This was articulated in one of the final stanzas of the Ravana *puja* that mentioned the wish to empower Ravana so that he obtains merits and console the people of the world. This relationship of mutual interdependence becomes very personal as people are provided with the opportunity to sponsor the *puja* in reward for Ravana’s help in their daily lives.

In Chapter 1, I referred to the article ‘Borders Crossed: Vibhishana in the *Ramayana* and Beyond.’ In that article, Sree Padma has discussed in detail the popularity of Vibhishana (Ravana’s brother) in Sri Lanka – primarily at and around the Kelaniya Buddhist site. In addition to being framed as an ancient king, Vibhishana is part of the



Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon as guardian king, sometimes considered a *boddhisatta*, and an extensive Vibhishana cult exists at Kelaniya. For Padma, the rise of Ravana as a Sinhalese nationalist rewriting of the island's history stands in contrast to the comfort, wealth, and well-being that Vibhishana provides to his devotees. In this chapter, I have aimed to show that at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya a Ravana cult has emerged. At this Buddhist site, multiple Ravana ideas co-exist, including Ravana as ancient monarch, *boddhisatta*, aspirant deity, and healer. The ritualising of these representations takes Ravana beyond the narrative and discursive sphere and serves to intensify the contemporary relevance of Ravana for people in their daily lives.

At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, the ritualising and materialising of Ravana as aspirant deity and healer aim to bring about affective relationships of laypeople with Ravana as he is believed to be actively involved in their daily lives. The Ravana statues, the protective cards, and popular Ravana books (which contain prescriptions to conduct a Ravana *puja* at home), all of which are for sale at the site, illustrate the intention to promote Ravana devotion at a larger scale. I noticed that people kept Ravana statues in home shrines and installed them at other places in the country (see for instance Chapter 7). The materialising of Ravana in statues at this Buddhist site seemed thus of even broader relevance to the recent interest in Ravana as the objects sold in the shops provide the opportunity for people to devotionally engage with Ravana at other places in the country as well (especially at home). The ritual employment of Ravana statues results in an ongoing engagement of people at an individual level with Ravana since these statues make him present and must be ritually cared for.

### **How are several of the Ravana representations at this Buddhist site related to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country?**

In Chapter 3, I introduced one of the core ideas of the ethno-symbolist Anthony Smith, namely that ethno-nationalists reconstruct a coherent new set of ideas derived from pre-existing mythologies and traditions. I mentioned in Chapter 3 that Bruce Kapferer and Dina Roginsky also included traditions for reinventions of ethno-nationalist constructions of the legendary past (see Section 3.3.2).<sup>875</sup>

At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, we see that an existing ritual repertoire is employed for Sumangala *Thero's* revivalist views, including the apotheosis of Ravana. In the first section of this chapter, I argued that several of Sumangala *Thero's* goals relate to how the past is (re)framed at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations. I have also shown that at this Buddhist site extensive use is made of existing ritual formats, and that principles and concepts from the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon are employed to create post-war representations of Ravana and the Hela that promote the glorious days of the past.

The adaptations made to these rituals illustrate the aspects of invention and help us sense why an interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists emerged in post-war Sri Lanka. The *maha Ravana perahera* is a recently invented ritual that exalts Ravana as

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<sup>875</sup> Kapferer, *Remythologizing Discourses*, 165.

ancient monarch of the Sinhalese. It celebrates Ravana as king of the ancient Hela and of the present-day Sinhalese Buddhist majority. Moreover, Hela king Ravana and Ravana as king of Lanka are used interchangeably in references to especially the *maha Ravana perahera*. Here, the core ideas of the perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country merge in the representation of Ravana as ancient monarch as he is simultaneously praised as king of the Hela (or Sinhalese; ethnicity) and as king of Lanka (Sri Lanka, see Section 4.1.3).

I indicated throughout this chapter that the *maha Ravana perahera* ritualises the splendour and power of Ravana's kingdom by including a 'replica' of the *dandu monaraya*, for instance, and by *angampora* performances. Some of the elements that stand out in the Ravana *puja* and *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* are the focus on indigenous Hela practices and healing. The latter relates to the ongoing care of Ravana for his people but also to the skills that the ancient Hela king mastered (as Ravana is considered to have invented 'all medicines'). The use of *kola kenda* (leaves congee) and *deshiya beheth kola* (indigenous medicinal leaves) also revives indigenous Hela herbal 'medicine.'

Mythic ancestry, ancient monarchy, indigeneity, and golden ages are central to ethno-nationalist representations of the past that are created at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisation, and these elements stand out in the recently invented Ravana rituals at this Buddhist site. The ritualising of these elements indicates the relation of the recent interest in Ravana with a post-war resurgence of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism. The ritualising of the representation of Ravana as ancient king of Lanka and of the present-day Sinhalese emphasises the ongoing and ancient presence of this ethnic group in the country. The elements of indigeneity and a glorious civilisation of the Sinhalese were absent or only partly present in *Mahavamsa*-based perceptions of the past, which have dominated Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in the twentieth century. The framing of Ravana as ancient Hela king fixates on early presence and superiority of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority. These representations of the past are more compatible with post-war triumphalism than the *Mahavamsa*-based perceptions of the past, which were openly criticised in a speech given in a meeting prior to the *perahera* (see also Section 4.2.3). The Hela-Ravana representation of the past propagates the idea that the Sinhalese were present in Sri Lanka before the Tamils, which serves to legitimate the Sinhalese claim to full ownership of the country. In Section 2.3.2, I mentioned that Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist parties argue that the national heritage of a country belongs to the ethnic group who made the country into a habitable civilisation. Claims to indigeneity, ancient monarchy, and superiority are central to the Sinhalese Buddhist post-war Ravana interest, and together they create the possibility for the Sinhalese Buddhists to claim ownership of the country. Several of the theorists referred to in Chapter 3 have argued that reassertions of identities and ethnic myths often emerge after or in times of stress and disruption (including wars and religious and cultural competitions; see Section 3.1.1). In Sri Lanka the end of the civil war in 2009 has functioned as a watershed that resulted into triumphalism among part of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority. The Ravana rituals at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya unveil dynamics of post-war triumphalism of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism.

In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I mentioned that the representation of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country was already central to Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism prior to independence and that it became increasingly hegemonic in the post-independence period (see Section 2.3.3 and Section 3.3.3). By hegemonic I mean here that the cultural representation of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country is broadly produced and experienced among Sinhalese in different social strata of the society. Several aspects of the ritualising and materialising of Ravana at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya illustrate the hegemonic character of the Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country as it is produced in multiple rituals at a Buddhist site. In several of the rituals Ravana is praised as progenitor of the Sinhalese and 'Father of the nation.' The Ravana rituals 'produce' Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country and provide the opportunity to experience Ravana as the ancient, marvellous, and indigenous king of the Hela/Sinhalese Buddhists.



## CHAPTER 7

# Mountains and Mythstories on the Move: Multiple Dynamics of *Ravanisation* with(in) Lore

This chapter explores the dynamics of *Ravanisation* with and within lore. These dynamics are now investigated in detail in relation to one specific geographical location in Sri Lanka: Lakegala. Lakegala is a massive triangular mountain that is part of the Knuckles Mountain Range (see Figure 7.1). I initially selected this mountain to investigate the process of *Ravanisation* for multiple reasons: I hoped this place was relevant to trace the ‘ancient Ravana rituals’ and that this rural and isolated place with its ‘Ravana lore’ would counterbalance the more recent interest in Ravana among the urban middle class (as described in Chapter 6, for instance). In my research design, I laid out a justification for comparing a rural case study and an urban case study. In addition, I inferred the relevance of Lakegala for my research from several conversations with authors of popular Ravana publications and presidents of popular Ravana research groups. I was thus determined to find out about the ancient Ravana traditions in this rural area.



**Figure 7.1:** Lakegala Mountain as visible from the Kandyan side. It is only from Meemure (located in the Kandy district) that the outstanding shape of Lakegala can be captured. Picture taken by author, Meemure, April 8, 2017.

However, after visiting Lakegala area several times I realised that I had been misled by publications on the internet, the people with an interest in Ravana living in Colombo area (especially some members of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi*; see Box 1.1), popular publications on Ravana (a newspaper article inspired by

Mirando Obeyesekere, for example)<sup>876</sup>, and a small group of people living in Lakegala area who happily appeased people with an interest in Ravana with some Ravana anecdotes and ‘traditional stories’ to generate more attention and income for the area. They all eagerly tried to convince each other (and themselves) that there are multiple connections of Ravana to this area and that there is an ancient belief in Ravana. This, however, is only partially true. Their hearsay and wishful thinking gained some foothold in academia through the article ‘Borders Crossed: Vibhishana in the Ramayana and Beyond’ (see Section 1.1.1). Without critical consideration, the author has argued that ‘[i]t is probable that this atmosphere of seeking grandeur, in combination with the agricultural rituals invoking Ravana, led to his veneration in Ramnamure [sic] village in Mathale district.’<sup>877</sup> Although, as I explore in this chapter, there are indications that Ravana is part of Lakegala’s lore, Ravana is not as central to the life and rituals of the villagers as recently suggested. Also, a member of the cultural committee involved in the organising of the annual village ritual (*yakkama*, see Section 7.2.2.2) explained that they decided several years ago to stop giving out information to outsiders due to misrepresentations of the villagers’ opinions in newspaper articles.<sup>878</sup> Consequently, it was hard for me to ask for details, let alone to ask people for consent (see on this also Section 7.1.3).

Over the years, I noticed that the life of the villagers in Lakegala area rapidly changed: the young generations left and return only once in a while to visit their relatives. Most villages are relocated due to the Kalu Ganga dam project (and this project led to an improved infrastructure to the remaining villages). Gradually a map of mobile phone network spots developed (although we still had to climb on top of rocks with our phones to stay connected to friends and family). Moreover, ecotourists and Ravana researchers also left their footprints.<sup>879</sup> Only one thing seemed to oppose the change: the beauty of the rock solid Lakegala that made my heart skip a beat every time I saw it appearing upon arrival in the area. Whereas the mountain stands the test of time, the multifarious and mysterious narratives attributed to the mountain are clearly on the move.

Several of the villagers were glad that I came to their houses to ask them about ‘history’ and encouraged me to write down all the things ‘before it was gone’ (bemoaning

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<sup>876</sup> In 2017, a full-colour article on the Ravana *dandu monaraya* inspired by Mirando Obeyesekere (he himself was unable to write due to illnesses) was published in the *Lankadipa* newspaper: Bandara, *Ravanage Dandumonaraya*. In this article it is suggested by Obeyesekere that there is a symbol/logo [*laanchanaya*, ‘mark’] in Laggala Mountain that can be interpreted as an aircraft. Unfortunately, this symbol was allegedly destroyed by treasure hunters.

<sup>877</sup> Padma, *Borders Crossed*, 764.

<sup>878</sup> Conversation 13-28-04-2018RA, member of the cultural committee, Ranamure, April 28, 2018.

<sup>879</sup> In Section 7.1.3 I reflect on my own position as researcher. Several of the research assistants that I took to Lakegala returned to the area after our visits. They did not visit Lakegala area again for any Ravana related research but for charity and leisure activities. In 2018, I heard from a villager that one of my research assistants, whom I had taken in the previous year to the area, had visited the area several times after that, with friends to hike there. The research assistant that I had taken in 2018 to conduct extensive research among the villagers, developed with her friends educational projects in the local village schools.

that the younger generations had in their opinion no interest in preserving the local culture). This chapter is not exactly fulfilling their wishes, as I do not dive into the details of their most beloved ritual (the *adukkuva*) related to their main source of income (paddy cultivation) or the multiplicity of local deities allegedly overlooking different areas. What I mainly do in this chapter is analyse how lore – including creative etymologies, the imagined landscape, and the ritualising and materialising of Ravana in a rural village – is employed in the process of *Ravanisation*. Like the previous chapter, I do this by introducing several representations.

In Section 3.2.1, I mentioned Stuart Hall, who has argued that we give meaning to things by how we represent them in the words we use, the stories we tell, the images we produce, and the emotions that we associate with them.<sup>880</sup> Following Hall, I argue that the meanings ascribed to Ravana lie in peoples' words, narratives, images, and practices: these 'represent' Ravana.<sup>881</sup> In this chapter, however, I use representation in a more general way to refer to how people have mentally framed Ravana's connection to the area without implicating that there is always a deeper level of meaning and interpretation in their words and narratives. The central questions addressed in this chapter are:

- *What kinds of representations of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala area have emerged in (post-war) Sri Lanka?*
- *How is rural lore – including poetry, creative etymologies, the imagined landscape, rituals, and material culture – employed in the process of Ravanisation?*
- *How are some representations of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala related to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country?*

In Section 7.1, I introduce Lakegala and provide some information that serves as a backdrop for the introduction of the representations of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala. In Section 7.2, I introduce a selection of representations of Ravana's alleged connections to Lakegala. For the representations discussed in Section 7.2.1, I employ the concept imagined landscape. This concept is derived from Diana Eck's work (see Section 3.4.1). As Eck has argued, geographical features in India such as rivers, mountains, villages, and waterfalls are linked with ancient stories of gods and heroes, and through these stories such geographical features in the landscape are connected to each other in an imagined landscape.<sup>882</sup> Although Diana Eck's definition of imagined landscape is broad – it includes pilgrimage, for example – I employ the term in this chapter to point out the process of attributing narratives to (local) sites. For the representations in-

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<sup>880</sup> Hall, *The Work of Representation*, 3.

<sup>881</sup> As the mountain is very central to local lore, I decided to give prominence to Lakegala for some of the alleged connections of Ravana to Lakegala. I thus sometimes discuss Lakegala representations to discuss Ravana's alleged connections to the mountain.

<sup>882</sup> Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*, 4, 5.

troduced in Section 7.2.2, I explore the religious dimension of the interest in Ravana in Lakegala. For that I employ the concept religious landscape as defined by Marietta Horster. The foci of the religious landscape include, for instance, ‘the ritual and cultural practices in the sphere of religion’ (see Section 3.4.2).

The central concept of this chapter is lore, a broad concept that includes the diverse elements of village life – for instance, creative etymologies, rituals, material culture, mythistorical imaginations, poetry, and objects related to that specific locality. I refrain from using folklore and folk etymologies since the term folk often connotes fantasy; I employ (local) lore and creative etymologies instead.<sup>883</sup>

By using the concept lore, I avoid a narrow focus on extracting an alleged authentic condensed version of the ‘local’ Ravana narrative. I do not assume that there is an ancient or fixed tradition preserved in these rural villages.<sup>884</sup> Lore and traditions constantly evolve. Looking at these changes, however, unveils a specific interest in a topic in a particular time period.

In Section 7.3, I reflect on how lore is employed in the process of *Ravanisation*. Also, I discuss how several of the representations of Ravana’s alleged connection to Lakegala and the interest in lore and alleged ancient traditions relate to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country.

## 7.1 General Description of Lakegala Area

The triangular monolith Lakegala is part of a rock formation located in the Knuckles Mountain Range, itself located in the Central Highlands. In 2010, the Central Highlands were added as a natural site to the World Heritage List to conserve and protect its biodiversity.<sup>885</sup> When I use the word Lakegala in this chapter I refer to the mountain

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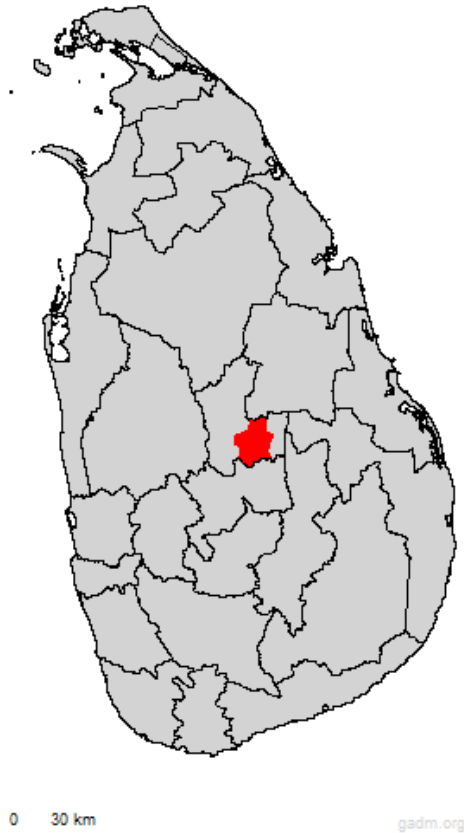
<sup>883</sup> Deborah Winslow has criticised the adjective ‘folk’ in folk etymologies. She argues that it has the negative assumption of ‘made-up’ and fantasy. Winslow, D. (1984), *The Onomastic Discourse of Folk Etymologies in Sri Lanka*, *Social Analysis* 16, 79-90, 79. Villagers themselves mentioned that their ancestors told them about Ravana and that it is rumours (*katakathava*). Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Kaṭa,’ 97, ‘Kathāwa,’ 101. That their ancestors told them about Ravana, was for instance mentioned in group conversation 02-02-04-2018RAGR, Ranamure, April 2, 2018. ‘Rumors’ was for instance used in: conversation 06-30-04-2018RKO, Ranamure, April 30, 2018; conversation 07-01-05-2018RA, Ranamure, May 1, 2018.

<sup>884</sup> I am aware that folklorists have focused on ‘folklore’ in a search of alleged authentic traditions and culture. For more on the development of folklore studies and the criticism on the search for authenticity, see for instance: Bendix, R. (1997), *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

<sup>885</sup> Central Highlands of Sri Lanka, *UNESCO*, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1203/> (retrieved October 22, 2020). In 2010 the Knuckles Mountain Range was declared a world heritage site and certain cultivations became prohibited. When I discussed the details of Lakegala with villagers, they hardly ever mentioned animal species or the fact that they lived in an area that was declared a world heritage site. They sometimes mentioned that the area is famous for cardamom cultivation (especially the Kalu pahana area, see Figure 7.6). In Ranamure a villager told me that they previously cultivated in Uyangamuva until it



(peak). Part of Lakegala Mountain is in the Mathale district and part of it is in the Kandy district. For this research, I have limited myself to the villages located close to or on Lakegala Mountain in the Mathale district. These villages fall under the supervision of the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat (see Figure 7.3).<sup>886</sup> There is one village on Lakegala located in the Kandy district: Meemure. I visited Meemure in 2017 for a brief exploration and to capture Lakegala in all her glory; it is only from the Meemure side that the outstanding shape of Lakegala can be seen (see Figure 7.1).<sup>887</sup>



**Figure 7.2:** The Laggala-Pallegama division (in red) on the map of Sri Lanka. World / Sri Lanka / Matale / Laggala-Pallegama (2018), GADM [picture], <https://gadm.org/maps/LKA/matale/laggala-pallegama.html> (retrieved October 22, 2020).

became a protected area: conversation 07-01-05-2018RA. See on cultivation: Ananda & Nahallage, *Unique Religious and Cultural Practices*, 75.

<sup>886</sup> With approximately 12,500 people in 2015 the Laggala-Pallegama division is the least populated division of the Mathale district. Statistical Information (June 14, 2016), Matale District, [http://www.matale.dist.gov.lk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=57&lang=en](http://www.matale.dist.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=57&lang=en) (retrieved November 20, 2017).

<sup>887</sup> I stayed in Meemure from April 17, 2017, until April 19, 2017.



**Figure 7.3:** Detailed map of the Mathale district. On this map (from 2005) Ranamure is indicated by the author with a small green circle and Narangomuwa [sic] by the small blue circle. At present some of the villages mentioned on the map, are relocated. Humanitarian Information Center Sri Lanka (September 6, 2005), Matale District Administrative Map, Waterboard.lk, [http://www.waterboard.lk/web/images/contents/regional\\_support\\_centres/central/matale\\_district\\_map.pdf](http://www.waterboard.lk/web/images/contents/regional_support_centres/central/matale_district_map.pdf) (retrieved October 22, 2020).

After I conducted fieldwork at the Mathale side of Lakegala in 2018, I decided to leave Meemure out of my thesis. An important reason was that the cultural and historical orientation of the villagers in Meemure was partly directed to Kandy, while this is not the case for villagers living on the other side of the mountain. Moreover, there is no proper road connecting the villages located at the Mathale side of the mountain to Meemure, and it would be too expensive for me to visit both sides of the mountain several times to provide a balanced overview. Finally, Meemure has become a popular destination for domestic tourists and hikers and people with an interest in folk traditions and Ravana.<sup>888</sup> For this reason, multiple books and articles on Lakegala are written from the Meemure perspective.<sup>889</sup> An example is an article published on October 22, 2017, in *Lankadipa* (newspaper; see Figure 7.4).<sup>890</sup> It tells the story of someone who had climbed Lakegala with a guide from Meemure, and the author and the guide connect almost everything they saw on the way to Ravana.<sup>891</sup> I mention Meemure here because it is located almost equally close to Lakegala as Narangamuva (see Figure 7.6) and because the village name is of relevance to the creative etymologies that I discuss in Section 7.2.1.1.<sup>892</sup>

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<sup>888</sup> Lakegala is recommended on the internet by hikers for a breath-taking hiking experience. See for instance a hiking blog written by Australians who had climbed Lakegala with a guide from Meemure: Journey of the Jacks: Sri Lanka's Most Dangerous Mountain, *TheBrokeBackpacker*, <https://www.thebrokebackpacker.com/lakegala-meemure-sri-lanka-adventure/> (retrieved February 4, 2020). The summary of a hiking tour is provided on this website: Niroshan (2016), *Lakegala (1494m)-Mountain of two peaks*, Lakdasun Trips, <http://trips.lakdasun.org/lakegala-1494m-mountain-of-two-peaks.htm> (retrieved February 4, 2020). This website mentions a local guide from Meemure (Nawa Mama), who happens to be the guide who also took Shaminda Ranshan Fernando, the author of the article published in the *Lankadipa* newspaper to Lakegala (see Figure 7.4).

<sup>889</sup> Examples of books that I found in bookstores in Colombo were: Dunukepotha, R. (2013), *Meemure: Sampradayika Gamaka Thorathuru* [Meemure: Details of a Traditional Village], Colombo 10: S. Godage & Brothers; Ranatunga, L. P. (2013), *Dumbara Kanduveti Sisara: Nakals, Dumbara saha Mathale Distrikk tula Parisaraya ha Smaraka Ageyimak* [Across the Dumbara Mountains: Ecological and Monumental Evaluation of the Knuckles, Dumbara and Mathale Districts], Mirigama: Akarsha. In 2018, I found a book published in English: Gunasekere, G. (2017), *Under the Shadow of Lakegala Meemure: An Account of An Ancient Historic Village in Udadumbara Mahanuwara District*, Colombo 10: S. Godage & Brothers.

<sup>890</sup> Fernando, S. R. (2017, October 22), *Rama Ravana Yuddhaya siduvune Lakegalada?* [Did the Rama – Ravana war take place in Lakegala?], *Lankadipa*. [www.lankadeepa.lk/rasawitha/රාම-රාවණ-යුද්ධය-සිදුවූයේ-ලකුණලද-57-519220](http://www.lankadeepa.lk/rasawitha/රාම-රාවණ-යුද්ධය-සිදුවූයේ-ලකුණලද-57-519220) (retrieved February 3, 2020). I found this newspaper article in a library in Guruvela (approximately eight kilometres from Ranamure).

<sup>891</sup> The villagers I talked with in Meemure were primarily focussed on how to promote their village and improve it both for researchers and (eco-)tourists. Meemure has gained popularity as a destination for domestic tourists who are looking for 'real forest experiences' and 'traditional lifestyle.' See for instance: Meemure Sri Lanka, *Sri Lankan Expeditions*, <http://www.srilankanexpeditions.com/location.php?city=Meemure> (retrieved October 23, 2017). Some domestic tourists were in Meemure when I was there to conduct research, and I had a brief chat with a tourist from Kurunegala, a city located around 85 kilometres north-east of Colombo (April 18, 2017). So-called Village Eco tours to Meemure often include a one night-stay in a tent in the paddy fields.

<sup>892</sup> That Meemure and Narangamuva are at a similar distance from Lakegala was also told so by a villager from Ranamure and a *kapu mahaththaya* from Narangamuva: conversation 05-06-04-2018RA,



**Figure 7.4:** Newspaper article on Lakegala that I found in the Guruswela library (located approximately 8 kilometres from Ranamure). Fernando, S. R. (2017, October 22), *Rama Ravana Yuddhaya siduvune Lakegalada?* [Did the Rama – Ravana war take place in Lakegala?], *Lankadipa*, Lankadipa.[www.lankadeepa.lk/rasawitha/රාම-රාවණ-යුද්ධය-සිදුවූණේ-ලක්ෂ්‍යලදද-57-519220](http://www.lankadeepa.lk/rasawitha/රාම-රාවණ-යුද්ධය-සිදුවූණේ-ලක්ෂ්‍යලදද-57-519220) (retrieved February 3, 2020).

The villages on the Mathale side of the mountain on which I primarily focus are Ranamure and Narangamuva (see Figure 7.3 and Figure 7.6). I was also interested in Ravanagama (Ravana village), located a little further away from the mountain. At the time of my research in 2018, only two houses remained in Ravanagama. The people still residing there (and people from the neighbouring villages) explained that the village of around 50 houses was created in the 1980s under former president Premadasa (see on the role of Premadasa ‘Kataragama’ in Section 5.3.1).<sup>893</sup> Due to the Kalu Ganga dam project the villagers from Ravanagama, as well as most of the other villages, were relocated.<sup>894</sup> Ranamure and Narangamuva were the only two ‘large’ villages located high enough to escape the relocation. By Lakegala area, I mean the mountain Lakegala, its forests, waterfalls, paddy fields, and gardens, as well as Ranamure, Narangamuva, and

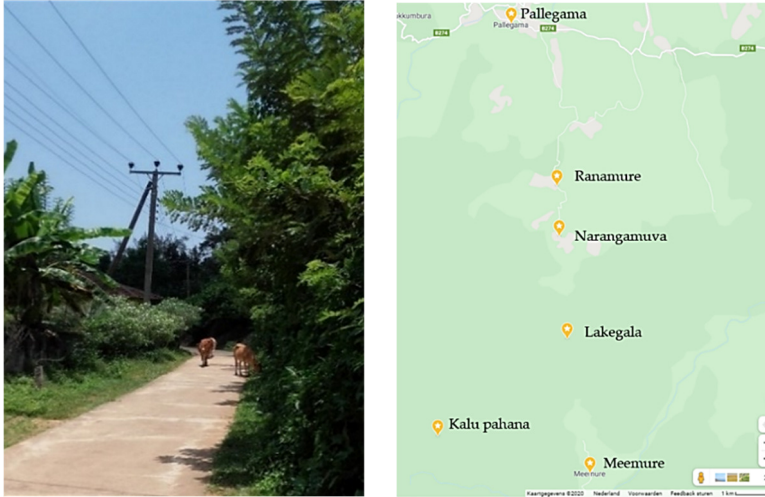
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Ranamure, April 6, 2018; conversation 01-05-04-2018NAkap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.

<sup>893</sup> One of the two families in Ravanagama in 2018 told me that Ravanagama was constructed in 1982 under president Premadasa and that the village consisted of 50 houses: conversation 02-03-04-2018RAV with one of the two families left in Ravanagama, Ravanagama, April 3, 2018. The other family in Ravanagama told me that the village was established approximately 37 or 40 years ago (in 2018) under Premadasa and that it previously consisted of 50 houses: conversation 01-03-04-2018RAV with one of the two families left in Ravanagama, April 3, 2018, Ravanagama.

<sup>894</sup> Kalu Ganga Project to be Vested with the People Tomorrow (2019, November 6), *Colombo Page*, [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_19B/Nov06\\_1573056824CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_19B/Nov06_1573056824CH.php) (retrieved January 2, 2019).

the sub-areas located on the Mathale side of the mountain. In what follows here, I introduce the villages Ranamure and Narangamuva.



**Figure 7.5** (left): Cattle on the Narangamuva main road in Narangamuva. Picture taken by author, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.

**Figure 7.6** (right): Detailed map of the area derived from google maps. Names of places inserted by author.

### 7.1.1 Infrastructure and Facilities

From the north, the Narangamuva road leads straight to Lakegala (see Figure 7.6). The road first passes through Ranamure and ends close to the paddy fields located at the end of Narangamuva. One bus comes to the area a few times a day.<sup>895</sup>

The main facilities in the villages are located along the main road. In both Ranamure and Narangamuva, there are two grocery shops along the main road, and I noticed only one little shop off the main road (in the Kanamula part of Ranamure). The shopkeepers mainly sold packaged food items (biscuits and chips, for example) and personal care products (shampoo, detergent, etc.). Vegetables and fruits were rather rare except for (locally cultivated) potatoes, tomatoes, and bananas. In Ranamure, I also noticed a post office located in a private home. It was established in 1961 and it serves the entire area.<sup>896</sup>

For medical help people have to go to New Pallegama.<sup>897</sup> New Pallegama is only six kilometres away, but the lack of proper infrastructure, vehicles, frequent public trans-

<sup>895</sup> The bus comes around school times. Sometimes this bus goes all the way up to Narangamuva, but more frequently it stops at the bottom of Ranamure and people from Narangamuva walk down to take the bus.

<sup>896</sup> Conversation 01-02-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 2, 2018.

<sup>897</sup> People often mentioned that they went to (New) Pallegama for medical facilities: group conversation 01-04-04-2018NAGR, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018; conversation 08-28-04-2018RK, Ranamure, April 28,

port, and telecommunication makes it hard to get to a hospital on time in case of an emergency.

In both Ranamure and Narangamuva, a school is located close to the main road. The Narangamuva school was established in 1955. It offers education until grade five.<sup>898</sup> After that, children from Narangamuva attend the Ranamure school.<sup>899</sup> This school was established in 1933.<sup>900</sup> The school has a new signboard indicating that one of the buildings contains a 'Sri Ravana Hall.' The school in Ranamure is located opposite the temple area and near the post office. Altogether this constitutes the 'centre' of Ranamure.

In addition to the Lakegala mountain (peak), there is also a Lakegala (sub)division or area. Most villagers used Lakegala to refer to the mountain, but when I asked for the details of a (sub)village called Lakegala, some people in Narangamuva explained that it is considered a separate area located within Narangamuva.<sup>901</sup> The statistics of the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat (of 2017) mention Lakegala as a separate division (*vasama*) with its own village officer (*grama niladhariya*).<sup>902</sup> This Lakegala division is located beyond the point where the main road in Narangamuva ends on the way to the Lakegala mountain top.



**Figure 7.7:** The mountain range (including Lakegala) from the Mathale side. Picture taken by author, Narangamuva April 30, 2018.

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2018; group conversation 07-04-04-2018NAGR, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.

<sup>898</sup> Group conversation 02-05-04-2018NAGR at the Narangamuva school, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.

<sup>899</sup> Group conversation 01-04-04-2018NAGR.

<sup>900</sup> Group conversation 02-05-04-2018NAGR. A villager from Ranamure pointed out that the school was there from 1933, and he added that the temple site was also there from that time onwards. Conversation 04-27-04-2018RK, Ranamure, April 27, 2018.

<sup>901</sup> In only one conversation did someone tell me that I was actually in Lakegala. Conversation 03-30-04-2018NL, Lakegala (Narangamuva), April 30, 2018. In other conversations in the same area, it was pointed out that I was in a subdivision of Lakegala (so they considered Lakegala a separate village).

<sup>902</sup> This document about the population of the Laggala-Pallegama division was provided to me at the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat at New Pallegama on April 27, 2018. The divisional secretary explained that Narangamuva, Ranamure, and Lakegala were the only three villages that were not relocated for the Kalu Ganga dam project. Group conversation 01-27-04-2018NPGR at divisional secretariat, New Pallegama, April 27, 2018.





**Figure 7.8:** The *devalaya* located on the Ranamure temple site. Picture taken by author, Ranamure, April 10, 2017.

Ranamure and Narangamuva both consist of multiple subareas or subdivisions. Often these were just a cluster of houses located at the same road. Several times, villagers pointed out that I was in a particular *vasama* or division of the village.<sup>903</sup> This idea of subareas together with the idea of families and subfamilies (sometimes living in the same house) made it difficult to find out the exact number of villagers living in a particular area. The statistics provided in 2017 from the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat mention that 469 people lived in Ranamure at that time and 452 people in Halminiya. This list predates the relocation of (part of) Halminiya. The remaining houses are now part of Ranamure. According to the statistics of the divisional secretariat, 269 people lived in Lakegala (here: the subdivision of Narangamuva) and 342 in Narangamuva in 2017 (no relocation happened).<sup>904</sup>

The people in Ranamure and Narangamuva are Buddhists. They mentioned that they daily conduct the *mal pahan puja* (offering of flowers and a lamp) to the Buddha (at

<sup>903</sup> Vasama means district. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Wasama,' 578. It was in conversations translated as (sub)division. Conversation 05-05-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018. For Narangamuva these divisions were for instance Lakegala and Korosgala. For Ranamure these were for instance Kanamula, Kaduvela, Pinavela (or Pinvalapitiya), Kovilamula and Delivata. I am not sure about the spelling of any of these divisions since I could not check it in any document. Some people explained that Kanamula officially belonged to Halminiya village, but since (part of) Halminiya was relocated due to the Kalu Ganga dam project, the remaining part (Kanamula) was now part of Ranamure. Conversation 07-28-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 28, 2018. It was however still pointed out as a separate and special area. I was directed to that part of the village because multiple *kapu mahaththayas* resided there and the traditions were allegedly preserved in that area. For instance: conversation 06-28-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 28, 2018.

<sup>904</sup> This document about the population of the Laggala-Pallegama division was provided to me at the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat at New Pallegama on April 27, 2018. In 2011, there were 338 people living in Narangamuva. See: Statistical Information (2016, June 14), Matale District, [http://www.matale.dist.gov.lk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=57&lang=en](http://www.matale.dist.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=57&lang=en) (retrieved November 20, 2017).

home), that they give alms and observe *sil* on full-moon days (see also Section 6.1.3).<sup>905</sup> Except for *poya* days, the temple site was not visited often. Overt public Buddhist practices were rather rare in these villages, in contrast to what I observed in Colombo.

Both Ranamure and Narangamuva have a temple site with multiple structures. In Ranamure, the Sri Ksetraramaya temple site contains what was called by the monk a Sunday school, a *chaitiya* (or *stupa*), a Bodhi tree, a hall to preach the *dhamma*, and a *budugeya* (shrine with multiple Buddha statues; see Figure 7.9).<sup>906</sup> The temple compound was there from the 1800s.<sup>907</sup> The monk who stayed at the temple site was from the Laggala region. He was ordained in 1968 and passed away in 2018 when he was 70 years old.<sup>908</sup>

The present-day *devalaya* in Ranamure is located on the temple site behind the Bodhi tree halfway up the stairs that lead up to the *budugeya* (see Figure 7.9). A *kapu mahaththaya* (lay priest) is in charge of this building. The other buildings and structures on the site are looked after by the monk.<sup>909</sup>

The *devalaya* moved to its present location around 2010.<sup>910</sup> According to the monk, the *devalaya* was moved in the same year the *chaitiya* was constructed. Earlier it was located on the rock where the current *chaitiya* is.<sup>911</sup> The current *devalaya* is not well maintained (see Figure 7.8).

The monk who lives in Narangamuva was from Ranamure. He came to the temple site in 2018. According to him, the temple was at that time over 50 years old.<sup>912</sup> Other villagers also explained that the temple site was rather old.<sup>913</sup> The *devalaya* was also recently rebuilt and was in a better condition than the Ranamure *devalaya* when I saw it in 2017 (see Figure 7.16).<sup>914</sup>

<sup>905</sup> That they offer flowers and lamps in the morning to Buddha, give alms, and go to the temple to observe *sil* on *poya* days was mentioned, for instance, in conversation 08-28-04-2018RK. *Mal pahan puja* was mentioned in conversation 02-29-04-2018RK, Ranamure, April 29, 2018. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Pahan,' 338, 'Mal,' 463.

<sup>906</sup> A *chaitiya* is a Buddhist monument or reliquary. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Chaitya,' 185.

<sup>907</sup> Conversation 07-03-04-2018RAmonk with monk, Ranamure, April 3, 2018. A traditional physician also pointed out that the temple site was there from the 1800s. Conversation 03-06-04-2018RPvk with physician, Ranamure, April 6, 2018.

<sup>908</sup> Conversation 07-03-04-2018RAmonk.

<sup>909</sup> This separation of tasks corresponds with the division made in Sri Lankan Buddhism between monastic Buddhism and theistic Buddhism (see Section 2.2).

<sup>910</sup> That the *devalaya* moved around 2010 was mentioned in conversation 03-02-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 2, 2018. That the present *devalaya* was constructed in 2011 was pointed out in the group conversation at the divisional secretariat: group conversation 01-27-04-2018NPGR.

<sup>911</sup> Conversation 07-03-04-2018RAmonk. He pointed out (in 2018) that this happened approximately fifteen years ago.

<sup>912</sup> Conversation 04-05-04-2018NAmonk with monk, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.

<sup>913</sup> A villager of over 80 years old from Narangamuva explained that the temple was there when he was a child. Conversation 05-04-04-2018NW, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.

<sup>914</sup> A *kapu mahaththaya* explained that one year they did not perform the *yakkama* in Narangamuva because the *devalaya* was broken. That year, the paddy fields were not prosperous. The year after the *devalaya* was rebuilt and the *yakkama* performed. Conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap.



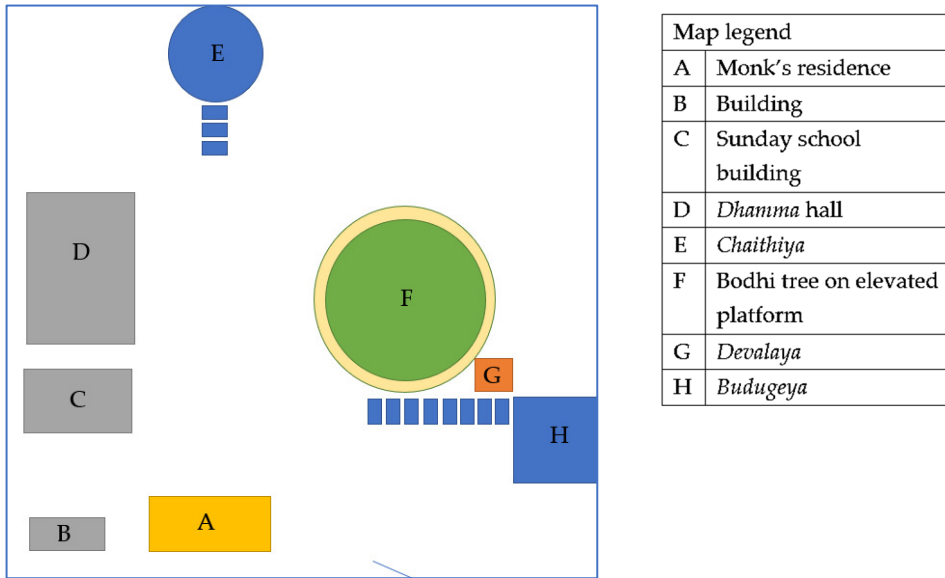


Figure 7.9: Simplified map of the Ranamure temple site, including the *devalaya* (G).

### 7.1.2 On People, Professions, and Problems

To earn their living, people in Ranamure and Narangamuva mainly cultivate paddy.<sup>915</sup> Paddy was around everywhere in the villages: I saw the grains laid out on the streets or on plastic sheets in the gardens and around the houses to dry (see Figure 7.11). Rice was also the main food consumed in the villages and most of the village rituals also have a connection with the paddy cultivation (see Section 7.2.2.1).

The conversations in which I learned about the details of the villages, the history, and rituals were most often with men who held an occupation or profession that was other than – or had another job in addition to – paddy cultivation. Some shopkeepers, for instance, had detailed knowledge about the village history and the school principals also had a broader knowledge of day-to-day life in the villages. The *kapu mahaththayas* were the largest group of men who held a special position in the villages.<sup>916</sup> A *kapurala* – or *kapu mahaththaya* as they were called in Ranamure and Narangamuva – is defined as

<sup>915</sup> According to the document about the population of the Laggala-Pallegama division that was provided to me at the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat in 2018, 100 people were in paddy cultivation in Narangamuva, 97 in Lakegala, 150 in Halminiya and 145 in Ranamuregama. I received this document at the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat at New Pallegama on April 27, 2018. In addition to paddy, some villagers cultivated green beans and pepper. Several villagers explained that they owned land and that there is nowadays a system in which others work in their fields and they share the profit (sharecropping). Conversation 12-28-04-2018RK, Ranamure, April 28, 2018. Even if one member of the family had another job, it was often in addition to paddy cultivation, or they still owned fields where others worked for them.

<sup>916</sup> The monks held a special position as well, but they were less informed about what was going on in the villages.

the priest of a deity cult of the Sri Lankan pantheon (see Section 2.2.2).<sup>917</sup> According to Gananath Obeyesekere, *kapuralas* often come from a family of *kapuralas*, but in the area of his research it was not a strictly hereditary position. He has also mentioned that the *kapuralas* often had no shrine but kept the ritual paraphernalia in a box at home.<sup>918</sup> I noticed the same in Ranamure and Narangamuva (see Figure 7.10). Except for the annual village ritual (*yakkama* see Section 7.2.2.2) the *devalaya* is barely used and the *kapu mahaththayas* perform the rituals at home. A *kapu mahaththaya* explained that his main tasks are performing rituals when people are ill.<sup>919</sup>



**Figure 7.10** (left): A *kapu mahaththaya* shows his ritual paraphernalia at home. Picture taken by author, Ranamure, April 9, 2018.

**Figure 7.11** (right): Drying of paddy rice near the house. Picture taken by author, Ranamure, April 6, 2018.

Like the *kapu mahaththaya*, the traditional physician (*veda mahaththaya*) inherited his knowledge from a *kapu mahaththaya* in the family.<sup>920</sup> I met two of those traditional physicians (one of them was officially certified as an Ayurvedic doctor by a council of Ayurveda in Colombo) in Ranamure and had a conversation with three *kapu mahaththayas* in Ranamure and two *kapu mahaththayas* in Narangamuva.<sup>921</sup>

<sup>917</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, 3. Clough translates *kapurala* as demon priest. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Kapurála,' 104.

<sup>918</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, 2, 12.

<sup>919</sup> The *kapu mahaththaya* ties a thread and chants. In case the illness prevails, he conducts more extensive rituals (see Section 7.2.2.2). Conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap.

<sup>920</sup> Conversation 03-06-04-2018RPvk; conversation 03a-29-04-2018RKvk, traditional physician, Ranamure, April 29, 2018; conversation 04-04-04-2018NAkap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018. Mahaththaya translates as sir or mister. *Veda* means doctor or medical practitioner. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Wedá,' 610.

<sup>921</sup> I was told that there are six, seven, or eight *kapu mahaththayas* in Ranamure: conversation 07-29-04-2018RAkap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Ranamure, April 29, 2018; conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap. In both vil-

Once in a while I met people in the villages who held governmental jobs. The cultural officer working at the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat lives in Ranamure, and both Ranamure and Narangamuva have a *grama niladhariya*. Sometimes I met younger people who went to Peradeniya University and returned to their home village.<sup>922</sup> The general tendency was, however, that young people left the villages and did not return. The divisional secretary mentioned that anyone who is capable leaves the villages as soon as they can afford it and that the people who remain are the elderly and people with (financial) difficulties.<sup>923</sup> I noticed that plenty of villagers struggled with life: there are no proper facilities for mentally and physically disabled, some villagers had a liquor addiction, people eloped, and I heard of people committing suicide. The poverty allows us to see the processes I describe in a different light: when people struggle to survive, they probably feel less motivated to initiate communal (ritual) events.

### 7.1.3 Conducting Research in Lakegala Area

In 2016, I was taken to Ranamure by a tour operator who had read about the alleged connection between Lakegala and Ravana in a newspaper article (see Section 1.2.2).<sup>924</sup> This newspaper article mentioned the name of a man from Ranamure who became my host in 2017 and 2018. I received his visiting card in 2016, and in 2017 I established contact with him – which was difficult because there was no cell phone network at that time – and I came back to Ranamure to discuss the alleged connection of Ravana to the area in more detail. At that time, my host arranged the interviews and took me and my research assistant around with a vehicle. I mainly discussed the connection of Ravana to the area with the people who were members of the cultural committee involved in the promoting of Ravana and the village ritual (*yakkama*, see Section 7.2.2.2).<sup>925</sup> In 2017, I also visited Meemure and, like at Ranamure, our host arranged most of the conversations. Since these conversations were highly biased, I left most of them out. When I refer to these conversations in this chapter, I explicitly mention that the people were part of the cultural committee or that I was taken to that particular person by my host. Also, my research assistants at that time were not used to the village terminology and pointed out that even the Sinhala differed from the Sinhala spoken in Colombo. I my-

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lages the *kapu mahaththayas* criticised the skills of the *kapu mahaththayas* in the other village: conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap; conversation 01-29-04-2018RKkap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Ranamure, April 29, 2018. This was not the only conflict in the village: there were some problems between the monk and the *kapu mahaththayas* in Ranamure and *kapu mahaththayas* and villagers within Ranamure criticised other *kapu mahaththayas* as well.

<sup>922</sup> Some of the remarkable jobs among the female population were a lady who previously worked abroad in a textile factory and a young girl who worked as a nurse for the Sri Lankan air force. One of the female teachers at the Narangamuva school went to the science faculty of Peradeniya university. Conversation 08-28-04-2018RK.

<sup>923</sup> Group conversation 01-27-04-2018NPGR.

<sup>924</sup> I was taken by this tour guide to Ranamure on April 27, 2016.

<sup>925</sup> In 2017, I stayed in Ranamure from April 8, 2017, until April 10, 2017.

self was also not familiar with the village terminology, and for that reason the interviews of 2017 are not as good as the interviews from 2018.

In 2018, I went to Lakegala area two times (April 2 until April 6, and April 27 until May 1) to conduct research in Ranamure, Narangamuva, and the surrounding villages. Again, I stayed in Ranamure, but this time my research assistant (another one) and myself started walking around. This led to confusion (and probably fear) on the part of my host – why ask the ‘ignorant’ villagers about their opinions? Other villagers who saw us walking up and down the main road were wondering when the foreigner would visit them.

In 2018, I conducted approximately 42 conversations in Ranamure and 25 conversations in Narangamuva. The difference in number is explained by the simple fact that I stayed in Ranamure (and we could easily walk around there) and also because the interest in Ravana had mainly taken shape there. I also visited some libraries and a few shops and temple sites of the surrounding villages to broaden my perspective (in Hettipola, Guruvela, and New Pallegama). In addition, I visited the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat to discuss some details.

A regular conversation took between 20 minutes and 1.5 hours and took place within the homes of the people. My research assistant and I walked around and asked if anybody was at home. If people were at home, my research assistant briefly introduced me as a researcher interested in the history of the area (she did not mention Ravana). We had to keep it low-key: earlier, when we provided people with more information on the topics of our interest (mentioning Ravana, for instance), people explained that they had no idea, or even worse, they directed us to the group of people in Ranamure involved in promoting Ravana. I noticed in conversations and publications on the internet that people with an interest in Ravana who came to the area consulted the group of around ten villagers involved in promoting Ravana and the annual village ritual. In 2018, I mostly talked with villagers who were not actively involved in promoting Ravana or in the annual village ritual. When people agreed to talk with us, we often started with general questions about the number of villagers, their place of birth, and their occupation. The occupation (mainly paddy cultivation) helped us to discuss the rituals related to paddy cultivation, and the different place-name etymologies often brought us to localised stories of the past. In addition, I often used the method of photo-elicitation (see Figure 7.12) and showed, for instance, a picture of the Ranamure *devalaya* (see Figure 7.8), as I noticed in 2017 the presence of a Ravana statue inside this *devalaya* (see Figure 7.17), and pictures of other ritual paraphernalia to discuss the details of rituals, deities, objects, and the position of Ravana in the local pantheon without introducing Ravana immediately.

I use in this chapter the word ‘conversation’ as a container term to include group conversations, interviews, and informal conversations. In most of the conversations multiple people joined in. When we met elderly people, husband and wife were part of the conversation but often one person took the lead. Therefore, I have reserved the term ‘group conversation’ for those conversations in which people from different families

joined in one conversation. In Ranamure and Narangamuva I conducted a few ‘group conversations’ at the shop with the people around (see Figure 7.12).



**Figure 7.12:** Group conversation at the shop in Narangamuva. The men are looking at the ‘picture book’ with photos I took in the previous year. Picture taken by author Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.

For local poetry, I was frequently directed to elderly women (and sometimes elderly men) who recited some poems from memory for me. I visited one elderly lady of approximately 90 years from Narangamuva in 2017 and 2018. She was blind, partially deaf, and told us that she was looking forward to dying, but I am grateful that she did not pass away in those years. She explicitly wanted her name to be mentioned in ‘the book’ so I do mention her a couple of times in this chapter (of course she was unable to read or sign any consent forms). In general, the older generations were considered to be the preservers of the village traditions, and they often knew about the local poetry. In a conversation with some kids, one of them explicitly explained that she learned about Ravana from her grandmother.<sup>926</sup> However, a couple married for over 70 years living away from the main road in Narangamuva explained that they learned almost nothing their entire life: since their parents passed away when they were young, they worked their entire life (they probably never went to school) and I noticed that they were poverty stricken.

Due to a high level of illiteracy and fear of the white researcher – one woman explained that she once hid in her bedroom when we came close to her house – I did not use any ‘paperwork’ in conversations with regular villagers. I have left sensitive data out of the chapter, or just mentioned it in general. I have written consent from most of the people who hold a special position (for instance, the *kapu mahaththayas*).<sup>927</sup> Most of them also could not read or write. One *kapu mahaththaya* showed a notebook with

<sup>926</sup> Group conversation 04-29-04-2018RAkids with children at Ranamure temple site, Ranamure, April 29, 2018.

<sup>927</sup> Transcripts of several conversations and details about consent can be requested from Tilburg University Dataverse (restricted access).

chants written down by a relative since he himself could not read or write. When it came to poetry, we often asked people if they were fine when I used it for my research.

I employ here the term ‘villagers’ and use a ‘V’ to indicate this in quotes. This is in no way meant to oppose them to urbanised people, but the research was conducted in villages. Though I sometimes asked people their age, I did not consistently do so, so age will not be a factor in my analysis. In addition, the family compositions seemed sometimes remarkable to us with multiple families living together and large age differences between husband and wife. Instead of thus providing incorrect information on family relations or age, or creating awkward situations, I gave every conversation a code that includes the number of the conversation on that day, the actual date, followed by two initials indicating the village.<sup>928</sup> If the conversation was conducted with a person who held a specific position, I have added ‘kap’ for *kapu mahaththaya* and ‘monk’ for monk (see Appendix 3). Also, when the conversation was with a member of the cultural committee, I explicitly mention it.

I stayed only for a brief time in the villages. However, nothing ‘new’ came up after a while. One reason was that there were no distractions: there was nothing else to do other than walk and talk (and that was the only thing we did), so we were able to cover almost the entire villages. I wish, however, that I could have seen more of the rituals than I did: I was able to see only one *yakkama* in 2017 in Narangamuva. In what follows I introduce what kind of Ravana representations relating him to Lakegala have emerged in the villages and how these Ravana representations are employed in the process of *Ravanisation*.

## 7.2 Representations of Ravana’s alleged Connection to Lakegala

In this section, I explore multiple representations of Ravana’s alleged connection to Lakegala. The selection of representations is mainly based on what the villagers have brought to the fore and the extent of the alleged connection to Lakegala. I use Ravana discourse (see Section 3.1) here to refer to popular Ravana publications and to interviews with Ravana researchers. It was mainly the people who devoted considerable time to ‘Ravana research’ who came up with details of Ravana’s connections to Lakegala.<sup>929</sup>

It is not my aim to make a division between ‘authentic’ Ravana lore and recent representations because lore is constantly evolving. Here lore includes traditions (inclu-

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<sup>928</sup> The interview codes of the conversations conducted in Lakegala area includes the date and the initials of the specific village. I therefore mention after the first reference to a specific conversation only the interview code.

<sup>929</sup> Most people from Colombo with no specific interest in Ravana had no idea about Lakegala. When I made a printout of the Lakegala photo that I took in Meemure (Figure 7.1) and hung it on one of the pillars at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya while I repaired the chariot there in 2018, for instance, some people paid reverence to the picture with devotional hand gestures thinking that it was the famous pilgrimage site Sri Pada.

ding material and ritual culture) as well as local narratives (of the past) about these traditions, villages, and their inhabitants that are allegedly passed down from generation to generation.<sup>930</sup> With my explorations of the multiple representations of Ravana's alleged connections to Lakegala as part of the dynamics of *Ravanisation* and lore, I aim to answer the question of how lore – including poetry, creative etymologies, the imagined landscape, and rituals and material culture – is employed for the recent interest in Ravana. I am well aware that my investigation of these dynamics is a snapshot and that I have probably overlooked some of the other processes.

In this section, I often refer to articles from the book *Historic Matale*.<sup>931</sup> The book, published in 1984 in Sinhala as *Ethihasika Mathale* by the Cultural Board of the Mathale district, is – to my knowledge – one of very few books providing extensive information on the life-circumstances of the villagers and lore (including a section on rituals) of the district. The book is the result of a joint interest among governmental and local representatives to put the traditions and 'pre-historic value' of the Mathale district forward. I refer here to the book to point out that certain Ravana ideas were present in the area in the 1980s and 1970s – as most of the research mentioned in the book was conducted at that time – although I am well aware that this also might include some wishful thinking and projections. I thus regard the book as an effort of a particular zeitgeist but in that capacity useful to compare it with the post-war interest in Ravana.<sup>932</sup>

This section starts with the multiple representations of Lakegala as Ravana's (temporary) abode (Section 7.2.1). In Section 7.2.1.1, I introduce the representation of Lakegala as Ravana's war zone, and in Section 7.2.1.2 the representation of Lakegala as part of Ravana's ancient kingdom. I also reflect on how the framing of Lakegala as Ravana's (temporary) abode is employed in the process of *Ravanisation*. I discuss the representation of Ravana as local deity separately in Section 7.2.2, as this representation has a different function for *Ravanisation* compared to the other representations.

## 7.2.1 The Representation of Lakegala as Ravana's (Temporary) Abode

Most of the villagers told me that they have climbed Lakegala.<sup>933</sup> When I asked for any narratives about Lakegala, they often mentioned two narratives: that Ravana brought

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<sup>930</sup> This working definition of lore is partly based on what Deborah Winslow has written about folk etymologies in Sri Lanka – namely that '[...] folk etymologies of village names are highly localised stories that relate individual communities to selected events in the past.' Winslow, *The Onomastic Discourse of Folk Etymologies in Sri Lanka*, 79. Also, that the knowledge was passed down from generation to generation was mentioned by villagers themselves by using the Sinhala word *paramparava* (generation; tradition since generations). Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'paramparāwa,' 325.

<sup>931</sup> Despite the translation of the book, I have asked my research assistants to translate some specific sections since some translations in the English book are of inferior quality and lack the subtle nuances of the original text.

<sup>932</sup> Another limitation of the book is that it deals with the entire Mathale district. Despite this, it contains detailed information on Ranamure and Narangamuva and the rituals in those villages.

<sup>933</sup> Out of approximately 30 conversations in Ranamure and Narangamuva, only five times did someone report that they had not climbed Lakegala. These five conversations were conducted in Ranamure,

Sita to Lakegala to hide her and how part of the mountain broke due to a war that involved Ravana. Here I focus mainly on how Lakegala is perceived as Ravana's war zone. I mention the representation of Lakegala as Sita's hiding place in Box 7.1.

### 7.2.1.1 The Representation of Lakegala as Ravana's War Zone

In a conversation with villagers who have climbed Lakegala, it was mentioned that Ravana came to Lakegala to hide Sita and that a war took place there between Rama and Ravana.<sup>934</sup> The man who took part in this conversation explicitly mentioned that this was referred to in poetry. Unfortunately, he could not remember the poem.<sup>935</sup>

As poetry (*kavi*) was considered an important source of knowledge for the villagers' 'traditional beliefs,' I mainly focus here on poetry in order to discuss the relevance of a particular representation of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala.<sup>936</sup> Poetry in Lakegala area was mainly recited by the elderly and consisted of a collection of four-line (rhyming) stanzas.

Extraordinary (natural) phenomena are central topics in rural lore. Around Lakegala, it is the mountain that mainly captures the imagination of the people. I was told, for instance, that on full-moon days some people have heard the sound of drumming coming from the mountain.<sup>937</sup> To illustrate the centrality of Lakegala Mountain in local lore I mention here several stanzas derived from the book *Historic Matale*:

- (2) When I was in the paddy fields of Ranamure,  
I heard a "ho-ho" sound;  
On looking around  
I saw water flowing down the Lake (rock) beautifully
  
- (3) The mother who constantly gave milk  
Is also there today;  
When many clouds had gathered over the mighty Lake rock,  
Lightening struck its summit.

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away from the main road. The reason that villagers went to the top was primarily for fun.

<sup>934</sup> Other villagers also mentioned that Ravana brought Sita to Lakegala to hide her and how part of the mountain broke off due to a war that involved Ravana. In approximately half of the conversations in which I asked for what purpose Ravana came to Lakegala it was mentioned that he came to hide Sita (or the wife of another king).

<sup>935</sup> Conversation 02-30-04-2018NK, Narangamuva, April 30, 2018.

<sup>936</sup> I do not provide in-depth analyses of the poems as it requires a thorough investigation of the words used in the local language; I work here mostly with poetic translations of a selection of poems. Despite this shortcoming I consider poetry worthwhile to include here for several reasons that I mention in the reflection.

<sup>937</sup> I happened to meet two villagers from Narangamuva who told me that they have heard the sound of drumming. The sound comes from inside the mountain, and it is believed by several of the villagers that the mountain is hollow and that a cave with a door leads to the inside of the mountain. Some located a palace inside the mountain. Conversation, 02-04-04-2018NA; conversation 14-04-04-2018NPreNA with elderly man who previously owned a shop in Narangamuva, New Pallegama, April 4, 2018.



- (4) When I cast my glance from Udatatana,  
I caught the sight of the Lake rock [Siri Laka gala]<sup>938</sup>  
I saw the muddy water flowing over the rock  
And the water fell on the 'Kalu-nika' tree because of the wind
- (6) The Kahapana forest [*kalupana keleya*] is to the North.  
On the south is Mimure of Laggala,  
The Gombare peak is two hundred and two feet high.  
The Lakegala rock is renowned [sic] throughout Laggala
- (8) Blasting the rocks,  
the tanks have been built in the days of old,  
the Mimure rock is covered with mist  
like the showers of arrows in battlefield of Ravana<sup>939</sup>

In these stanzas the focus is on the mighty mountain, its splendour, and its centrality to the area. One figurative reference is made to Ravana: the mist surrounding the rock evokes associations with the arrows of Ravana's war. How Ravana's war badly affected Lakegala was recited by an elderly lady of approximately 90 years old from Narangamuva. Varieties on these stanzas were also recited by other villagers (poetic translation):

Doubtful to run around this rock [*gala*]<sup>940</sup>  
Afraid to open eyes and see  
Sad to put into verse to say  
Lakegala is a good place to build a *dagaba*<sup>941</sup>  
The Mathale rock [*gala*] was seen tall  
Lakegala seems like it has been smoothed on all four sides  
Is it a gods' [*deviyan*] residence on that rock [*gala*]  
From Ravana's great war; Lakegala  
Ravana's war broke Lakegala

It shines as a beautiful image/with beauty for our Siri Laka<sup>942</sup>  
Every gentleman comes to see

<sup>938</sup> The transcription says Siri Laka: Wijesooriya S. S., & Etambagaskada R. (1996), Folk Poetry, in C. Gamage (Ed.), *Historic Matale*, Department of Cultural Affairs, 351-370, 353. (Original work published 1984). The original Sinhala text says *siralaka*: Wijesooriya S. S., & Etambagaskada, R. (1984), *Janakavi* [Folk Poetry], in S. Gamage (Ed.), *Ethihasika Mathale*, Mathale: *Mathale disa sanskritthik mandalaye Prakash-thayak*, 232-241, 232. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Jana,' 189, 'Kavi,' 112.

<sup>939</sup> Wijesooriya & Etambagaskada, Folk Poetry, 353, 354. This is the only time that Ravana is mentioned in the stanzas presented in this book.

<sup>940</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Gal,' 156.

<sup>941</sup> A *dagaba* is a large solid building in the form of a cone raised close to the Buddhist temple and an object of highest veneration (reliquary). See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Dágaba,' 239.

<sup>942</sup> The word *ruvin* is used. It is derived from *ruva* that can be translated as image, beauty. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Ruva,' 538.

The inauspicious thing done to us by king Ravana  
Siri Laka was broken into two parts, a slope was let go into the lake [*veva*]<sup>943</sup>

The references to Ravana in this poem and in the poem from the 1970s (as mentioned in *Historic Matale*) do not tell extensive Ravana stories. These stanzas are, however, important to the framing of Lakegala as Ravana's (temporary) abode as the stanzas of both poems relate Lakegala to Ravana's war. Moreover, it refers to the mountain as Siri Laka and Siri Laka *gala* (*gala* means rock). This designation – as I discuss in the reflection of this section – is important for the broader relevance of lore and the portrayal of this mountain as Ravana's war zone in the process of *Ravanisation*.

How Ravana's war affected the rock was elaborated upon in stanzas recited by a member of the cultural committee who was actively involved in promoting Ravana's connection to the area (see Sections 7.1.3 and 7.2.2.2). I here provide a translation of four stanzas that he recited (poetic translation):

- (1) *Ilakdiva* was given the name Lakdiva  
the origins of the place where the name for this Lakdiva came from are unknown  
Lak was fertile and with victory Siri Laka was created  
the name for Lanka was created here
- (2) The name Lakgala is derived from the past  
*Ilakgala* was coined to become Lakgala  
Lak was fertile and with victory Siri Laka was created  
the name for Lanka was created here
- (3) During Kashyapa Buddha's *sasanaya* [period/dispensation]<sup>944</sup>  
in that time king Ravana travelled in the sky  
For the wrongdoing that Rama did  
It is said that princess Sita was taken and covered in Lakegala
- (5) In Uyangamuva, lakes had been built before  
Rama's arrow/strength and gunfire stroke the aim  
Ravana's war was strong like arrows  
The darkness of November came as smoke to Lakegala<sup>945</sup>

On a local level, poetry is of specific relevance to *Ravanisation* because it relates the alleged war between Ravana and Rama to the mountain and explicitly mentions several sites and natural features that emerged/were affected by the war: a piece of the rock broke and fell into a lake, which is located in a garden. When I asked villagers about specific sites located on Lakegala Mountain, they frequently mentioned the presence of

<sup>943</sup> Recitation of poetry by M. G. Punchimenika, Narangamuva, April 9, 2017.

<sup>944</sup> Some other villagers mentioned that Ravana came to Lakegala at the time of Kashyapa Buddha as well. For instance: conversation 04-04-04-2018NAkap. See on the *sasana(ya)* concept note 218.

<sup>945</sup> Recitation of poetry by a member of the cultural committee, Ranamure, April 9, 2017.

a pond (*pokuna*), lake/tank (*veva*), or stream (*oya*), and a cave located in the Uyangamuva garden (for more on the cave, see Box 7.1).<sup>946</sup> Uyangamuva is a flat area with trees and waterways located between Narangamuva and the mountain's top (see Figure 7.13). I visited the area in 2017, and several villagers also went to Uyangamuva because the area was used in the past for cultivation and letting cattle graze.<sup>947</sup> Although the garden is romanticised in poetry – and I could imagine that the cool climate under the trees is convenient for leisure activities and certain cultivation – I have no warm memories of the swampy ground with bloodthirsty leeches and the extremely hot and steep rocks around the garden that we (unsuccessfully) tried to climb to visit the cave.

### Box 7.1: Co-existing and Competing Imagined Landscapes

In addition to a pond, some villagers mentioned that a cave (*lena*) was located in the rocks surrounding Uyangamuva.<sup>948</sup> Several villagers told me that they have visited the cave (or have at least seen the entrance from a distance) and came up with details – that it has the size of a house, for instance, or that there were remains of cooking facilities. It was also mentioned that paddy coverings could be found in the cave, indicating that people lived there in the past.<sup>949</sup>

When I asked who stayed in the cave, several villagers explained to me the creative etymology of the cave's name: *kapu atuva galena*, which translates to 'the rock cave where cotton is made.'<sup>950</sup> This creative etymology of the cave led to a creative association with Kuveni: in the *Mahavamsa*, it is suggested that when Vijaya came to Sri Lanka, the female *yaksha* Kuveni was making cotton (see Section 4.2.3). People who knew about the cave most often mentioned that Kuveni stayed in this particular cave making cotton, hence its name.<sup>951</sup> Whereas several of the other sites on the mountain were related to Ravana, the association of the cave with Kuveni through its etymology made some villagers think of a cave for Ravana and/or Sita as well. In contrast to the representation of Lakegala as Ravana's warzone, for which several nature objects and sites were mentioned in poetry, no specific features were mentioned as Sita's hiding place. Some villagers mentioned that Sita was kept in a cave and referred to Sita's cave as the *kapu atuva galena*.<sup>952</sup> Others mentioned that Ravana lived in a cave.<sup>953</sup> The mystery of to whom this cave exactly belonged was solved by

<sup>946</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Oya,' 89, 'Pariwāpa,' 330, 'Wēwa,' 622.

<sup>947</sup> For instance, an elderly man from Ranamure who never climbed Lakegala explained that he went to Uyangamuva in 1968 for spice cultivation, cardamom in particular: conversation 07-28-04-2018RA. In addition to this elderly man, some other people also mentioned that Uyangamuva was used for cultivation in the past (conversation 02-30-04-2018NK; conversation 07-01-05-2018RA; conversation 02-06-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 6, 2018). One villager even explained that he had deeds of part of the Uyangamuva garden: conversation 14-04-04-2018NPreNA.

<sup>948</sup> In five conversations it was explicitly mentioned that *kapu atuva galena* is located in Uyangamuva.

<sup>949</sup> That remains of paddy coverings can be found, that it has remains of cooking facilities, and that the cave is the size of the house were mentioned in five conversations.

<sup>950</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Kapu,' 104, 'Gal,' 156, 'Lena,' 551.

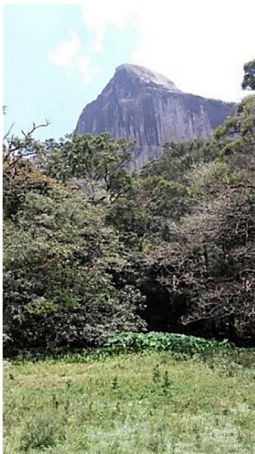
<sup>951</sup> That Kuveni stayed in the cave (making cotton) was mentioned in six conversations.

<sup>952</sup> That Sita stayed on Lakegala in a cave – not specified – was mentioned in three conversations. That Sita was kept in *kapu atuv(a) galena* was mentioned in two conversations: conversation 06-05-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018; conversation 04-04-04-2018NAkap.

<sup>953</sup> Conversation 05-06-04-2018RA; conversation 03a-29-04-2018RKvk.

a *kapu mahaththaya* from Narangamuva (himself critical on the promoting of Ravana in the area) who said that since Kuveni and Sita lived in different eras, both could have stayed in the cave.<sup>954</sup>

This vignette of the cave illustrates the close connection in lore between alleged events of the past and the landscape. In addition, the narratives attributed to the cave illustrate the evolving character of lore. The creative etymology of the cave related the cave (and the area) to the *Mahavamsa*. Other sites and natural features in the same area however related the area to Ravana's war that took allegedly place in Lakegala. There was no specific site in the landscape for the other condensed version of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala: that he brought Sita to Lakegala to hide her there. The idea of Sita living in a cave – or even this particular cave – has gained some foothold. This vignette of the cave illustrates the heterogeneity of Sinhalese Buddhist mythistorical imaginations of Sri Lanka's past that simultaneously co-exist and compete at a local level in the imagined landscape.



**Figure 7.13:** Lakegala with the 'pond' and trees in front of it. Picture taken from Uyangamuva. Picture taken by author, Uyangamuva, April 9, 2017.

Villagers mentioned about the pond in Uyangamuva that part of Lakegala rock broke and covered it. The war between Rama and Ravana was given as an explanation of this event. As one of the villagers explained (translation):

- V [...] there is a huge lake [*veva*]. On top there are remains of the mountain that fell and underneath there is water. There are rock plains on top.
- R How did that rock [*gala*] fall?
- V The rock [*gala*] fell when Ravana and Rama were fighting, when they were shooting, according to rumours [*katakatha(va)*]. When hiding Sita devi, when she was kept here, they have shot from Dunuvila. That rock crashed down. That is the ordinary opinion. Rama was the one who shot. That is how they say. They had stone weapons [...] those unlike today.<sup>955</sup>

<sup>954</sup> Conversation 04-04-04-2018Nakap.

<sup>955</sup> Conversation 06-05-04-2018NA. The story that there is a pond on Lakegala that had been covered by part of the rock was mentioned in twenty conversations. In line with this explanation by the villagers

**Box 7.2: Place-name Etymologies and the Framing of Lakegala as Ravana's War Zone**

In Ranamure (and a select group of people in Narangamuva), I asked villagers about the meaning of Ranamure.<sup>956</sup> Most often they 'translated' Ranamure as 'checkpoint' or 'security point' (frequently, they used the word *murapola* or 'barrier').<sup>957</sup> As an alleged security checkpoint in the past, Ranamure was associated with war (*raṇa* translates as war). When I asked who used the checkpoint, the majority of villagers that I talked with in Ranamure mentioned the alleged connection of the village with Ravana. For instance (translation):

- R How [was] the name of the village Ranamure made?  
 V Generally, King Ravana was there in Lakegala. Those times there were guard points [*murapola*].<sup>958</sup>

In Narangamuva, I discussed the meaning of the name of the neighbouring village in ten conversations and a different picture took shape. Most of the villagers also mentioned that Ranamure was a checkpoint, but only two of them related the village name to Ravana. Others mentioned that diverse people used the security checkpoint.<sup>959</sup> A *kapu mahaththaya* gave a remarkable explanation of the name of the neighbouring village (translation):

*Kapu m:* A king called Vijayapala fled war and hid between Ranamure and Narangamuva. Ranamure was so called because there was a checkpoint under a Rana-vara tree. This is Narangamuva. The other was in Meemure which was a checkpoint under a Mee tree [...]. There is no connection with Ravana. These are made up stories. Those who know history would not say that.<sup>960</sup>

In *The Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register*, J. P. Lewis wrote down lists of etymologies of 295 village names of the Mathale district when he worked as a government agent in the area

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and, for instance, the poem recited by the member of the cultural committee, it was often explicated that Rama shot an arrow from *dunuwila* (a lake in the area) and because of that only the rock broke and the pond was covered.

<sup>956</sup> In Narangamuva, I discussed the meaning of Ranamure in ten conversations. In Ranamure, I discussed it in 30 conversations. It also came up in some conversations in the neighbouring villages. Two deviant stories about the etymologies of Ranamure were told in Narangamuva and Ranamure. One person explained that the names of Ranamure and Meemure were derived from types of trees (conversation 04-04-04-2018Nakap). Another person informed us that there is a story that the village names of Meemure and Ranamure were derived from jewels (*rathana*): gems (*mini*) and gold (*ran*); conversation 03a-29-04-2018RKvk; Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Mini,' 483, 'Ratana,' 524, 'Ran,' 526. In both conversations, multiple stories were mentioned to inform me and the informants themselves expressed no interest in Ravana.

<sup>957</sup> *Murapola* is most probably derived from *murapala* or watching (*mura*) place (*pala*). See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Mura,' 'Murapala,' 492.

<sup>958</sup> Conversation 07-28-04-2018RA. In five conversations in Ranamure, I was told that they had no idea about the name of the village. In a few other conversations, people were not sure about the meaning.

<sup>959</sup> Some villagers did not (want to) explicate which kings' security checkpoint it was. It was mentioned in Narangamuva that Ranamure was a checkpoint of Narada *vedda* (conversation 04-30-04-2018NL, Narangamuva, April 30, 2018), King Vijayapala (conversation 06-05-04-2018NA; conversation 04-04-04-2018Nakap) and King Vallagamba (conversation 11-04-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018; conversation 02-30-04-2018NK).

<sup>960</sup> Conversation 04-04-04-2018Nakap.

(1906-1910).<sup>961</sup> In Lewis' lists, it is said that gold (*ran* means 'gold' in Sinhala) was watched there by guards (*mure* means 'guard' in Sinhala).<sup>962</sup> No other reference is made to Ravana in Lewis' lists, and at present the place-name etymologies of the other villages in Lakegala area lack any connection with Ravana.<sup>963</sup>

In the chapter 'Folk-lore of Laggala' (*Historic Matale*, 1984), it is mentioned that some believe that the Rama-Ravana war was fought at Ranamure: "[...] the word "Rana" means "war" and "mure" means "occasion".<sup>964</sup> Around the time that *Historic Matale* was written, an interest in Ravana was expressed on a governmental level by Premadasa (see section 'Kataragama' in Section 5.3.1), for instance, who even named a village in Laggala area after Ravana. Mirando Obeyesekere noted in a publication of 1998 that Ranamuregala (Ranamure rock) peak can be identified as a military base of Ravana and that Ravana's arsenal was distributed over several sites around Lakegala.<sup>965</sup> In the popular Ravana book *Ravana Sri Lankave Shreshtha Raju – The Great King of Sri Lanka* (2015) it is mentioned that Ranamure was used for weapon storage. For this the creative etymology of Ranamure is mentioned: *rana* means 'war' and thus Ranamure is considered the place of the battle.<sup>966</sup>

<sup>961</sup> Lewis, J. P. (1924), Folk Etymology: Placenames and Traditions in the Matale District, in J. M. Senaveratna (Ed.), *The Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register* (Vol. 9, Part 3), Colombo: Times of Ceylon, 135-142, 140. Lewis, J. P. (1924), Folk Etymology: Placenames and Traditions in the Matale District, in J. M. Senaveratna (Ed.), *The Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register* (Vol. 10, Part 2), Colombo: Times of Ceylon, 100-113. Lewis noted that he found two books, probably from the fifties or sixties (of the 1800s), on villages in the Mathale district: Lewis, Folk Etymology (Vol. 9), 135. On Lewis see: Pieris, P. E., & Naish, R. B. (1999), *Ceylon and the Portuguese, 1505-1658*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 213. A significant number of etymologies mention plants, trees, or herbs. Another group of etymologies refers to events that happened during the times of certain kings, especially king Vijayapala, a local king ruling the Mathale district during the time of the Portuguese, see also: Wimalaratne, W. A. (1996), Provincial Limits, Roadways and the History of Matale, in C. Gamage (Ed.), *Historic Matale*, Department of Cultural Affairs, 22-27, 24. (Original work published 1984). See on the top three of 'Thematic Elements in the Lewis Etymologies' (nature, royalty, and common people): Winslow, *The Onomastic Discourse of Folk Etymologies*, 81.

<sup>962</sup> Lewis, Folk Etymology, 140.

<sup>963</sup> In Lewis' lists, the etymology of Narangamuva is mentioned twice, most probably because Lewis combined etymologies from two books. Narangamuva or Narangomuwa is said to derive '[f]rom the *nāran* (mandarin orange) tree which stood here.' In the list of villages in south Mathale, it is mentioned that the village is called after the *vedda* Nihará. These references to Narangamuva are found in: Lewis, Folk Etymology (Vol. 9), 140; Lewis, Folk Etymology, (Vol. 10), 104. In the conversations that I held in Narangamuva, the place-name etymology was related to inhabitation of the village: I was told that a *vedda* called Narada came to the village, that the village was named after him, and that they considered this *vedda* their ancestor.

<sup>964</sup> Piyadasa K. D. (1996), Folk-lore of Laggala. in C. Gamage (Ed.), *Historic Matale*, Department of Cultural Affairs, 135-137, 135. (Original work published in 1984). Piyadasa was at that time the development officer of the Mathale area.

<sup>965</sup> Obeyesekere, M. (1998), *Lanka Pura Rajadaniya* [The Kingdom of Lanka Pura], in Matale District Secretariat (Ed.), *Batadandu Kandavetiye Urumaya*, Gangodavila: Depani, 1-12, 3. This book was published in 1998 under the supervision of the Matale District secretariat for the occasion of a literature-art appraisal festival.

<sup>966</sup> Somasundara, D. (2015), *Ravana Sri Lankave Shreshtha Raju – The Great King of Sri Lanka*, Colombo 10: S. Godage and Brothers, 144, 188. Ranamure as a point to guard with reference to the etymology is also mentioned in: Premachandra, A. (2017), *Lankadipati Sri Ravana* [Ravana, Supreme Lord of Lanka], Muleriyawa: Ashoka Premachandra, 35. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Rana,' 522.

The creative etymologies of placenames (toponyms) in Lakegala area mentioned here are, at present, almost exclusively related to mythistorical persons.<sup>967</sup> Although I have not conducted in-depth (historical) research on other creative place-name etymologies, this might suggest a general increased interest in (alleged) ancestry in the last century. The evolution of the Ranamure place-name etymology further illustrates that an interest in Ravana's alleged connection to the area was present prior to the post-war period. The tradition of creative place-name etymologies in lore – combined with the evolving character of lore – is at present employed to strongly relate Ravana to Ranamure. Similar to the references of Ravana's connection to Lakegala in poetry, the creative etymology of Ranamure envisions Lakegala as Ravana's warzone and provides *Ravanisation* with a territorial dimension that some Sinhalese Buddhists have elaborated upon in the post-war period.

How the specific representation of Lakegala as Ravana's warzone in lore is employed in the process of *Ravanisation* becomes explicit when we look at how poetry allegedly derived from Lakegala area is reproduced by the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* (see Box 1.1). In 2014, this research group posted a collection of Power-Point slides on their Facebook page.<sup>968</sup> One of the slides was titled 'Ravana's territory emerging from the Laggala folk poems.' On the slide, they duplicated a folk poem (*yana kavi*) derived from the children's' book *Hela Maha Virayano: Sakvithi maha Ravana rajathuma* (*Great Hela Hero: King Ravana the Great Ruler of the World*, 2009).<sup>969</sup> I provide here a poetic translation of all the stanzas:

- (1) The rock where Pulathisi *rishi* dwelled upon<sup>970</sup>  
 The rock, Yak warriors respected by bending heads  
 The rock that can be seen from Pulathisi *pura* day and night  
 Laggala is fortunate to have these powerful forces
  
- (2) To the village of Meemure which shines as a pleasant beauty  
 Every gentleman comes to see  
 This value is given to us by King Ravana  
 A piece of Siri Laka was cut out and washed away to the river [*veeva*]

<sup>967</sup> Winslow has also pointed out that place-name etymologies are often connected to names of alleged historical persons: Winslow, *The Onomastic Discourse of Folk Etymologies in Sri Lanka*, 79.

<sup>968</sup> In addition to these slides, they have published pictures of rituals they have conducted to Ravana at several places in the country as well as posts of newspaper publications on Ravana, articles written by other Ravana researchers, and public events. Their Facebook page has around the maximum of 5,000 followers.

<sup>969</sup> These stanzas were extracted from the book: Bulathsinhala, Ch. (2009), *Hela Maha Virayano: Sakvithi Maha Ravana Rajathuma* [Great Hela Hero: King Ravana the Great World Monarch], Pannipitiya: SRS Publications, 34-36. It is mentioned in the book that children are nowadays stuck in a race chasing after competitive exams and that there are many unproductive programs on TV and media targeting at children. This book was written as a necessity of the era to teach children about Ravana.

<sup>970</sup> See on Pulathisi *rishi* or *rishi* Pulasthi: 'Katuwana' in Section 5.3.1 and note 796.

- (3) Mathale rock is seen soaring high  
Lakegala, seen as scraped off from four sides  
Is that rock a god's dwelling?  
Rama's path was directed to Lakegala
- (4) In Uyanganuwa, [a] lake was built from former times  
Rama's arrow and gunfire stroke the aim  
Ravana's fearful wars with gunfire  
The darkness of November came as smoke to Lankagala
- (5) When King Bandara ascended the throne  
A great *stupa* was made in this Lakdiva  
He, with the intention of departing to heaven  
Gave many concessionary work to the Meemure village
- (6) A square shaped structure lies at the top of Laka  
Which is said to bring you back to youth if you drink a sip of water  
King Ravana's dwelling is right there  
Oh friend, look at black water pond [*kaludiya pokuna*] on top of Siri Laka
- (7) The pearl of the East is my Siri Lak earth  
Mathale is published/known all over the world  
Ravana's country is the beginning of the Hela nation [*jathiya*]  
When [you] say Laggala, [your] heart is pounding<sup>971</sup>

### **The relevance of lore and the envisioning of Lakegala as Ravana's warzone in the process of *Ravanisation***

In this section, I have shown that oral transmission, including poetry, is in an area with a high level of illiteracy of central importance for local representations of the past and general knowledge about the area. Several stanzas presented in this chapter contain references to a war in which Ravana was involved. This war took place in Lakegala, and Lakegala was where Sita was held captive. The whereabouts of Ravana in the past as mentioned in poetry are bound up with sites and natural features. In addition, the creative etymology of Ranamure relates events of the war between Rama and Ravana to Lakegala area. That the poetry relates Ravana to features in the landscape provides the area with alleged historical relevance for the recent interest in Ravana. Poetry was collected and reproduced, for instance, by the members of the cultural committee who col-

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<sup>971</sup> Translation of the stanzas as provided on slide 37 on the Facebook page of the *Ravana Shakthi*. Ravana Shakthi Jathika Sanvidhaniya [Ravana Shakthi National Organisation], (2014, August 23), *Laggala Janakavi Thulin Mathuvana Ravana Adaviya* [Ravana's Territory emerging from the Laggala Folk Poems], Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=282822301909604&set=a.282821315243036&type=3&theater> (retrieved February 7, 2020). On the original source see the previous footnotes. In an article written by Mirando Obeyesekere the seventh stanza of this poem is also mentioned. Here, however, it says 'Lakgala' in the final sentence. Obeyesekere, *Lanka Pura Rajadaniya*, 3.



lected the poems from the elderly and the popular research group the *Ravana Shakthi* to preserve an alleged longstanding tradition among Sinhalese of connecting Ravana to Lakegala.

In Chapter 3, I introduced the concept imagined landscape. Diana Eck has argued that geographical features in India are linked with ancient stories of gods and heroes, and that these stories connect the geographical features in the landscape to each other. At and around Lakegala Mountain, several sites are connected to each other through the envisioning of Lakegala as Ravana's warzone. Ravana's connections to Lakegala as mentioned in lore (here poetry, creative etymologies, and conversations with villagers) are bound up with specific sites and natural features in the landscape. Lakegala's lore is employed for the recent interest in Ravana to provide Lakegala's landscape with 'historical' relevance. The evolving place-name etymology of Ranamure and the promotion of this village by the cultural committee has contributed to the profiling of this village as part of the larger imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom.

The representation of Lakegala as Ravana's war zone as mentioned in lore, also has relevance to *Ravanisation* beyond the imagining of the local landscape. The title given to the folk poems duplicated by the *Ravana Shakthi* reveals this broader spatial relevance: 'Ravana's territory emerging from the Laggala folk poems.' Ravana becomes associated not just with the mountain, but with the entire country. Important for the extension of the connection of Ravana from local sites to the entire country, is the name of the mountain itself. Siri Laka is used to refer to the mountain. In addition, Siri Laka (blessed Lanka) was used in the past as designation for the entire country.<sup>972</sup> Several villagers even mentioned that the name of the country was derived from the name of the mountain. The seventh stanza of the poem as reproduced by the *Ravana Shakthi* clearly illustrates the larger spatial implications of Ravana's connection to Lakegala: after explaining how the mountain – referred to as Siri Laka – was affected by Ravana's war, it explicitly broadens the designation Siri Laka to the country and connects it to Ravana and the Hela. Lore is thus employed by a segment of the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists to bind up the Hela-Ravana representation of the past with actual territory.

In Chapter 2, I mentioned that Dharmapala's interpretations of some concepts derived from the chronicle the *Mahavamsa* were relevant to Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism in twentieth-century Sri Lanka. Dharmapala interpreted the word *dipa*, for example, as a physical island and argued that Lanka was the island of the *dhamma* and of the Sinhalese. The relevance of actual territory for Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nation-

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<sup>972</sup> For more on designations used for Sri Lanka, see: Roberts, *Language and National Identity*, 75-102. As mentioned on page 84 of this article, Lakdiva and Siri Laka were used in war poetry of the Kandyan period (fifteenth century until 1818). Roberts translated Siri Laka as 'blessed lanka.' See: Roberts, M. (2012), *Sinhalese and its Reproduction, 1232-1818*, in A. Welikale (Ed.), *The Sri Lankan Republic at 40: Reflections on Constitutional History, Theory and Practice*, Centre for Policy Alternatives, Colombo, 253-287, 266. 'Lak(a)' and Siri Laka' were used in the ninth century: Schalk, P. (2002), *Ilavar and Lankans, Emerging Identities in a Fragmented Island*, *Asian Ethnicity*, 3(1), 47-62, 52, DOI: 10.1080/146313 60120095865. *Siri* means beauty, fortune, success, and *lak* Lanka or target. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Siri,' 684, 'Lak,' 543.

alism was further pointed out by Benjamin Schonthal who has coined the concept territorialised Buddhist nationalism in his discussion of the change in the constitutional law in Sri Lanka in 1978. This change in the constitution made it the task of the government to protect the Buddhist *sasana* and gave them the right to intervene in issues related to shrines, statues, and geographical spaces.

In Chapter 3, I argued that there is a close entanglement of narratives of the past with sites in South Asia and that this was taken to a next level in the context of twentieth-century (ethno-)nationalisms. About the Indian context it is argued that the imagining of the landscape was easily employed in the context of twentieth- (and twenty-first-) century nationalism to envision India as the kingdom of Rama (and thus a Hindu country).

In Chapter 4, I showed that in the process of *Ravanisation*, Ravana is considered the king of the Hela and the king of Lanka. Although these references can be found in the discursive and narrative sphere as well, an examination of how Lakegala's local lore is employed for the recent interest in Ravana further reveals the territorial implications of the recent interest in Ravana. Lakegala's lore provides *Ravanisation* with a tradition among the Sinhalese of an alleged historical connection of Ravana to Lakegala. In addition, as I have argued, Lakegala's lore and the creative use of Siri Laka, adds significantly to the territorial dimension of this phenomenon. It allegedly connects the 'historical' Ravana (as warrior) to actual sites: Lakegala, that becomes extended to the entire country. These territorial implications of *Ravanisation* – as, for example, based on lore – disclose the ethno-nationalist potential of this post-war phenomenon as it presents Sri Lanka as the country of Ravana and the Hela (this connection with ethnicity is discussed in detail in Section 7.2.2). On a local level several villagers, however, did not attach great importance to the envisioning of Lakegala as Ravana's warzone and framed it as 'rumours' from the elderly. For them, Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala did not result in grandiose claims of 'historical' relevance of the area.

### 7.2.1.2 Representations of Lakegala as part of Ravana's Ancient Kingdom

In this section, I explore how a segment of the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka has (recently) taken up the effort to include Lakegala in the broader imagined landscape of Sri Lanka as Ravana's ancient kingdom. For that, specific functions are attributed to Lakegala that are exemplary for the representations of Sri Lanka's past in the context of *Ravanisation*. I reflect on that in more detail in the end of this section.

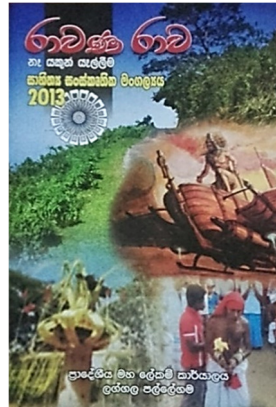
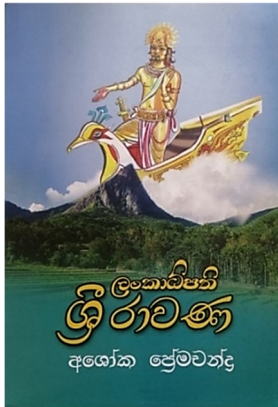
In Chapter 5, I introduced my exploration of several sites of Ravana's alleged ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka. Sigiriya is considered Ravana's main palace. In the same area – Sigiriya and Lakegala are both located in the Mathale district – Ravana had another residence: Lakegala. Mirando Obeyesekere has argued that Lankapura was located on top of the Dumbara mountain range (of which Lakegala is one of three peaks) mentioned in the *Ramayana*.<sup>973</sup> According to him '[t]here is evidence to show that the

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<sup>973</sup> Obeyesekere, *Ravana, King of Lanka*, 39.

kingdom of Laggala or the Lankāpura was located in the Matale District.<sup>974</sup> Like Mirando Obeyesekere, other authors have suggested that Lakegala was (part of) Lanka-pura and that Ravana took residence there.<sup>975</sup> As mentioned as early as 2008 in an article in the *Sunday Observer*:

Mighty Ravana Emperor was the head of all tribes such as Raksha, Yaksha, Deva Etc. who ruled in Lanka from Lakegala, present Laggala to the east of the Knuckles range of mountains towards the Meemure village [...]. Ravana lived in Lakegala which is also identified as Laggala, Lankapabbatha, Lankagiri, Samudra Malaya Samudragiri etc.<sup>976</sup>



**Figure 7.14** (left): Cover of the book *Lankadipati Sri Ravana* written by Ashoka Premachandra. The cover depicts Ravana in his *dandu monaraya* and Lakegala mountain.

**Figure 7.15** (right): Cover of the *Ravana Rava* [Ravana's Echo] magazine published in 2013 by the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat to promote the Ravana *yakkama* in Ranamure.

<sup>974</sup> Obeyesekere, *Ravana, King of Lanka*, 41.

<sup>975</sup> Reference to the *Ramayana* to locate Ravana's kingdom in Sri Lanka is also made by Somasundara: Somasundara, *Ravana Sri Lankave Shreshtha Raju*, 144. On the back cover of the book *Lankadipati Sri Ravana* (see Figure 7.14), the author cited the 'Maha Bharath' to support the claim (probably the *Mahabharata* is meant) that Ravana lives across the ocean in Thrikutagirikanda, Lankapura. Then he posed the rhetorical question if this three peaks mountain range (Thrikutagirikanda) consists of Lakegala, and its surrounding mountains. In the novel, the author argued that Lankapura was close by Lakegala. Premachandra, *Lankadipati Sri Ravana*, back cover, 144 and Appendix 32.

<sup>976</sup> Karalliyadda, S. B. (2008, August 24), Ravana Mighty Emperor of Lanka, *Sunday Observer*, <http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2008/08/24/plus03.asp> (retrieved February 25, 2020). On the first page of *Historic Matale*, it is mentioned that '[i]t is the accepted view of modern historiographers that Lankapura, the capital city of the world-renowned King Ravana, who ruled Lanka during that era, 4,000 years ago, was situated in Laggala in Matale.' Paranagama, & Sumanajothi Nayaka *Thero*, (1996), *Historic Matale* (Trans.), in C. Gamage (Ed.), *Historic Matale*, Department of Cultural Affairs, 3-12, 3. (Official work published 1984). Similar references to Lakegala as Lanka *pabbatha* (*pabatta*, mountain in Pali) and Lanka *giri* (mountain/rock in Pali and Sinhala) are made in recently published popular Ravana books. In *Ravana Sri Lankave Shreshtha Raju – The Great King of Sri Lanka* it is mentioned that Laggala *kanda* (mountain) is referred to as Lanka *pabbatha* and Lanka *giri*. Somasundara, *Ravana Sri Lankave Shreshtha Raju – The Great King of Sri Lanka*, 144. In *Mithyavak Novana Ravana Puravruththaya* [The Ravana Legend which is not a Myth] the author also mentions that in the past Lakegala was referred to as Lanka *pabbatha* and Lanka *giri*. Samarasingha, R. P. (2014), *Mithyavak Novana Ravana Puravruththaya* [The Ravana Legend which is not a Myth], Dankotuva: Wasana Books, 77. Davids & Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 'Giri,' 282, 'Pabbata,' 461. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Giri,' 161.

I showed in the previous section that most people in Lakegala area connected Ravana to the area through the framing of Lakegala as Ravana's war zone and Lakegala as the place where he hid Sita. Among villagers in Lakegala area, the function of Lakegala as part of Ravana's larger kingdom and/or residential area was barely brought to the fore. One *kapu mahaththaya* even denied that Ravana stayed in the area: he only came and went.<sup>977</sup>

Several Sinhalese Buddhists, however, started to think about some specific functions that the mountain could have played in Ravana's ancient kingdom. For this, the outstanding shape of the mountain and the creative etymology became relevant. I introduce here two examples of representations of Lakegala as part of Ravana's ancient kingdom.

In addition to the etymology of the village names, I also discussed the etymology of Lakegala Mountain with the villagers.<sup>978</sup> They often broke Lakegala into two words: (*i*)*lak* (*lak* or *laka* means aim) and *gala* (stone or rock). In approximately half of the conversations in which I discussed the etymology of Lakegala, villagers added that Lakegala was used in the past as a beacon for travellers, or specifically sailors from Trincomalee side who used Lakegala as point of orientation to 'aim' at.<sup>979</sup>

Authors of popular Ravana books have also referred to Lakegala as a beacon. As mentioned in the book *Mithyavak Novana Ravana Puravrutthaya* (The Ravana Legend which is not a Myth), it is believed that Talaimannar in the northwest and Koneswaram (Trincomalee) in the northeast of Sri Lanka can be seen from the top of Lakegala.<sup>980</sup> According to this author, traders coming from the ocean used Lakegala in the past as outstanding landmark. In *Hela Isivara Maha Ravana* (Hela Saint Great Ravana), written by a monk as reading material for school children, it is explained that there were reflective mirrors on top of the mountain.<sup>981</sup> According to D. Somasundara, the author of *Ravana Sri Lankave Shreshtha Raju – The Great King of Sri Lanka*, the mountain was referred to as *illakgala* (aiming rock) because sailors aimed at it (i.e., used it as a point of orientation). In addition, the outstanding shape of the mountain was employed by Ravana to land his flying machine (*dandu monaraya*) on.<sup>982</sup> Mirando Obeyesekere has further provided alleged 'physical evidence' of the connection of Ravana's flying machine (*dandu*

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<sup>977</sup> Conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap.

<sup>978</sup> In Narangamuva, I discussed the creative etymology of Lakegala in eleven conversations. In one conversation I was told that they had no idea. In Ranamure, I discussed the meaning of Lakegala in twelve conversations. In five conversations, I was told that they had no idea. I also discussed the creative etymology of Lakegala in the surrounding villages.

<sup>979</sup> The creative etymology of Lakegala is 'aiming rock' derived from *ilakke* (target) and *gala* (rock). At least in ten conversations it was mentioned that Lakegala was used in the past as a beacon or aim when people came with ships to Sri Lanka, and several others mentioned that it was an aim that could be seen from afar. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Ilakke,' 71.

<sup>980</sup> Samarasingha, *Mithyavak Novana Ravana Puravrutthaya*, 77.

<sup>981</sup> Bopitiye Ariyagnana (2017), *Hela Isivara Maha Ravana* [Hela Saint Great Ravana], Ganemulla: Udaya, 30. This book was written by a monk and recommended on the cover as reading material for school students.

<sup>982</sup> Somasundara, *Ravana Sri Lankave Shreshtha Raju*, 144.

*monaraya*) to Lakegala by mentioning in a newspaper article that there was a symbol in Laggala mountain that can be interpreted as an aircraft.<sup>983</sup>

In a group conversation in the Narangamuva shop, a young man who had learned about Ravana via media sources on his phone, explained two ways by which the Lakegala etymology was connected to Ravana: someone aimed from Dunuvila (a lake in the area)<sup>984</sup> at Lakegala to hit Ravana because he had stolen someone's wife.<sup>985</sup> He also explained that Lakegala was used in the past by ships as a beacon or aim (*laka*). In addition, Ravana used it as point of orientation for his *dandu monaraya*. This modification of Lakegala's creative etymology by extending its alleged beacon function for ships to a point of orientation for Ravana's travels by airplane only happened sporadically in Lakegala area.<sup>986</sup>

In addition to Lakegala as a beacon, Lakegala is referred to in the Ravana discourse for its alleged astrological and time calculation functions. Mirando Obeyesekere has mentioned, for example, that *rishi* Pulasthi (considered Ravana's grandfather within the Ravana discourse) used Lakegala for astrological (*jyotishaya*)-scientific studies.<sup>987</sup> In the book *Vijayagamanayta pera Lankave Sri Vibhutiya* (The Glory of Sri Lanka before the Arrival of Vijaya) the astrological function of Lakegala is discussed in the context of space travelling. It is said that the top of Lakegala was an observatory of *rishi* Pulasthi where he studied celestial objects and that Ravana and Vishravas (Ravana's father) also studied astrology there.<sup>988</sup> The president of a popular Ravana research group (the Universal Knowledge Research Centre) considered Lakegala Ravana's planetarium and research centre for astrology.<sup>989</sup>

Suriya Gunasekera, one of the key-authors in the Ravana-discourse (see Box 4.1), has taken the astrological function of Lakegala in another direction. Gunasekera men-

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<sup>983</sup> Bandara, *Ravanage Dandumonaraya*, 7. See the first footnote of this chapter. I took pictures of the article to verify the content with the villagers but none of the villagers had actually seen this figure/rock carving.

<sup>984</sup> In the context of *Ramayana* tourism, it is explained that *dunu* means 'bow' and *vila* means 'lake,' and that Rama killed Ravana during the war from this particular place by aiming at him with his bow. *Vila* means pond or lake. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Dunu,' 250, 'Vila,' 600.

<sup>985</sup> This association of the creative etymology of Lakegala with Ravana happened sporadically. That Lakegala was used as a target (*laka*) to shoot at during the war between Rama and Ravana was mentioned by another villager: conversation 05-05-04-2018NA. In a popular Ravana book a similar explanation of the mountain's etymology was given: the aiming at Lakegala during the war explains the mountain's name: Rama aimed at Lakegala (*ilakka gala*, aiming rock) to shoot Ravana. Samarasingha, *Mithyavak Novana Ravana Puravrutthaya*, 78.

<sup>986</sup> One coherent narrative was told in Meemure by a villager who used to live on the other side of the mountain, and he was also clearly informed by media and Ravana researchers. He mentioned that Lakegala was used by Pulasthi (in the Ravana-discourse considered Ravana's grandfather) for astrological observations. In addition, he mentioned that Ravana used it as an aim for his sky voyages with his *dandu monaraya*. Conversation with villager G. Meemure, April 18, 2017.

<sup>987</sup> Obeyesekere, *Lanka Pura Rajadaniya*, 5. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Jyotisha,' 196.

<sup>988</sup> Sudusingha, K. D. S. (2017), *Vijayagamanayta pera Lankave Sri Vibhutiya* [The Glory of Sri Lanka before the Arrival of Vijaya], Devinuvara: Sudusingha, 102.

<sup>989</sup> Interview with Sri Mal, April 23, 2017.

tioned that Ravana folklore (*janapravada*) can be found in Laggala and Meemure (amongst other areas). The folklore speaks about the grandiosity of Ravana and it is, impossible that false stories are passed down for 4,000 or 5,000 years.<sup>990</sup> The main function of Lakegala, as advocated by Gunasekere, can be found in the book *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, a book written by the Portuguese Jesuit de Queiroz (see Section 4.1.2).<sup>991</sup>

There is a Portuguese Father called Queiroz who wrote a book about Ceylon: *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon* [...]. May have written around 1620. Maybe between 1620 and 1630. He says he went all around the country with the permission of the king. So, there is a place called Laggala close to, have you been to Mathale? [...] People at Laggala has told this catholic father that ilakegala, ilakegala is known as Lakegala and that mountain, it is a black mountain was taken as the, at present day we take the Greenwich line so he has taken this ilakegala, ilakke is aim, ilakegala as zero meridian to measure the entire universe [...]. So, people were aware even in the seventeenth century about Ravana's astrology.<sup>992</sup>

The popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* has taken over this idea of Lakegala as the central longitude. One of the slides that they have posted on their Facebook page mentions Lakegala in the context of star gate technology and its function for time calculation. On this slide, reference is made to the Portuguese Jesuit de Queiroz. As mentioned above, he wrote that the ancient prime meridian was situated over Laggala.<sup>993</sup> This idea resonates in other books as well. In *Sri Lanka Ravana Rajadaniya saha Sigiri Puranaya* (Sri Lanka Ravana Kingdom and Sigiri Legend) it is mentioned that the

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<sup>990</sup> Gunasekere, *Ethihasika Ravana*, 37, 38.

<sup>991</sup> It is not my aim here to point out whether references to any books are true or not, but so far I have been unable to find the reference to Lakegala as the centre meridian in *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*. I found a reference to Lanka's position in *Eleven Years in Ceylon*. As Forbes has mentioned in a section on 'Submersions of Lanka-poorā': [t]he traditions say that the defeat and death of Rawana were but parts of that judgement which his wickedness and the impiety of the Rakshasas had provoked. The doom extended to their country, whose fairest provinces sank beneath the ocean, [...] while the waves of oblivion closed for ever above the pride and wealth of Lanka-poorā. Its name, however, survives as the meridian point of Indian astronomers; [...] and in legends of Ceylon and the continent of India it is maintained that the splendour of Lanka's brazen battlements still gleams from the dept of ocean, [...] and illumines the sky above, just at the time when day has ceased and before night has closed in darkness [...]. The first three sets of square brackets in this quotation are omissions of footnotes. At the place of the second set of square brackets the footnote says that 'Colonel Lambton has fixed the meridian of Lanka as 75° 53'15" east of Greenwich; this is nearly three degrees to the westward of any part of Ceylon.' In: Forbes, *Eleven Years in Ceylon*, 266-267.

<sup>992</sup> Interview with Suriya Gunasekere, April 5, 2017.

<sup>993</sup> This is mentioned on slide 41 as published by the *Ravana Shakthi* on their Facebook page. Ravana Shakthi Jathika Sanvidhaniya [Ravana Shakthi National Organisation] (2014, August 23), *Vishva Jathuru Thuna? Star Gate* [Universe Journey Triad? Star Gate], Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=282822575242910&set=a.282821315243036&type=3&theater> (retrieved February 7, 2020).

first meridian longitude of the world was between Lakegala and Ujjayini in India.<sup>994</sup> The alleged function of Lakegala for time calculation is extended by some authors to Lakegala's outstanding shape. In the book *Hela Isivara Maha Ravana*, it is explained that Lakegala was used in Ravana's time as a device for measuring time: time in the entire island was measured according to the way the shadow fell around the mountain.<sup>995</sup>

### Reflection on representations of Lakegala as part of Ravana's ancient kingdom

For the alleged functions of the mountain as part of Ravana's kingdom, the shape and height of the mountain are important. The mountain has allegedly functioned as a beacon in the past and for this function the creative etymology of the mountain was combined with its outstanding triangular shape. This alleged beacon function is sometimes extended to Ravana's air traveling skills by mentioning that he also used it as point of orientation for his sky voyages. Another specific function for Ravana's kingdom was the use of the mountain as planetarium and time measurement device.

The creative etymology of the mountain – in local lore explained as beacon for ships – and its outstanding shape are extended and interpreted in the process of *Ravanisation* to make grandiose claims about the splendour of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka. The interpretations of Lakegala as time calculator/zero meridian and beacon for sky voyages in the Ravana discourse provide a more positive portrayal of the past compared to the representations of Lakegala as Ravana's warzone and Lakegala as the place where Sita was held captive. The representation of Lakegala as beacon for Ravana's *dandu monaraya* and the astrological/observatory functions of the mountain relate to the advanced technology mastered by Ravana and the Hela. Although these representations are only to a limited extent locally (re)produced, they disclose some central characteristics of *Ravanisation*. In Chapter 4, I showed that in the context of *Ravanisation* Ravana is portrayed as very skilled and talented and that the Hela civilisation was extremely advanced. Astrology and aircraft technology are included in the lists of the ten skills that Ravana allegedly mastered (see Section 4.3.2). The representations of Lakegala as a beacon (and by some as a runway) for the *dandu monaraya* and astrological centre materialise the skills and connects the ancient Hela civilisation to an extraordinary physical site in Sri Lanka. The inclusion of Lakegala as part of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka in the process of *Ravanisation* by extending its creative etymology and elaborating on its outstanding shape makes this site a physical marker of the ancient Hela civilisation in Sri Lanka. Reproductions of the mountain in the process of *Ravanisation* recall it – like Sigiriya – as one of the symbols of Ravana's ancient kingdom. The (recent) representations of Lakegala as part of Ravana's ancient kingdom reveals several characteristics of ethno-nationalist representations of the past as it focusses on the golden ages of the indigenous Hela civilisation that is explicitly bound up with territory. In Chapter 3, I introduced several theorists who argue that indigeneity,

<sup>994</sup> Seneviratne, *Sri Lanka Ravana Rajadaniya saha Sigiri Puranaya*, 153.

<sup>995</sup> Bopitiye Ariyagnana, *Hela Isivara Maha Ravana*, 30. Elsewhere Lakegala is referred to as 'sun dial': Samarasingha, *Mithyavak Novana Ravana Puravvruththaya*, 78.

ancient monarchy, territory, and golden ages are central to ethno-nationalist representations of the past. As I further argue in the following section, these characteristics are uniquely blended in the multiple representations of Ravana's alleged connections to Lakegala.

## 7.2.2 The Representation of Ravana as Local Deity

Whereas the focus in the previous sections was on Lakegala as (part of the) imagined landscape, I explore in this section the relevance of Lakegala as religious landscape. In Chapter 3, I mentioned that a religious landscape includes (amongst other things) sanctuaries and ritual and cultural practices. I mainly focus on the representation of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala as local deity to discuss the specific characteristics and the relevance of Ravana's religious landscape at Lakegala for *Ravanisation*. First, I introduce some general concepts, principles, and rituals related to the pantheon that I came across in Lakegala area. I then explore the local ritual and material culture related to Ravana, and I conclude with some reflections on the relevance of the representation of Ravana as local deity for *Ravanisation*.

### 7.2.2.1 Kings and Ancestors, Deities and *Yakshas*

In 2017, I went with my host to Uyangamuva, a garden located on Lakegala (see Section 7.2.1.1). There, he showed me a place where villagers conduct a specific ritual: the hanging of the twig or branch (*aththa*).<sup>996</sup> In Lakegala area, this ritual is conducted to ask protection of the deity who allegedly overlooks a certain area – the ominous border area, when they enter the place allegedly belonging to that deity.<sup>997</sup> My host explained that people conduct the ritual to ask Ravana to protect them before they enter the forest.<sup>998</sup> Later, I came to know that he was one of few people to connect this ritual (directly) to Ravana.<sup>999</sup>

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<sup>996</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Atta,' 17.

<sup>997</sup> I discussed the ritual in 43 conversations in Lakegala area. In more than half of the conversations, protection was explicitly mentioned (23 conversations). Others mentioned that it is done to ask the blessing of the deity to not lose their way. As I noticed and was told, particular places are reserved to conduct this ritual. In addition to the entrance of Uyangamuva, villagers mentioned Kalu pahana (see Figure 7.6) as a place where they used to conduct the ritual.

<sup>998</sup> Visit of Uyangamuva (with host and research assistant), Lakegala, April 9, 2017.

<sup>999</sup> In two other conversations, it was mentioned that the ritual hanging of the twig was done to Ravana: conversation 14-04-04-2018NPreNA. Group conversation 01-04-04-2018NAGR. The first conversation was set up by my host since he considered this man to have special knowledge about Ravana. The group conversation was led by a man who learned about Ravana's connection to Lakegala through media items (for instance TV programmes). In addition, it was mentioned in Narangamuva in seven conversations that this ritual hanging of the twig was done to Kanda *deviyo* (*kanda* means mountain, he was considered the main deity of the area). In two conversations it was said that it was done to Kanda-Bandara *deviyo* and in two conversations that it was done to other deities (Vanniya *bandara* and Gambara *deviyo*). In Ranamure it was mentioned in six conversations that the ritual was conducted to Kanda-Bandara. It was mentioned two times that it happened to Kanda *deviyo* and Bandara *deviyo*. In



The anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere has mentioned the ritual of the hanging of branches of trees or twigs in a description of village rituals that he observed in Rambadeniya (also located in Laggala)<sup>1000</sup> in the 1950s and 1960s. In this section, he noted some concepts and deities that are of relevance to my discussion here. Therefore, I provide the entire quote:

In Rambadeniya, after each harvest, villagers will gather together in a collective thanksgiving ritual for the gods known as the *adukku* ("food offering"). During this festival the priest of the *deva* or deity cults (never the Buddhist monk) pays formal homage to the Buddha and the great guardian deities and then actively propitiates the local gods, especially their main deity known as Bandara Deviyo (Bandara means "chief" rather than "king," the term reserved for the guardian gods). These rituals help define the village as a "moral community" under the benevolent care of Bandara Deviyo. Once every year, however, some of the villagers go to the great pilgrimage centre of Mahiyangana, about thirty-five miles away, which the Buddha himself consecrated by his presence. As we proceed through the forest, we hang branches or twigs on trees sacred to local deities, implicitly acknowledging that we are no longer under the care of *our* local deity but under the aegis of another whose *sima* (boundary) we are now crossing.<sup>1001</sup>

According to Obeyesekere, the operative pantheon of the villages where he conducted research consisted mainly of deified ancestors who were referred to as *yakku* (Sinhala plural for demon).<sup>1002</sup> This principle of post-mortem deification of ancestors (see Box 2.3) is central to the pantheon in Lakegala area: it was pointed out by villagers that several deceased people turned into deities and others into *yakshas*.<sup>1003</sup> When misfortune happens among the living, this is often – but not exclusively – believed to be caused by *yakshas*.<sup>1004</sup> People who allegedly made significant contributions in the past are now

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addition, it was mentioned twice that it was done to other deities (Sumana Saman and Vanniya bandara). Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Kanda,' 102.

<sup>1000</sup> Obeyesekere, G. (1963), *Pregnancy Cravings (Dola-Duka) in Relation to Social Structure and Personality in a Sinhalese Village*, *American Anthropologist*, 65(2), 323-342.

<sup>1001</sup> Obeyesekere, G. (2004), *Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity: The Premodern and Pre-colonial Formations* (ICES Ethnicity Course Lecture Series 1), Colombo 8: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 21. *Sima* or *himawa* means limit or boundary. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Himáwa,' 738.

<sup>1002</sup> Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, 14.

<sup>1003</sup> Conversation 06-05-04-2018NA. For instance, the *kiri ammas* were *yakshas* in the past and are now considered to cease small children's illnesses. Conversation 03-03-04-2018RAVsurkap, relocated *kapu mahaththaya* of the Madumana *devalaya*, Ravanagama surrounding, April 3, 2018. See on the *kiri ammas* also note 856.

<sup>1004</sup> In a divination process, the *kapu mahaththaya* asks the major deities (for the villages of my research: Bandara *deviyo* and/or Kanda *deviyo*) prior to the ritual to find out who caused the misfortune. Only when this is figured out more extensive rituals can be conducted to the *yakshas* and deities. Deities and *yakshas* are related to particular diseases brought upon specific groups of people. As explained by a *kapu mahaththaya*, these rituals are now performed less because of western medicine (conversation 04-04-04-2018NAkap). Also, first the *kapu mahaththaya* ties a thread and only performs more extensive rituals when this is not successful. Conversation 01-05-04-2018NAkap.

paid respect to as deities. King Mahasena was mentioned as an example. This king constructed the Minneriya tank (located at the border of the Mathale district). He is now venerated as Minneriya *deviyo* because he made such an important contribution to the area.<sup>1005</sup>

Because several references in lore indicate a historical connection of Ravana to the area, some people with an interest in Ravana started to (re-)think Ravana's position in the local pantheon. For this they followed the principle of post-mortem deification: after a (once famous) person passed away he (or she) is turned into a deity or *yaksha*. The people in Lakegala area who considered Ravana a deity, most often referred to him as Bandara *deviyo*. This *deviyo* was in Ranamure mentioned several times as the main or chief god of the area, in a similar way *bandara* was referred to by Gananath Obeyesekere.<sup>1006</sup> A *kapu mahaththaya* from Ranamure involved in promoting Ravana, for instance, explained (translation):

If someone does something wrong, there is the district secretary and the police for that, like that he [*Bandara deviyo*] is the leader for the *yakkunta* [*yakshas*].<sup>1007</sup>

In more than half of the eighteen conversations in Ranamure in which I discussed the connection of Ravana to a deity, it was mentioned that Ravana was considered a deity, most often Bandara *deviyo*.<sup>1008</sup> When I learned about the connection of Ravana with Bandara *deviyo*, I started to collect chants and invocations directed to this particular deity. I provide an example here of an invocation chant to Bandara *deviyo* as mentioned in the book *Historic Matale*:

To the Agara polla, to the river of gems [Manik river], to the bare successful cloak, to the *kurulla bendi ayudaya*, Brahman *bandara* or Gange (river) *bandara deviyo*, who foresaw, as numerous as the stars in the sky, as the grains of sand

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<sup>1005</sup> That Minneriya *deviyo* was previously King Mahasena was mentioned, for instance, by a *kapu mahaththaya* from Narangamuva: conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap. In the book *Historic Matale*, it is explained that the Minneriya tank was discovered by King Mahasena after he followed a cow with a bag full of meneri grain (hence the name of the tank). See: Wijesooriya, Etambagaskada & Egodagedera, Folk Literature, 349.

<sup>1006</sup> A *kapu mahaththaya* from Narangamuva also explained that there are many *bandara deviyo*s (for instance Gange *bandara*) and that most of them were considered to be previous kings. Conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap.

<sup>1007</sup> Conversation 01-29-04-2018RKKap.

<sup>1008</sup> Ravana considered as Bandara *deviyo* was mentioned in eight conversations in Ranamure. Ravana considered to be a deity was mentioned in four conversations. In the other six conversations in Ranamure in which I discussed the relationship of Ravana to a certain deity, it was mentioned that they had no idea or people explained that he was not considered a deity. Ravana as Bandara *deviyo* was mentioned two times in Narangamuva. Ravana considered as Kanda *deviyo* was mentioned three times in Narangamuva. Ravana as considered just a deity was mentioned in two conversations in Narangamuva.

upon the earth, and as many as the leaves on the tamarind tree, as many as the waves upon the sea.<sup>1009</sup>

And one of the stanzas to Bandara *deviyo* recited at the time of the *yakkama*:

The beautiful rock [*gala*] is surrounded by ring of hills  
 Pure Garuda brings/prepares a gold ring / the golden bracelet called Garuda is  
 brought  
 Was *komari polla* [rod] made from gold for the god [*devidunta*]  
 The area of Lake Anavatapta surrounded by a sunlight ring of water.<sup>1010</sup>

These Bandara *deviyo* chants and invocations from the book mention specific ritual objects related to Bandara *deviyo* that are used in the village rituals (the *kurulla bendi ayuda* and *komari polla*). Bandara *deviyo* chants that I collected from *kapu mahaththayas* in the villages did not include any reference to Ravana, but some included, like the above-mentioned stanzas, references to specific ritual objects. In the following section, I discuss an annual village ritual and the relevance of the ritual and material culture for the representation of Ravana as a local deity to the area.

### 7.2.2.2 The Ritual and Material Culture

The main annual collective village ritual mentioned by villagers was the *yakkama*. *Yakkama* or *yaksha* activities (*kama* means action)<sup>1011</sup> are often related in literature to exorcism rituals and demon (*yaksha*) ceremonies. I employ here the term *yakkama* and use it as it was mostly done by the villagers: as annual village ritual.<sup>1012</sup>

<sup>1009</sup> Updated version of the chant to Bandara *deviyo* as provided in Athurugiriya, A. (1996), Beliefs and Rituals Connected with Agricultural Activity in Laggala (Trans.), in C. Gamage (Ed.), *Historic Matale*, Department of Cultural Affairs, 149-155, 153. (Original work published 1984). *Kurulla bendi ayuda(ya)* translates as weapon (*ayuda*) with bird (*kurulla*) tight on (*bendi*) it. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Áyuda,' 65, 'Kurullá,' 126, 'Bēndi,' 433,

<sup>1010</sup> Updated version of the chant to Bandara *deviyo* as provided in: Athurugiriya, Beliefs and Rituals Connected with Agricultural Activity in Laggala, 154. *Garuda* translates as mythical bird. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Garudá,' 156; Monier-Williams, Leumann, & Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 'garudá,' 348.

<sup>1011</sup> Others referred to it as *avurudu baraya* (annual vow), *gambaraya* (village vow), *gambara pujava* (village vow offering), *gambara yakkama* (village vow *yakkama*), *shanti karmaya*. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Gama,' 155. For *bara(ya)* see note 182. Although, by its etymology, the *yakkama* is associated with exorcism and demons I prefer here to refer to it as a ritual, since the villagers most often did not mention *yakshas* but rather deities when they talked about the ritual. The etymology of *yakkama* was only mentioned once explicitly by a traditional physician who lived in Ranamure (who was able to read and write). As he explained, the word *yakkama* means *yakuna karana* or 'doing what is supposed to be done to the *yakkas*.' Conversation 03b-29-04-2018RKvk.

<sup>1012</sup> Some people pointed out that in the past *yakkamas* were also held on request in private homes but that this practice is almost extinct because it is too expensive for one person. One *kapu mahaththaya* mentioned that a *yakkama* costs around 2 lakh Sri Lankan rupees (in 2020 approximately 1,000 euros). Conversation 01-29-04-2018RKKap.

The purpose of the *yakkama*, as explained by the villagers, is to ask protection against illnesses and for successful paddy cultivation.<sup>1013</sup> This is done by propitiating all the benevolent and malevolent beings. Villagers often mentioned Kanda *deviyo*, Bandara *deviyo*, and/or Kanda-Bandara *deviyo* as the main deities to conduct the ritual to. Others mentioned that it is done to multiple deities as well as *yakshas* (for instance the *kiri ammas*, considered female *yakshas*).<sup>1014</sup> The ritual used to be done in April or May around the time of blossoming.<sup>1015</sup> But now this annual cycle has changed: people use fertilisers, harvest all-year round, or have multiple jobs.<sup>1016</sup>

The *yakkamas* in Ranamure and Narangamuva follow a similar format, and since around six *kapu mahaththayas* are needed, the *kapu mahaththayas* of both villages participate in the *yakkamas* in Ranamure and Narangamuva.<sup>1017</sup> In Ranamure, a group of villagers – recently referred to as cultural committee – takes the initiative for the preparations and performance of the ritual.<sup>1018</sup>

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<sup>1013</sup> Most annual rituals in Lakegala area deal with the primary source of income of the villagers: paddy cultivation (see Section 7.1.2). An overview of the rituals related to cultivation in the Laggala region is provided in: Athurugiriya, Beliefs and Rituals Connected with Agricultural Activity in Laggala, 149-155. The rituals referred to most often by villagers were the *kiri ithiravima* (boiling of the milk) and the *adukkuva*, both performed to protect the paddy and other crops. The *adukkuva* or *adukku danaya* (giving of *adukku*) is the more extensive of the two rituals. Once the first harvest comes, the villagers take the first bit, make flour and prepare for instance milk bread and give it as an offering to the deities. A *kapu mahaththaya* is invited by an individual family – or a few families together – to assist in the ritual. In recent times it has become more common to replace the *adukkuva* by the boiling of the milk. The boiling of the milk is less extensive (and less expensive). The connection of the *yakkama* to paddy cultivation is made, for instance, by the distribution of an areca flower after the ritual that farmers are supposed to hang in the paddy fields for protection. The distribution of the areca flower was only mentioned in two conversations. For translations of the concepts, see: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Aḍukkuwa,’ 15, ‘Itirenawá,’ 68, ‘Kiri,’ 120.

<sup>1014</sup> Some other deities mentioned by villagers as propitiated in the *yakkama* were Kataragama, Vishnu, Minneriya *deviyo*, Gange *bandara deviyo*, and Vanniya *bandara deviyo*.

<sup>1015</sup> Some people came up with details and told that the *yakkama* takes place in April, May, or June (after the New Year around Vesak *poya* that is often celebrated in May) to chase away the flies that could harm the blossoming harvest. Flies were explicitly mentioned in four conversations. It was mentioned two times that it should happen after the New Year. A *kapu mahaththaya* pointed out that it happened around Vesak *poya* (often celebrated in May): conversation 01-29-04-2018RKKap.

<sup>1016</sup> When I asked the secretary of the divisional secretariat why they did not follow the traditional calendar, he mentioned that he had only learned about it the last time the *yakkama* was organised. Group conversation 01-27-04-2018NPGR.

<sup>1017</sup> That around six *kapu mahaththayas* are needed for the dancing in the *yakkama* was mentioned by a *kapu mahaththaya* from Ranamure: conversation 01-29-04-2018RKKap. Another *kapu mahaththaya* from Ranamure mentioned that he was also invited for the *yakkamas* in Meemure and Narangamuva: conversation 07-29-04-2018Rakap.

<sup>1018</sup> In 2017, I discussed the *yakkama* with several of the members of the cultural committee who were involved in the organising of the *yakkama* in Ranamure in the previous years. They explained some of the details of their tasks as I have mentioned here. Members of the cultural committee were referred to as ten prominent persons: the *veda mahaththaya* (traditional physician), *viduhalpathi* (village school principal), *kapu mahaththayas*, and his helpers, *jothishya aya* (people involved in astrology) and *arachchi* (village official, equivalent to *grama niladhari* or village officer) in: group conversation 04-02-04-2018RAGR, Ranamure, April 2, 2018. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, ‘Árachchi,’ 65.



**Figure 7.16:** A *kapu mahaththaya* comes from the *devalaya* to dance around the *kumbaya* (decorated trunk) on the day of the annual *yakkama*. Picture taken by author, Narangamuva, May 17, 2017.

On the actual day of the *yakkama* the conch shell is blown to let the villagers know that the *yakkama* is going to take place.<sup>1019</sup> A group of people constructs a *thorana* (pandal) in front of the *devalaya*.<sup>1020</sup> Together with the *kapu mahaththaya*(s) a select group of men (no women allowed) take the objects (mainly weaponry) out of the *devalaya*. These objects are taken together in *perahera* with ritual drumming to a clean body of water close by.<sup>1021</sup> There, the objects are cleansed with water (*nanumura* – ritual bathing or anointing, see Chapter 6).<sup>1022</sup> Lime, saffron water, yellow sandalwood, and turmeric water are also applied.<sup>1023</sup> Then the objects are taken back in *perahera* to the *devalaya* area where

<sup>1019</sup> I have seen and participated in the *yakkama* in Narangamuva in 2017. Fieldwork on the *yakkama*, Narangamuva, May 17, 2017.

<sup>1020</sup> The construction of a *thorana* was mentioned in several conversations, for instance, a group conversation in Narangamuva: group conversation 01-04-04-2018NAGR. *Thorana* means pandal, arch erected on festival occasions and decorated with the young shoots of the cocoa-nut leaves, ferns etc. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Torana,' 223.

<sup>1021</sup> In most conversations, it was implied that the weapons were taken in a procession to a body of water. A *kapu mahaththaya* in Ranamure explicitly mentioned that the objects from the *devalaya* are placed on a palanquin and carried on the shoulders in the procession: conversation 07-29-04-2018Rakap.

<sup>1022</sup> The anointing or bathing of the weapons was explicitly referred to with *nanumura* in those conversations: conversation 03-06-04-2018RPvk; conversation 04-27-04-2018RK.

<sup>1023</sup> Diverse ingredients for the *nanumura* were mentioned – for instance: lime (conversation 03-02-04-

the men attach a betel leaf and areca flower to the objects. After a dance is performed with the shield (allegedly belonging to Kanda *deviyo*), the other weapons are placed on a platform (*messa*) in the *devalaya*.<sup>1024</sup> While a group inside the *devalaya* chants to various deities, a *kapu mahaththaya* gets possessed.<sup>1025</sup> He takes the object of a particular deity or *yaksha* outside the *devalaya* and dances around the *kumbaya* (pole of a banana trunk decorated with betel leaves, areca and coconut flowers, see Figure 7.16).<sup>1026</sup> When he is finished, he places the object back in the *devalaya*. The villagers are not part of the procession and *nanumura* of the objects in the morning but observe the ritual dancing that takes place in the afternoon from the side lines.

Although most villagers in Narangamuva and Ranamure explained that the *yakkama* takes place annually, this was only the case in Narangamuva at the time of my fieldwork there. In Ranamure it had not been held for a very long time, but in the first half of the 2010s the *yakkama* was again organised. This was only a temporary revival: when I came in 2018 it was evident that over the past few years the *yakkama* had not taken place.<sup>1027</sup> Despite its decline in recent times, this revival of the *yakkama* in Ranamure is important for the representation of Ravana as a local deity. I explain this by looking at the material and ritual culture related to Ravana in Ranamure.

The largest *yakkama* in Ranamure since its revival in the early 2010s took place in 2013 (and probably also in 2014). The divisional secretary of the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat expressed an interest in reviving traditions and was one of the main initiators of this extensive *yakkama*.<sup>1028</sup> The Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretari-

2018RA), saffron water (conversation 04-04-04-2018Nakap), yellow sandalwood, saffron water and lime (group conversation 01-04-04-2018NAGR), turmeric water, sandalwood, and saffron (conversation 12-04-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018).

<sup>1024</sup> Details about the *messa* were explained by a *kapu mahaththaya* from Narangamuva. He pointed out that separate sections and divisions are made on the *messa* for deities and their retinues: conversation 04-04-04-2018Nakap. In Narangamuva, one person explained that they first dance with the shield and break a coconut, then the weapons are taken inside. After that the weapons are taken back outside and they tie the betel and the areca flowers to the weapons. Then the weapons are taken one by one and the *kapu mahaththayas* dance with them and they are taken back inside (conversation 05-05-04-2018NA). Also, in Ranamure a *kapu mahaththaya* explained that first a dance with the shield and an object called *hol kuru* has to be performed before the other weapons are taken inside the *devalaya*: conversation 07-29-04-2018Rakap. Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Messa,' 504.

<sup>1025</sup> In Ranamure, I was told that there is a specific group of people for the chanting during the *yakkama* (conversation 08-06-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 6, 2018). In Narangamuva I was told that a particular person is in charge of the chants (conversation 04-04-04-2018Nakap).

<sup>1026</sup> A *kapu mahaththaya* from Narangamuva referred to the decorated banana trunk used in the *yakkama* to dance around as *kumbaya* (pole): conversation 04-04-04-2018Nakap.

<sup>1027</sup> Reasons mentioned for the (recent) decrease of interest in organising a *yakkama* in Ranamure were: a disinterest of villagers in traditions, negligence of the *kapu mahaththaya* in charge of the *devalaya*, and conflicts with the monk.

<sup>1028</sup> In 2018, I discussed the *yakkama* with the divisional secretary and the cultural officer of the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat. They mentioned that the *yakkama* in Ranamure happened after fifteen years under the supervision of the divisional secretariat in 2011, 2012, and 2013. After 2013, the support of the divisional secretariat stopped due to the projects in the area to relocate the villages. Group conversation 01-27-04-2018NPGR.

at published a special festival (*mangalyaya*) magazine in 2013, which is remarkable because of the high level of illiteracy in the villages itself. The cover of the magazine *Ravana Rava* (*Ravana's Echo*)<sup>1029</sup> displays a *kapu mahaththaya* in his traditional clothes, the decorated banana trunk central to the *yakkama* to dance around, and a famous picture often employed in the context of *Ravanisation*: Ravana on his *dandu monaraya* (see Figure 7.15). In 2013 the *yakkama* was also videoed, contributing to the wider dissemination of the *yakkama*.<sup>1030</sup>

Coinciding with the interest and financial support of the divisional secretariat was the presence of a popular Ravana research group during one of the *yakkamas* in the first half of 2010s. When I once was allowed to enter the Ranamure *devalaya* – which is very exceptional – I was struck that there was a Ravana statue placed on the platform inside the *devalaya*. A brand-new gold-coloured Ravana statue from the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya was placed between the weaponry and the Paththini anklets (see Figure 7.17). The villagers explained that the people who donated the statue – some explicitly mentioned that they came from Colombo or from Devram Viharaya –<sup>1031</sup> came on a *yakkama* day and performed their own *puja* right next to the *yakkama*.<sup>1032</sup> They donated the Ravana statue on that day<sup>1033</sup> and commissioned the *kapu mahaththaya* to perform a *puja* once a week for several months in a row.<sup>1034</sup> One of the *kapu mahaththayas* in Narangamuva explained the impact of the donation of the statue (which resulted even in the change of the name of the *devalaya*; see Box 7.3), referred to here as Bandara *deviyo* statue, as follows (translation):

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<sup>1029</sup> *Ravana Rava* (*Ravana's Echo*). The magazine includes articles on other local traditions and rituals. Also, people were asked to write contributions and poems. Ravana translates as sound (or echo). See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Rawa,' 528.

<sup>1030</sup> That the *yakkama* was organised by the 'cultural office' and videoed was mentioned in a conversation with a villager from Ranamure: conversation 06-29-04-2018RKO, Ranamure, April 29, 2018. Since the *yakkama* was sponsored by the divisional secretariat and they promoted it, the entire area was at that time informed about it. At a school in a neighbouring village the children were asked to write an assignment on Ravana. Conversation 13-28-04-2018RA.

<sup>1031</sup> A *kapu mahaththaya* from Ranamure mentioned that this group came from Colombo as did another member of the cultural committee (conversation 01-29-04-2018RKKap; conversation 13-28-04-2018RA). One of the *kapu mahaththayas* remembered that they were from Devram Viharaya (conversation 06-03-04-2018RKKap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Ranamure, April 3, 2018). A *kapu mahaththaya* from Narangamuva explained that they came from Matara (conversation 01-05-04-2018NAkap).

<sup>1032</sup> This was explained by a *kapu mahaththaya* and a member of the cultural committee (conversation 13-28-04-2018RA; conversation 01-05-04-2018NAkap). Two *kapu mahaththayas* mentioned that this group donated a Ravana statue on that day (conversation 01-29-04-2018RKKap; conversation 07-29-04-2018RAkap).

<sup>1033</sup> Conversation 01-01-05-2018RD, Ranamure, May 1, 2018.

<sup>1034</sup> That weekly *pujas* were performed to the statue (and that it was commissioned by the group who donated the statue) was mentioned by two *kapu mahaththayas* (conversation 01-29-04-2018RKKap; conversation 01-05-04-2018NAkap). The president of the *Ravana Shakthi* confirmed that they went to 'Lakegala' on a *yakkama* day and also explained that they performed a *puja* and donated the Ravana statue. Interview with PR1, March 9, 2018. One of the other members mentioned that they went in 2014. The president was not sure about the year.

*Kapu m:* They worship Bandara *deviyo* now [since] a year ago because of the statue. Else they were worshipping Asthana *deviyo*. They took the statue that was brought here [...]. Ranumure is a guarding point [*murapola*]. Meemure is also a *murapola*. Narangamuva is the village of Bandara *deviyo*; King Ravana's area [...] is in Narangamuva. They took the statue that was sent here. They worship Bandara *deviyo* because they have the statue. Or they would worship Astana *deviyo*. We should take it [the statue] here [Narangamuva].<sup>1035</sup>

Another villager from Ranamure told me that once a 'cultural (*sanskritthiya*) program' was organised in the village.<sup>1036</sup> On that day, the Ravana statue was brought and its value and connection to the area were explained.<sup>1037</sup> It was also ensured on that day that the connection of Ravana with Bandara *deviyo* was made visible and explicated. One of the weapons belonging to Bandara *deviyo* was shown for this.<sup>1038</sup>

While most of the villagers knew almost nothing about the weapons kept in the *devalaya*, most of the villager in Ranamure knew about the *kurulla bendi ayuda*. The *kurulla bendi ayuda* (weapon with bird – *kurulla* – tied on it) has a remarkable shape: a weapon in the shape of a bodhi leaf with a tiny bird on top (see Figure 7.17). This weapon, of which I showed the villagers a picture, was considered Bandara *deviyo*'s weapon (see also Section 7.2.2.1).<sup>1039</sup>

<sup>1035</sup> Conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap.

<sup>1036</sup> Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Saṅskṛita,' 646.

<sup>1037</sup> Conversation 01-01-05-2018RD.

<sup>1038</sup> The other weapon belonging to Bandara *deviyo* is the *komari polla* (stick, rod): conversation 03-03-04-2018RAVsurkap; group conversation 01-27-04-2018NPGR; conversation 01-29-04-2018RKKap; conversation 03b-29-04-2018RKKvk with traditional physician, Ranamure, April 29, 2018; conversation 07-29-04-2018Rakap). The *komari polla* is also explicitly mentioned in a chant to Bandara *deviyo*. Clough translates *polla* as rod. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Polla,' 380. *Komari* probably translates as aloe. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Kómáriká,' 138.

<sup>1039</sup> The particular shape of the *kurulla bendi ayuda* contributes to the association of Ravana to Bandara *deviyo*. The connection of this weapon to Ravana was a few times explicated in conversations, and when it happened it was done by referring to the bird (*kurulla*) on top: the bird indicated a *garuda* (mythical eagle) and the family lineage of Ravana was the *garuda vanshaya* (*garuda* lineage), that Bandara *deviyo* could fly (conversation 03-02-04-2018RA), and that it symbolised the *dandu monaraya* (conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap). Interestingly, at other places in Lakegala area and in the book *Historic Matale*, the weapon of Bandara *deviyo* has the shape of a Bodhi leaf but lacks the bird on top. I also discussed the *kurulla bendi ayuda* with *kapu mahaththayas* from neighbouring villages and a *kapu mahaththaya* from Narangamuva explained that they also once had this weapon but that it was stolen: conversation 01-05-04-2018Nakap. A *kapu mahaththaya* from one of the relocated villages showed me a weapon in the shape of a Bodhi leaf belonging to Bandara *deviyo*, and when I asked where the bird was, he replied that it broke off. Conversation 03-03-04-2018RAVsurkap. Also, in the book *Historic Matale* the weapon of Bandara *deviyo* used in the agricultural rituals is referred to as *bo-kola ayuda* (bodhi leaf weapon) and its image lacks the bird on top. Athurugiriya, Beliefs and Rituals Connected with Agricultural Activity in Laggala, 150.



**Box 7.3: The Impact of the Donation of the Ravana Statue**

The different objects (mainly weaponry) allegedly belonging to a variety of deities are stored inside the village *devalaya* throughout the year. At the time of the annual *yakkama*, the *devalaya* is opened, decorated, and used for several ritual activities.<sup>1040</sup> In Ranamure, several villagers referred to the building as the Paththini *devalaya* when I showed them a picture of it (see Figure 7.8) because the anklets related to this goddess are kept inside.<sup>1041</sup> When I asked one of the *kapu mahaththayas* from Ranamure why some people now related to the *devalaya* as Ravana *devalaya*, he explained that the name of the *devalaya* changed because people who came to the area six years ago donated a Ravana statue. Earlier, the *devalaya* was a Paththini *devalaya*.<sup>1042</sup>

The Narangamuva and Ranamure *devalayas* did not contain any statues prior to the donation of the Ravana statue. Between the weaponry and anklets, the brand-new Ravana statue sharply contrasts. The presence of the statue resulted for some villagers in the change of the name of the *devalaya*. Its ritual function remains limited, however, as the statue does not fit in the annual performances of the *kapu mahaththayas* for which they dance with the objects allegedly belonging to specific deities and *yakshas*. The connection of Ravana to the local deity Bandara *deviyo* through the *kurulla bendi ayuda* is of greater importance for his representation as deity in the area.

Most of the villagers in Ranamure knew about this particular weapon because an explanation of this weapon was given on one of the *yakkama* days.<sup>1043</sup> One villager from Ranamure who was critical about the recent promoting of Ravana in the villages mentioned explicitly how and when this happened (translation):

- V: When there are some festivals the district secretary comes to the *devalaya*. There were videos of some of the festivals by the *kapu mahaththaya* who is there now. *Kurulla bendi ayuda* is like a Bo leaf, there is a bird on top. Our fathers were in charge of the *devalaya* doing *kapukam* till they died. We have not heard of King Ravana being Bandara *deviyo*. Those *kapuwo* said King Ravana is now Bandara *deviyo*, something like that in the videos. They said the weapons were of King Ravana.<sup>1044</sup>

<sup>1040</sup> Besides its use in the annual *yakkama* I never heard of other rituals regularly performed in the *devalayas*. Some people pointed out that *pujas* were held in the *devalaya* on request, but I have neither seen nor heard of people doing it.

<sup>1041</sup> To find out the function of the *devalaya*, I used the method of photo-elicitation and showed the villagers in Ranamure a picture of the village *devalaya* (or asked them about the village *devalaya*). In approximately half of the 29 conversations in which I discussed the name of the *devalaya* in Ranamure, the name was not specified or they referred to it with the village name (Ranamure *devalaya*) or *pansale devalaya* (temple *devalaya*, since it is located on the temple premises).

<sup>1042</sup> Conversation 07-29-04-2018RAkap.

<sup>1043</sup> Even one of the members of the *Ravana Shakthi* remembered the name of the weapon and mentioned that it was explained during the *yakkama*. Interview with PR1, March 9, 2018.

<sup>1044</sup> Conversation 03-06-04-2018RPvk.

Publications on the internet provide details about this event as well.<sup>1045</sup> According to K. Ariyadasa, the author of the online *Lankadipa* article *Ravana Devathwayen pudana Yakkama ta giyemu* (we went to the *yakkama* where Ravana is worshipped as a deity), the *yakkama* has been performed by villagers in Ranamure for many generations. In addition to a brief general description of the *yakkama*, he mentioned that the weapons were returned to the *devalaya* and ‘offered’ to Ravana who is considered *Bandara deviyo*. The *kurulla bendi ayuda* is the most important weapon. On the day of the *yakkama*, the Ravana cultural committee established in Ranamure distributed a handout to preserve the ‘original version of history.’ It explained that their ancestry is linked to Ravana, not Vijaya, and that Ravana lived and landed his *dandu monaraya* safely on Lakegala.<sup>1046</sup>



**Figure 7.17:** A brand new statue of Ravana as produced by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya placed between the weaponry of *Bandara deviyo* (including the *kurulla bendi ayuda*: weapon in the shape of a bodhi-leaf with a bird on top of it) in the Ranamure *devalaya*. Picture taken by author, Ranamure, April 9, 2017.

**ලෝල අභි රාවණගේ අය මිසක් විජයගේ අය නොවෙයි. 32**

මී මුළු ගම මැද ගහන් වැටියා - ඒ ගම මැද පහන් ගුණයා උද්දෙන් ආයුධ සිර කරන්නා - ගහේම බණ්ඩාර ලො මුද්දන්නා මේම කවිය ලන්ගල ගමිහුන් සියන්තේ ඉතා ආදර්ශීයයි. එනම් ලොකාචාරී පළමු ජන නොවෙන්නේ සිවුන් පැවත එන අය වරින් වරමින් ඔවුන්ගේ අභිමානය සියපාන ලක්කල, සිහිසිරිම රාවණ උජු දේවිය ලෙස සැලකීමත් ඉන් සියළුම ලන්ගල ජනතාව යක්කම් ලෙසත් හඳුන්වන්නේ දෙවිවරු මෙන්ම ආත්මී ගෘහ දේවතාවුන් වැනිම මෙන්ම එම ආයතන සිහිට ඉල්ලා කෙරෙන භාර්යිකම්මයයි. විජයදත්තට පෙර මෙවර රජගම කළ රාවණ උජු දේවත්වීමෙන් වැඩිමුදු මෙහි අරමුණයි. මෙම යක්කම් පැවැත්වීමෙන් තමන්ගේ සම්මානය සරුවන බවත් ලොවේයා සුවචන බවත් අඳුරු ආත්මා දුග්ඵල මමර පෙන සැලකෙන බවත් ගමිහුන්ගේ දැඩි විශ්වාසයක් පවතී.

**ලෝකේල කඳවැටිය (හ) යක්කම්**

පංචදාර්ය විභාසාද මැද පත්තිනි කළම හා රාවණ උජු කවියා කළ මව් සියා දෑ දොවා පිරිසිදු කර පෙරපරින් ගහන් පැහැ දේවාලයේ තබයි. මහා දෙවියන් ලෙස ගමිහුන් හඳුන්වන්නේ රාවණ උජු. රාවණා දෙවි බණ්ඩාර දෙවි, ගහේ බණ්ඩාර, දෙල්ල බණ්ඩාර, මුත්තම බණ්ඩාර ආදී ගම්මලන් රාවණ හඳුන්වයි.

ගමිහුන් සියන්තේ "ලන්ගල අභි රාවණගේ අය මිසක් විජයගේ අය නොවෙයි. අභි මේ රජම ආනන්දකයෝ නොවෙයි. විජය උජු ලොකවට එක් කලින් ඉන්ද්‍ර ලන්ගල අභි ඉඳුලා සියෙන්ගේ රාවණා කාලයේ සිටියි. අභි රජම සැබෑ උරුමකරුවෙයි. එක අභි ආර්ථිකවරයන් සියනවා".

දුම්රිය කාර්යාල බුමාර ආර්යාලය (2011-10-02 දින ලංකාදීප පුවත්පතෙන් උපුටා ගැනීමයි)

**ආවණ සවිස් ජාතික සංවිධානය** 36- 071-9310344  
 ravnasaviya@gmail.com

**Figure 7.18:** Slide 32 as published by the popular research group the *Ravana Shakthi* on their Facebook page. This article mentions that the villagers of Laggala area are proud of their ancestry – dating it back to Ravana’s time – and that they refer to Ravana as a deity. Also, they keep some objects that Ravana’s used in their *devalaya* and use these in their annual village ritual (*yakkama*). Ravana Shakthi Jathika Sanvidhaniya [Ravana Shakthi National Organisation], (2014, August 23), *Laggala api Ravanage aya Misak Vijayage aya Noveyi* [The People of Laggala are Descendants of Ravana and not from Vijaya], Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=282822128576288&set=a.282821315243036&type=3&theater> (retrieved February 7, 2020).

<sup>1045</sup> Since most of the popular Ravana books aim to provide information on an ancient civilisation and Ravana’s kingdom in the past (as considered ‘history’ or ‘pre-history’) they do not discuss the *yakkama*.  
<sup>1046</sup> Ariyadasa, K. K. (2014, November 26), *Ravana Devathwayen pudana Yakkama ta giyemu* [We went to the *yakkama* where Ravana is worshipped as a Deity], *Lankadipa*, <http://www.lankadeepa.lk/features/රාවණ-දේවත්වයෙන්-පුදන--'යක්කම්'-ගියෙමු/2-278292> (retrieved February 27, 2018).

In an article on the history of Laggala presently on the website of the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat, it is mentioned that the villagers (in the area) believe that they descend from Ravana and that they are the real *yaksha* tribal people. They also believe that Ravana became deified as Bandara *deviyo* and that he still protects his descendants. The villagers annually organise a Ravana *yakkama* to commemorate Ravana. The ritual has been organised for many generations.<sup>1047</sup>

Several Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana refer to the representation of Ravana as a local deity to argue that there is a genealogical connection of Ravana to the villagers. A very clear example of the connection between the representation of Ravana as local deity-cum-ancestor and the present-day villagers has been given by Mirando Obeyesekere (see Box 4.2) in *Batadandu Kandavetiye Urumaya* (The Heritage of the Batadandu Mountain Range).<sup>1048</sup> This book was published in 1998 under the supervision of the Mathale District secretariat for the occasion of a literature-art appraisal festival.<sup>1049</sup> In it, Obeyesekere has cited the Ravana *katha puskolapoth* (palm leaf manuscripts, see Box 4.2) as evidence for the claim that the ancient Hela dwelled in Laggala. And he has further mentioned that the inhabitants of Laggala area root their ancestry back to the *yakshas*,<sup>1050</sup> and that there is a general belief (in Laggala area) that Ravana wished to be reincarnated in Sri Lanka after his death and that a deified Ravana still protects his people.<sup>1051</sup>

Authors of some recently published popular Ravana books have referred to the villagers of Lakegala area as the ancient inhabitants of Sri Lanka as well. In his book *Lankadipati Sri Ravana*, Premachandra has argued that unmixed Sinhalese from Ravana's time still live in Ranamure. According to him, the villagers believe that Ravana's power is still present in the village. He also mentioned the annual village ritual, called the Ravana *yakkama*: the ritual takes annually place in the Ranamure village and by this ritual, the villagers empower the weapons of the regional deities. Ravana is considered Kanda *deviyo*.<sup>1052</sup>

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<sup>1047</sup> *Laggala Ithihasaya* [The History of Lakegala/Laggala]. Laggala-Pallegama Divisional Secretariat, [http://103.11.32.18/matale/laggala\\_pallegama/index.php/en/grama-niladhari.html#](http://103.11.32.18/matale/laggala_pallegama/index.php/en/grama-niladhari.html#) (retrieved February 26, 2020).

<sup>1048</sup> Obeyesekere, Lanka Pura Rajadaniya, 1-12.

<sup>1049</sup> Jayakody, L. (1998), Foreword by the Minister of Buddhist, Cultural and Religious Affairs, in Matale District Secretariat (Ed.), *Batadandu Kandavetiye Urumaya*, Gangodavila: Depani, n.p.

<sup>1050</sup> Obeyesekere, Lanka Pura Rajadaniya, 2. For the *yaksha* connection to the area, he referred to the sixteenth-century *Rajavaliya* and the Mahayana Buddhist *Lankavatara Sutra* (see Section 4.1.2). Obeyesekere, *Ravana King of Lanka*, 41.

<sup>1051</sup> Obeyesekere, Lanka Pura Rajadaniya, 9. Obeyesekere did not specify to which deity Ravana is connected, but another article in the same book mentioned that folklore indicates that Ravana was deified as Gange *bandara deviyo* after he passed away. *Shanthi Karma, Puda Puja ha Abhichara Vidhi*, (1998), in Matale District Secretariat (Ed.), *Batadandu Kandavetiye Urumaya*, Gangodavila: Depani 110-113, 111. I have not translated the title of the contribution since it mentions specific names of (exorcism) rituals and it would go beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss and explain them here in detail. In a book about Meemure it is mentioned that Ravana became deified as Gale *bandara* after he passed away and that villagers still worship him: Ranatunga, *Dumbara Kanduvati Sisara*, 57.

<sup>1052</sup> Premachandra, *Lankadipati Sri Ravana*, back cover, Appendix 35-36.

The popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* published a PowerPoint slide 'The people of Laggala are Descendants of Ravana and not from Vijaya' (see Figure 7.18). The villagers are said to be proud of their ancestry which they trace back to Ravana. They consider themselves the first inhabitants and true inheritors of the country. Ravana is to them a king and deity (*Ravana raju devata*), and they refer to him as *Ravana devi*, *Bandara devi*, *Gange bandara*, *Sellam bandara*, *Brahmana bandara*. In their annual harvest ritual, the *yakkama*, they worship the deities and *yakshas* and ask them to protect their harvest, and the village against dangers and perils. On that day, they take the anklets of Paththini and objects that Ravana used (not specified), wash them, and take them to the *devalaya*.<sup>1053</sup>

Villagers in Lakegala area mentioned the connection of *yakshas* to the area only sporadically to me. Some believed that there were *yakshas* in the area prior to Vijaya's arrival to Sri Lanka, but this did not automatically lead to an affiliation with Ravana as their direct ancestor. Several people involved in promoting Ravana made an effort to connect the *yaksha* ancestry to Ravana over other stories of *yakshas* that mainly related to the *Mahavamsa* (and Kuveni). The *yaksha* ancestry is thus slightly on the move, but for most villagers descentance from Ravana is of limited relevance.

### **The relevance of Lakegala's religious landscape and the representation of Ravana as local deity for the process of Ravanisation**

In Chapter 3, I introduced the concept ritualising with reference to Ronald Grimes. Ritualising is the act of cultivating or inventing rites, and I employ the -ising ending for ritualising and materialising throughout this thesis to point out the emerging and inventive character. In addition, I have referred to several scholars in Chapter 3 who argue that when (ethno-nationalist) revitalisations take place, pre-existing myth-symbol complexes and traditions are often employed and remodelled to create (or invent) a new set of ideas. In Ranamure, the annual *yakkama* was almost extinct, but it was revived in the first half of the 2010s. An important adaptation was made to this ritual at that time: Ravana's connection to the local deity *Bandara deviyo* was extensively promoted. For some people, Ravana's position in the revived *yakkamas* grew so prominent that the *yakkamas* came to be known as *Ravana yakkamas* and the village *devalaya* came to be referred to as a *Ravana devalaya*.

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<sup>1053</sup> Summary of the topics discussed on slide 32 as published by the *Ravana Shakthi* on their Facebook page. *Ravana Shakthi Jathika Sanvidhaniya* [Ravana Shakthi National Organisation], (2014, August 23), *Laggala api Ravanage aya Misak Vijayage aya Noveyi* [The People of Laggala are Descendants of Ravana and not from Vijaya], Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=282822128576288&set=a.282821315243036&type=3&theater> (retrieved February 7, 2020). In the original source that is used for this PowerPoint slide it is mentioned that the villagers of Ranamure and Laggala consider King Ravana *Bandara deviyo* and that Ravana as *Bandara deviyo* still protects the people. During the annual 'Ravana *yakkama*' the villagers take multiple weapons as used by Ravana in the past in procession and clean them out of respect to him. Ariyadasa, K. K. (2014, September 25), *Laggala di Ravana Pujavak* [A Ravana Puja at Laggala], Info Sri Lanka News, <http://www.infosrilankanews.info/2014/09/lakgala.html> (retrieved February 7, 2020).

As I have argued, the material and ritual culture are central to the promotion of the representation of Ravana as the local deity Bandara *deviyo* in Ranamure. The traditional way of annually propitiating local deities and *yakshas* in the *yakkama* is through the anointing of, and ritual dancing with, the object that allegedly belongs to a particular deity. These objects are not statues but tools: mostly weapons, but also shields and anklets. Those weapons are central to the ritual because they represent the deity or *yaksha* at the time of the ritual. The invocations and chants recited explicitly mention which object belongs to a certain deity or *yaksha*. The ritual objects of Bandara *deviyo* are the *komari polla* and the *kurulla bendi ayuda*.<sup>1054</sup> More than the brand-new statue of Ravana donated by the *Ravana Shakthi*, the latter is important to relate Ravana as local deity to the area. The newly donated Ravana statue is not an object that the *kapu mahaththaya* traditionally dances with. The *kurulla bendi ayuda* is important because it is an alleged ancient object and is, like the other objects, a 'tool' that can be used to dance with. Also, although people explicitly mentioned the bird (*kurulla*) to relate this weapon to Ravana, its shape of a bodhi leaf seems to connect Ravana to one of the most central symbols of Buddhism.

In Chapter 3, I referred to the religious studies scholar Webb Keane, who has argued that '[i]deas are not transmitted telepathically. They must be exteriorized in some way, for example, in words, gestures, objects, or practices, in order to be transmitted from one mind to another.'<sup>1055</sup> On the day of the *yakkama*, an authority (the *kapu mahaththaya*) publicly explained that Ravana is Bandara *deviyo* by showing the *kurulla bendi ayuda* to the villagers and giving an explanation. The objects (the statue and the weapons) have given a considerable impetus to the representation of Ravana as the local deity Bandara *deviyo*. By relating Ravana to a traditional weapon (the *kurulla bendi ayuda*) of an existing village deity (Bandara *deviyo*) it becomes possible to properly propitiate him in the annual village ritual.

Following from my explorations, this connection of Ravana to an existing village deity is of specific relevance to *Ravanisation* for at least three reasons. The connection of Ravana to the local deity Bandara *deviyo* has integrated Ravana into Lakegala's religious landscape in a traditional way by following the principle of post-mortem deification. This is important to the process of *Ravanisation* because, insofar as Ravana is connected with the local deity Bandara *deviyo*, a longstanding tradition of Ravana devotion among Sinhalese Buddhists can be claimed. In Chapter 3, I mentioned that not only 'ancient texts' are quoted but also that folklore – including rituals – are considered the embodiment of tradition for ethnic groups striving for revitalisation. That the villagers involved in the revival of the *yakkama*, the divisional secretariat, and the *Ravana Shakthi*

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<sup>1054</sup> In the chapter 'Beliefs and Rituals Connected with Agricultural Activity in Laggala' Bandara *deviyo* is mentioned as a deity they invite in rituals related to the paddy cultivation and in the *yakkama* ritual that is performed in certain villages in the Laggala area. He is given a prominent place in the annual rice harvesting ritual (*adukkuva*).

<sup>1055</sup> Keane, *On the Materiality of Religion*, 230.

refer to the *yakkama* in Ranamure as ‘Ravana *yakkama*’ points in the direction of a claim of a tradition of Ravana devotion among Sinhalese Buddhists.

In the previous section I mentioned several functions of Lakegala’s imagined landscape for the alleged historical connection of Ravana to the area. The religious landscape of Ravana in Lakegala area, the rituals conducted by villagers, the *devalaya*, and the objects in the *devalaya* also relate to an alleged historical connection of Ravana to the area. In addition, these are in a very specific way of relevance to the process of *Ravanisation*. In Chapter 3, I have with reference to the religious studies scholars Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead argued that religious emotions are bound up with sacred places, temples, shrines, and landscapes. The second ‘contribution’ of the religious landscape of Ravana in Lakegala for the recent interest in Ravana is that, in his capacity as a local deity, Ravana appeals to human emotions in the present because it is believed that Ravana and his power and protection can still be accessed when he is ritually propitiated. It was for this reason that members of the popular research group the *Ravana Shakthi* visited the place: Ravana’s power continues to be present there.<sup>1056</sup>

Third, through post-mortem deification, Ravana becomes connected to the area and its inhabitants. As Ravana is considered a local deity-cum-ancestor, the villagers are turned into his descendants. The *Ravana Shakthi* has even argued that this provides evidence for the Sinhalese that they are the first inhabitants of the country and therefore the true inheritors of Sri Lanka. A segment of the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists envisions the villagers as the living embodiment of the ancient *yakshas* who were present in Sri Lanka prior to the arrival of Vijaya. They are the embodiment of unspoiled ancestry and unmixed ethnicity or, to use Roginsky’s concepts, they are considered ethnic natives and the human carriers of folklore.<sup>1057</sup> I reflect in more detail on several of the ethno-nationalist dynamics of *Ravanisation* – especially on the relevance of lore, territory, and representations of the past – in the final section of this chapter.

### 7.3 Reflection: *Ravanisation* and the Multiple Dynamics (with)in Lore

I have given my analyses of the relevance of the multiple Ravana representations that have evolved in and about Lakegala’s lore in the reflection parts of each section. Therefore, I mainly reflect here on some general tendencies I have noticed about this case study that seem to relate to some characteristics of how ‘the past’ is employed at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations. In addition, I relate my reflections to general insights of how at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations lore is employed. I do that by referring to some of the concepts and theorists that I have introduced in Chapter 3. Furthermore, I point out some case specific insights that continue to build on my explo-

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<sup>1056</sup> Interview with PR1, March 9, 2018.

<sup>1057</sup> Roginsky, *Nationalism and Ambivalence*, 245.

rations of the relevance of the imagined landscape as I have set out in Chapter 5. As a conclusion, I also reflect on the role of researchers and media, and to what extent the efforts to promote Ravana's alleged connection to the area have a long-lasting effect.

### ***Ravanisation, Lore, and Sinhalese Buddhist Ethno-Nationalism***

In Chapter 3, I introduced several ethno-symbolists who have argued that at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations, ethno-nationalists reconstruct a coherent new set of ideas derived from existing mythhistories. Among them is Anthony Smith, who has further argued that nationalism is '[...] a modern ideological movement, but also the expression of aspirations of various social groups to create, defend or maintain nations – their autonomy, unity and identity – by drawing on the cultural resources of pre-existing communities and categories.'<sup>1058</sup> When we look at the way lore is employed in the context of *Ravanisation* we see, as I argue here, some general dynamics of ethno-nationalist revitalisations.

Several scholars have argued that folklore is employed by (ethno-)nationalists to claim and show a longstanding tradition in the country of an authentic culture.<sup>1059</sup> In academia, the search for national identity and authenticity was supported by academic disciplines such as folklore studies, ethnography, and anthropology. According to Regina Bendix, '[...] nationalism, builds on the essentialist notions inherent in authenticity, and folklore in the guise of native cultural discovery and rediscovery has continually served nationalist movements since the Romantic era.'<sup>1060</sup> An example of this in twentieth-century Sri Lanka is the re-invention of the Kohomba *yakkama* (see Box 1.3). Susan Reed has described how at the start of the twentieth century the Kohomba *yakkama* was almost extinct in Sri Lanka. The promoting of Kandyan dance – mainly derived from this ritual – by the state in the 1940s and 1950s resulted in a resurgence of the Kohomba *yakkama*.<sup>1061</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, the Kohomba *yakkamas* were mainly performed as cultural heritage events by the state.<sup>1062</sup> Eva Ambos has elsewhere argued that Kandyan dance has been taken out its original context (the Kohomba *yakkama*) and presented as 'the' national and Buddhist dance. The state, in other words, has transformed Kandyan dance performances to fit the national post-colonial identity project.<sup>1063</sup>

The shared quest of (ethno-)nationalists and academics in search for identity in Lakegala area becomes explicit in the article 'Unique Religious and Cultural Practices as Evident in the Kandyan Village of Meemure.' The two authors, both of whom ob-

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<sup>1058</sup> Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 18.

<sup>1059</sup> Baycroft, T. (2009), Introduction, in T. Baycroft & D. Hopkin (Eds.), *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe During the Long Nineteenth Century* Leiden: Brill, 1-10, 1. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004211834\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004211834_002)

<sup>1060</sup> Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 7.

<sup>1061</sup> Reed, *Dance and the Nation*, 10, 11, 24.

<sup>1062</sup> Reed, *Dance and the Nation*, 174, 180.

<sup>1063</sup> Ambos E. (2012), The Changing Image of Sinhalese Healing Rituals: Performing Identity in the Context of Transculturality, in C. Brosius & R. Wenzlhuemer (Eds.), *Transcultural Turbulences: Towards a Multi-sited Reading of Image Flows*, Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 249-269, 256, 261.

tained a PhD in anthropology and currently work at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, have written this article with the sole aim to document and preserve the 'ancient' traditions of Meemure for further generations. They have argued that the inhabitants of Meemure form a unique group living isolated from mainstream society. They have further maintained that the traditional practices preserved among the older generation have been passed down without change for centuries.<sup>1064</sup> And further still, they write:

Meemure, a village in the Central Province of Sri Lanka, is one such village that has a unique culture which is distinctly different in several aspects from mainstream cultural practices. The villagers of Meemure are believed to – be descendants of King Ravana and his Yaksha gothra, or the Yaksha tribe.<sup>1065</sup>

The ambition of scholars, popular Ravana researchers, and several villagers to collect and reproduce poetry, reveals an interest among a segment of the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists to preserve lore. In the process of *Ravanisation*, references in lore that mention Ravana are employed to claim that there is a tradition of connecting Ravana to Lakegala (extended to Sri Lanka). As I have argued in this chapter, the historical connection of Ravana to the area is elaborated upon by a select group of people with an interest in Ravana to claim that the villagers living in Lakegala area are the descendants of Ravana and/or the ancient *yakshas*. That the villagers still 'worship' Ravana as a local deity-cum-ancestor provides further evidence that they are his descendants. Some have even argued that the villagers are the first inhabitants of the country, that they deny that they are from Vijaya, and that they are the rightful inheritors of the country. I have argued throughout this chapter that the reproduction of lore and how the villagers are framed disclose dynamics of interest in lore and an authentic culture that are characteristic of ethno-nationalist revitalisations. As Roginsky has mentioned, the representation of the villagers (of rural communities) as ethnic natives and carriers of folklore, and folklore as representing the embodiment of tradition, are central to ethnic groups that strive for revival.

Although my research at Lakegala area was only a snapshot, my explorations seem to suggest that the interest in Ravana's alleged connections to Lakegala area in lore is part of a larger post-war identity project among some Sinhalese Buddhists. The aim of this project, I suggest, is to establish an unquestionable ancient connection of the Sinhalese to the country through claims of indigenous ancestry and ancient traditions.

### **The Representation of Lakegala as Ravana's Abode and Ethno-Nationalist Representations of the Past**

The ethno-nationalist tendency to draw from pre-existing sources – including mythologies, traditions, and communities – to create a new set of ideas is more fully revealed

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<sup>1064</sup> Ananda & Nahallage, *Unique Religious and Cultural Practices*, 73, 80.

<sup>1065</sup> Ananda & Nahallage, *Unique Religious and Cultural Practices*, 80.



when we look at the specific framing of Lakegala as part of Ravana's ancient kingdom. I have argued throughout the chapter that a connection between Ravana and Lakegala area is present in lore. The most prominent representations of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala in lore do not depict Ravana in a favourable way: his presence and the war that he caused by kidnapping Sita have badly affected the beautiful mountain. I have argued in this chapter that in the context of *Ravanisation* – especially in popular Ravana books – this connection of Ravana to Lakegala in lore is referred to but also modified to create a representation of the glorious past of the Sinhalese. Building on poetry, creative etymologies, and colonial records, the mountain becomes an astrological centre or time measurement device, for instance, and Ravana used the beacon function of the mountain for his air voyages. This illustrates the reconstruction of a new set of ideas out of pre-existing mythhistories and traditions. This 'new' set of ideas shows how the recent representations of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala relate to ethno-nationalist representations of the past. Several of the functions ascribed to Lakegala as part of Ravana's kingdom emphasise ancient technology mastered by Ravana and the Hela. These representations fit in the larger picture of the golden ages or civilisation of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka that is central to *Ravanisation* (see Chapter 4). The apotheosis of Lakegala and its marvellous functions in Ravana's ancient kingdom appeal more to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country than the *Mahavamsa*-based perception of the past, since the Hela-Ravana representation of the past maintains that the Sinhalese had an indigenous and glorious civilisation. The framing of Lakegala as astrological centre or target for air travels seems to be in line with ethno-nationalist representations of golden ages and the assumption that the ethnic group who made the country into a habitable civilisation is the rightful owner of the country (see Section 2.3.2 on the post-war articulations of this statement by Sinhalese Buddhist political parties).

### **The Relevance of Lakegala as Ravana's Imagined and Religious Landscapes for *Ravanisation***

In this chapter, I have made an artificial division between representations of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala as an imagined landscape (Section 7.2.1) and as a religious landscape (Section 7.2.2). I have argued that the unique combination of multiple representations of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala has a very specific function for *Ravanisation*. The framing of Lakegala as Ravana's war zone and as part of Ravana's ancient kingdom allegedly relate Ravana historically to Lakegala. I have argued that, following the principle of post-mortem-deification in the local pantheon, the historical connection of Ravana to the area and his passing away are preconditions for present-day devotion to him. Together, Ravana's imagined landscape and religious landscape at Lakegala area constitute a unique past-present nexus. The king who once roamed around in the area now allegedly dwells there as deity who protects the villagers.

In Chapter 3, I mentioned that Claudia Moser and Cecelia Feldman have pointed out that rituals should be studied in their specific material and topographical context:

rituals impact the physical setting and vice versa. In the Ranamure *yakkamas* that were revived in the first half of the 2010s, Ravana was propitiated as Bandara *deviyo* in a similar way as other local deities by the ritual anointing of and dancing with his weapon. The representation of Ravana as a local deity follows the local principle of post-mortem deification. This representation of Ravana contrasts with some other representations in the Ravana discourse according to which Ravana is unconscious and will wake up in the future or any other millenarian expectations. But in his capacity as Bandara *deviyo* Ravana becomes closely connected to Lakegala area and the villagers in the present as he is believed to provide protection to those who reside in the area that he allegedly overlooks.

When we only look at Ravana from a discursive/narrative perspective, the present-day relevance of the presence of this ancient king in Lakegala area for the villagers remains unnoticed. In my discussion of the revival of the *yakkamas* in Ranamure in the first half of the 2010s, I have argued that this ritual illustrates the present-day relevance of Ravana's connection to the area as Bandara *deviyo* because the aim of this ritual is to ask protection over the village and the harvest. In general, local deities are believed to oversee very specific areas, and the ritual hanging of the twig is an example of a ritual that is conducted at the border of the area to mark the transition from the area of one deity to another. My specific case study indicates that actual territory is thus relevant to both Lakegala's religious landscape and imagined landscape. For the latter, as I have discussed, natural features in the landscape are bound up with narratives of Ravana's alleged visits to the area.

In Chapter 2, I referred to several theorists to argue that territory is central to ethno-nationalism and that it is key to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country. Throughout the twentieth century, interpretations of sections from the *Mahavamsa* were employed to argue that Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese Buddhist Island. I have argued in Chapter 4 that, in the process of *Ravanisation*, Ravana is considered the king of the Hela and the king of Lanka. For the Lakegala case, both alleged connections are elaborated upon by some Sinhalese Buddhists: the villagers are the living embodiment of the ancient Hela and the designation of the mountain as Siri Laka is also used to refer to the country. These elaborations combine the central elements of the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as the country of the Sinhalese: territory and ethnicity. As Michael Roberts has shown, the tendency to equate 'Ceylonese' (or Lankan) with 'Sinhalese' and 'Sinhala' with 'Lanka' is present in several Sinhala ideologies through the decades.<sup>1066</sup> The insights of the Lakegala case study, as derived from my explorations, illustrate the specific relevance of an actual site and its inhabitants for the process of *Ravanisation* and for the Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country. Lakegala's imagined and religious landscapes together constitute an alleged ongoing continuum from the past to the present of the intermin-

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<sup>1066</sup> Roberts, *Language and National Identity*, 92.

gling of ethnicity (Ravana and the Hela, or present-day Sinhalese) with territory (Lakegala, or Sri Lanka).

### Reflection on Lore, Authenticity, and Revitalisation

The search for ‘authenticity’ within the disciplines of folklore, anthropology, and ethnography has been subject to a continuous debate about the ‘validity’ of cultural representations. As the anthropologist Linnekin pointed out in the 1990s:

The concern, at times phrased as an accusation, is that writing about the contemporary construction or "invention" of culture undercuts the cultural authority of indigenous peoples by calling into question their authenticity. Implicitly, authenticity is thus equated with the transmission through time of a tradition, that is, an objectively definable essence or core of customs and beliefs (Handler 1986; Handler and Linnekin 1984).<sup>1067</sup>

In this chapter, I do not argue or attempt to disprove that there is an ancient tradition of Ravana belief in Lakegala area. However, based on my broader research (see for instance Section 5.4 on the 1980s interest in Ravana), I suggest that some of the multiple alleged connections of Ravana to Lakegala are not merely post-war inventions: the representation of Ravana’s war that badly affected Lakegala mountain seemed to be present in Lakegala’s lore prior to the recent interest in Ravana (which does not, of course, automatically make it ‘ancient’). The revival of the *yakkamas* in the first half of the 2010s and the increasing tendency to call them Ravana *yakkamas* are, as I have indicated, most probably recent inventions. Despite this, I do not assume that the Ravana *yakkamas* were inauthentic: on the contrary, the Ravana *yakkamas* illustrate an actual (sincere) interest in Ravana among a selective group of the villagers in the first half of the 2010s that continues to build on local principles and connections between the area with Ravana that were present over the centuries. The Ravana *yakkamas* fit into the everchanging character of lore. At the same time, not all villagers ‘agreed’ with the change, and I have deliberately given a voice to villagers who held different opinions.

The Laggala region has been subject to several ‘waves’ of interest to put the special character of the area forward. Some of these were supported by (local) governmental representatives. The interest in the Laggala region or the broader Mathale district was often related to folklore – including local rituals – and the ‘pre-historic’ value of the area. These waves of interest led to publications in the 1970s and 1980s (for instance *Historic Matale*) and 1990s (for instance *Heritage of the Batadandu Mountain range*). The financing of the *yakkama* in Ranamure in the first half of the 2010s and the promoting of this ‘ancient’ Ravana ritual – including Ravana as a local deity – illustrate an increased interest in lore specifically related to Ravana among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority in the post-war period. I have suggested that this interest in Ravana lore

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<sup>1067</sup> Linnekin, J. (1991), Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity, *American Anthropologist*, 93(2), 446-449, 446. A similar discussion is mentioned in: Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 4.

is part of a larger reframing of the past that serves the post-war identity project of a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhists majority. This reframing of the past is more palatable to post-war triumphalism than the *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of the past because it aims to put forward ancient traditions, indigenous ancestry of the Sinhalese, and a glorious civilisation. I consider the dynamics of *Ravanisation* with(in) lore – especially how lore is employed to create an ancient and indigenous connection of Ravana and the Hela to Sri Lanka – as exemplary of how the past is (re)framed at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations. It is this framework of revitalisation that I found useful in investigating the multiple dynamics of *Ravanisation* with(in) lore in this chapter (for my reflections on the two levels of revitalisation, see Section 8.3).

### **Reflection: The Impact of the Presence and Absence of Media and Researchers in Lakegala Area**

As indicated throughout this chapter, I noticed in some conversations that media and Ravana researchers who have visited the area played a role in what villagers knew about Ravana's connections to Lakegala. I also pointed out in Section 7.2.1 that eco-tourists and people with an interest in Ravana most often stay in Meemure. They report their tours online via YouTube or in articles. In a group conversation at the main shop in Narangamuva, the difference between the villages located on the Kandy and Mathale side of the mountain was brought up (translation):

We got it from the Siyatha TV Channel, they got all the information. They still show it on TV at 7:00 p.m. We have copied it to our phones now. In the Meemure area, they have deformed that place because they get a lot of visitors. The village is also destroyed. We also see that Lakegala is a very important thing.<sup>1068</sup>

I should stress here that infrastructure and governmental support have contributed to differences between the villages. The divisional secretary of the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat mentioned that the government mainly sponsored and promoted (the development of) eco-tourism in Meemure and not in their area.<sup>1069</sup> The publicity given to Meemure, and the accommodations available there, have also led to a preference of Meemure over Ranamure and Narangamuva by people with a particular interest in the area and/or Ravana and tourists. Some people from Ranamure and Narangamuva, however, told me that researchers – most often referred to as professors – had also come to their villages. Some villagers even mentioned that they actually climbed Lakegala because they guided those people. An elderly man of approximately 90 years, who had previously lived in Narangamuva, explained that he went on several expeditions with researchers in the 1970s and 1980s. One of those expeditions was with Senerath Paranavitana (professor of archaeology, 1896-1972; see also Section 5.2.1), and

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<sup>1068</sup> Group conversation 01-04-04-2018NAGR.

<sup>1069</sup> Group conversation 01-27-04-2018NPGR.

they went looking for inscriptions. He undertook another expedition in the 1980s with people who wrote contributions to *Batadandu Kandatvetiye Urumaya*. Among them was Mirando Obeyesekere who was eager to find out a specific stone carving, but they could not find it.<sup>1070</sup> More recently – as one of the villagers explained – Herath Mudhiyanse Attanayaka (the dean of the Faculty of Arts from Peradeniya University) came, and it is largely through the researchers' interest that the interest in Ravana has awakened in the villages.<sup>1071</sup>

In addition to the presence of researchers, media play an increasingly important role in the dissemination of (emerging) representations of Ravana's alleged connection to Lakegala. I have explained that mobile phone network access was still limited in Ranamure and Narangamuva in 2018, but in the surrounding villages people had access to media via smartphones and there the importance of newspaper articles was mentioned.<sup>1072</sup> In New Pallegama, I was explicitly told that I could find the details of Ravana's connections to Lakegala in the books written by Mirando Obeyesekere.<sup>1073</sup> In several of the conversations in which people told me that they learned certain ideas of Ravana's connection to Lakegala from the publications of Mirando Obeyesekere, it was explained that Ravana was in an unconscious state and that his body was being preserved in a boat full of herbs and located in the area.<sup>1074</sup> Around the main shop in Narangamuva, some people brought up the idea that Ravana is in an unconscious state.<sup>1075</sup> I have often referred to this group conversation at the Narangamuva shop in which a young man who learned about Ravana via media sources on his phone took the lead. He mentioned ideas similar to those brought up in the conversation set up by my host with an elderly man who had 'special knowledge' about Ravana. This elderly man previously owned a shop in Narangamuva, most probably the same shop where I held the group conversation. The relevance of shops for the dissemination of Ravana ideas

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<sup>1070</sup> Conversation with elderly man (around 90 years old) who previously owned a shop in Narangamuva and recently moved to New Pallegama: conversation 14-04-04-2018NPpreNa, April 4, 2018. That Senarath Paranavitana came to the area was also mentioned in one other conversation (conversation 06-05-04-2018NA).

<sup>1071</sup> Group conversation 04-02-04-2018RAGR.

<sup>1072</sup> In Hettipola (approximately 15 kilometres away from Ranamure by car) I was told by a shopkeeper that he learned the details about Ravana's connection to Lakegala through newspaper articles published in *Mavbima*. In this newspaper a series written by/or inspired by Mirando Obeyesekere was published. Conversation 02-28-04-2018HE with shopkeeper, Hettipola, April 28, 2018.

<sup>1073</sup> Group conversation 04-03-04-2018NPGR in shop, New Pallegama, April 3, 2018.

<sup>1074</sup> This preserving of Ravana's body in a boat full of herbs was for instance mentioned in a conversation set up by my host with an elderly man (around 90 years old): conversation 14-04-04-2018NPpreNA. They, however, doubted if it was true. It was mentioned in three other conversations as well.

<sup>1075</sup> The idea that Ravana is in an unconscious state contradicts the established principle in the local pantheon that when someone dies, he can attain a state of divinity. However, as I have pointed out, the belief in the re-awakening of Ravana among Sinhalese was mentioned as an alternative mythistorical imagination by the Portuguese father Fernão de Queiroz in the 1680s (see Section 4.1) and thus has longstanding roots. Even these ideas can co-exist in lore.

should be emphasised. These are the places where people hang around and take notice of new ideas as shared via various media sources.<sup>1076</sup>

Media also work the other way around: through the media attention given to the Ravana *yakkamas* that were held in the early 2010s, as well as through the articles published in newspapers and on the internet about the Ravana *yakkama*, it is now common knowledge that there is an ancient annual village ritual in Lakegala area called the Ravana *yakkama*. No matter its temporary and recent character, for those with an interest in Ravana Lakegala provides an example of a longstanding interest in Ravana in the country reflected in the villagers' traditions.

That Ranamure and Narangamuva are less frequently visited by Ravana researchers than Meemure, coupled with the fact that media access was still limited, should not lead to the assumption that these villages are 'unspoiled.' Some researchers have also visited the Mathale side of the mountain. I have explained that as a research strategy I tried to make the conversations as low-key as possible (see Section 7.1.3). What this means is that I most often let the people themselves talk instead of imposing Ravana-questions or present myself as someone conducting research on Ravana. Despite this, I am aware that I as a researcher have influenced the context while conducting the research by coming to the area as an outsider. Whereas reflexivity and the influence of the researcher on the social context while conducting the research has become part of ethnography, I would also like to stress here the structural impact of researchers of any kind visiting rural areas on and off. Researchers not only influence the context at the particular moment of their actual physical presence, the continuous flow of researchers and journalists has a long-term effect on the self-perception of the villagers. Although working independently, they all turn to the villagers as 'sources' of traditional knowledge. By each conversation the researchers make the villagers reflect on the relevance of the area (and they reproduce that probably in the next interview). Also, popular research output will reach the villagers through media as I expect that media access at the Mathale side of Lakegala mountain will rapidly increase and this will result in new dynamics. The (recent) representations of Ravana's connection to Lakegala are collaborative constructions of a select group of villagers, government officials, Ravana researchers, and academics.

Despite the researchers' interest in the area, the media items that are produced about Ravana's connections to Lakegala, and the efforts by the cultural committee of Ranamure to promote Ravana's connection to Lakegala, the interest in Ravana in the villages extensively appealed only to a select group of villagers. Some of the representations of Ravana's connection to Lakegala only gained foothold in Ranamure and not in Narangamuva. Also, in Ranamure the enthusiasm for Ravana is prevalent among a select group of people only, and some other villagers openly criticised it. An example

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<sup>1076</sup> In addition to books and newspaper articles, I noticed that several villagers in Ranamure had a TV, and I was twice explicitly told there that they had learned about Ravana and his connection to Lakegala through TV programs.

of the limited impact of *Ravanisation* in the villages are the rituals: the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* commissioned the performance of *pujas* (offerings) to Ravana after they donated the statue. After the required period ended, none of the villagers took up the initiative to continue these *pujas*. Also, after the divisional secretariat withdrew their sponsorship of the *yakkama* in Ranamure, the *yakkamas* did not continue. Among the majority of villagers, it is still mainly a condensed story of Ravana's arrival to Lakegala mountain and the war that affected the mountain peak that remains. Time will tell if and which representations of Ravana's connection to Lakegala will permanently shape Lakegala's lore. I hereby express my hope that in the process of investigating references to Ravana in lore, there will remain place for criticism and reflexivity both among villagers and in the research output.





## CHAPTER 8

# Conclusion

It was on the *navam* (full-moon) day at the end of February 2021 that a very specific memory of my time in Sri Lanka came to mind. On *navam poya* 2021, I was awake almost the entire night due to a cold. Because of my pregnancy, I was not allowed to use regular medicines and my midwife had recommended me to drink ginger tea. Ginger-turmeric tea indeed brought some relief to my throat, but this herbal mixture had afterwards a burning effect on my stomach, and it made me vomit several times. As I could not get any sleep after that, I stared through the window at the beautiful and bright full moon, remembering my introduction to Sri Lankan samahan tea, which tasted a bit like the herbal tea I tried that night, in 2017. Soon after I arrived in Sri Lanka, I went on my scooter from my apartment in Nugegoda to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Pannipitiya to attend a *perahera* preparatory meeting. I had been on my way for about five minutes when it started to storm. Because the phone I used to navigate got wet and I did not have a raincoat, I took shelter in a Buddha shrine somewhere in the dark fields of Maharagama. One hour later, I finally arrived completely soaked at the meeting where only a few people were gathered because of the heavy rains. They had rescheduled the meeting for some days later in the week, but I stayed just long enough in the air-conditioned meeting hall to catch a cold. At the next meeting, the secretary of Sumangala Thero offered me a cup of special herbal tea: the Sri Lankan samahan tea. This tea contained ginger and pepper, and I drank it often until I recovered from my cold. During the festival week at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in 2017, a special samahan tea minivan stood at the parking lot of the temple site to serve tea to the volunteers for free. This was, as I realised only later, completely in line with the agenda of Sumangala Thero to promote everything that relates to the 'traditional herbal medicines' of Sri Lanka. Thinking about the samahan tea on a specific *poya* night in the Netherlands evoked warm memories of my time in Sri Lanka, especially the loving care of the people from the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya.

In this concluding chapter, I summarise several of my research findings and propose some topics for further research as I hope that, although my research about Ravana has come to an end, someone else will continue this fascinating journey with Ravana in Sri Lanka.

To structure the first two sections of this concluding chapter, I use my research questions and research foci as introduced in Chapter 1. My research question is divided into three sub questions: (1) what kind of Ravana representations have emerged in post-war Sri Lanka (2009 onwards)? (2) How do these Ravana representations take shape on local

levels? (3) How is the interest in Ravana related to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country?

In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I introduced several Ravana representations that were then discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. In Section 8.1.1, I therefore summarise my answers to sub-question 1 and sub-question 2 by relating primarily to my research findings as discussed in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. In addition, I relate my findings to my specific research foci, as these particular foci help us sense the multiplicity of *Ravanisation*. In the third part of my thesis, I have reflected on the relevance of the multiple Ravana representations for Sinhalese Buddhists at local levels. Continuing to build on my specific research findings, I offer in Section 8.1.2 some general observations about *Ravanisation*. These remarks are based on my fieldwork, however, and thus cover only a limited spectrum of the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka.

In Section 8.2, I provide a brief theoretical reflection. In Section 8.2.1, I give my answer to sub-question 3: how does the post-war interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists relate to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country? I do this by relating some of my research findings to the general (theoretical) insights about Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism that I introduced in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, especially focussing on how the phenomenon of *Ravanisation* relates to post-war Sinhalese Buddhist self-perception. In Section 8.2.2, I evaluate my choice of the concept revitalisation to coin the process of the recent interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka. I introduced this concept in the first chapter and employed the concept throughout my thesis to investigate the characteristics of this phenomenon at two levels. I critically ask in retrospect: to what extent was it useful to select the concept revitalisation to investigate and analyse some of the diverse aspects of *Ravanisation*?

Section 8.3 provides a brief reflection on my research methodology. In this section, I answer questions like: what were the limitations of my research strategies? Have I given an equal voice to my informants and how has this become visible throughout my thesis? Following the methodological limitations of my research, I provide some suggestions for further research in the final part of this chapter (Section 8.4).

## 8.1 General Reflection on *Ravanisation*

In the previous chapters I have argued that *Ravanisation* in post-war Sri Lanka is a multi-faceted phenomenon with very diverse manifestations. Ravana has many faces, and multiple, sometimes even competing, representations have emerged and co-exist in the post-war period. In this thesis, I have examined in detail only a selection of Sinhalese Buddhist Ravana representations. Moreover, my research was limited to Ravana representations that have emerged at specific localities, although I have aimed to picture the broader context of these representations and wider embedding of my case studies in Part II of

this thesis. In other words, I have looked at how certain ideas about Ravana – including representations that seem at first instance of minor importance – are of relevance to the local ‘community’ and their interest in Ravana. This grassroots perspective revealed patterns of how (and why) an interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists has taken shape in very diverse strata of society.

### **8.1.1 The Multiplicity of Ravana Representations in Post-War Sri Lanka**

In this section, I briefly summarise the multiple Ravana representations that I have discussed in Chapter 4 through Chapter 7 and give my analyses about what these representations indicate about *Ravanisation*. In addition, I reflect on how my specific ritual, material, and spatial research perspectives have disclosed the relevance of several Ravana representations at a local (community) level, which leads to a broader understanding of why the interest in Ravana in the post-war period has a (relatively) wide appeal.

#### **Ravana as the king of Lanka**

In Chapter 4, I showed that the representation of Ravana as king of Lanka is central to the process of *Ravanisation*. Ravana is generally known as king of Lanka, and this representation is not ‘new.’ In the process of *Ravanisation*, however, the ancient monarch Ravana becomes intimately related to Sri Lanka, which is considered (a remainder of this) ancient Lanka. This strong focus on physical territory related to ancient monarchy (and ‘ethnicity,’ as I discuss in the next section) discloses the ethno-nationalist relevance of *Ravanisation*. My investigation from a ritual, material, and spatial perspective of the multiple connections made by a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority to relate Ravana as king of Lanka to Sri Lanka reveals how this representation actually takes shape in present-day Sri Lanka and the relevance of this representation for local sites and communities living close to these localities.

Employing a spatial perspective to investigate the alleged connection between Ravana and actual territory reveals that the representation of Ravana as king of Lanka is central to what I have referred to as the imagined landscape of Ravana’s ancient kingdom. In Chapter 7, I showed that the local narratives of the past and their connections to sites and natural features are central to Lakegala’s lore. Lakegala’s lore is employed in the process of *Ravanisation* to extensively relate the perception of the Hela-Ravana past to actual territory. The creative use of Lakegala’s designation Siri Laka adds significantly to the broader relevance of this connection of Ravana to local sites as present in lore: Siri Laka is also used as a designation for the entire country. Ravana’s alleged connection to the country thus follows from his connection to this very specific mountain as mentioned in Lakegala’s lore.

My explorations of the world heritage site Sigiriya as part of Ravana’s alleged ancient kingdom further discloses another important aspect of the spatial dimension of the representation of Ravana as king of Lanka. In Chapter 3, I introduced Diana Eck’s definition of an imagined landscape and characterised imagined landscapes as charged with emotion. In the process of *Ravanisation*, Sigiriya is envisioned as the palace of King Ravana

or his stepbrother Kuvera. Whereas people from the pro-*Mahavamsa* discourse tolerate that an alternative Sinhalese Buddhist mythistorical imagination remains at the periphery, the Hela-Ravana perception of the past becomes a 'real' threat to *Mahavamsa*-based perceptions of the past when actual sites are envisioned as remainders of the ancient kingdom of Ravana. The envisioning of Sigiriya as Ravana's or Kuvera's ancient palace is considered an actual threat to the *Mahavamsa*-inspired representation of the construction of this famous world heritage site by King Kashyapa I. My specific spatial research focus indicates that, in post-war Sri Lanka, Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana are stepping out of the shadows and making rival claims when it comes to Sri Lanka's past. *Ravanisation* is not just a narrative; Ravana's connection to Sri Lanka is realised in the present-day landscape. Actual sites, charged with emotions, put the competition between multiple Sinhalese Buddhist mythistorical imaginations on edge.

In Chapter 6, I discussed in detail the relevance of the ritualising of the representation of Ravana as king of Lanka in an annual procession organised by an urban Buddhist temple site. Adorned as a real monarch, seated on the back of an elephant, and outfitted with royal adornments and weaponry, Ravana is commemorated as the ancient king of Lanka. The ritual is further relevant to the process of *Ravanisation* because it not only commemorates Ravana as ancient monarch but also creates the possibility to actually engage with Ravana in the present. In representing Ravana as king during the festival, the statue gives people the opportunity to pay respect to their king and to participate in this ritual by, for example, performing *angampora* in public to 'protect' his ornaments. The possibility of an alleged multisensorial experience in the present unveils a unique characteristic of the materialising and ritualising of the representation of Ravana as king of Lanka in this procession. In this ritual, Ravana as king of Lanka is transplanted from the narrative sphere of the distant past into twenty-first-century Sri Lanka. It also distances Ravana from a Hindu/*Ramayana* context because it places Ravana within a recognisable Sinhalese Buddhist ritual context associated with power and kingship. This extensive ritual publicly performs the close triad of ancient monarchy, territory, and ethnicity and represented it in the present. I evaluate the relevance of Ravana's alleged connection to ethnicity here in more detail.

### **Ravana and the Hela (civilisation)**

The most central and dominant post-war representation of Ravana is his alleged connection to the Hela. Others have pointed out (see, for instance, D. Witharana in Section 1.1.1) that the 'story of an autochthonous Hela Ravana' challenges the Vijaya narrative from the *Mahavamsa*. By examining how representations of the Hela-Ravana past and the ethnic connection between Ravana and the Hela have taken shape in the spatial, ritual, and material sphere, we can sense in detail the relevance of this representation for a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority in post-war Sri Lanka: ethnic and cultural independence of the Sinhalese from India and other ethnicities (within and beyond the borders of the country) and, in addition, an increasing tendency to advocate superiority of Sri Lanka (especially the Sinhalese) over other countries.

In Chapter 7, I showed that the alleged historical connection of Ravana to Lakegala area is creatively extended by some Sinhalese Buddhists to make claims of ancient inhabitation and continuing presence of the Sinhalese in the country. The ritual practices of the villagers in Lakegala area are crucial for the argumentation that there is an ongoing connection of the villagers to Ravana as their ancient ancestor. The ritual and material perspectives I have employed to investigate this connection – though more limited than in Chapter 6 – added some case specific insights to the relevance of this alleged connection of Ravana to the villagers for the process of *Ravanisation*. The village pantheon in Lakegala area consists mainly of deified ancestors who gained a position in the pantheon through the process of post-mortem deification. That the villagers still allegedly venerate Ravana as a local deity (*Bandara deviyo*) is (recently) put forward. By relating Ravana to the traditional weapon (the *kurulla bendi ayuda*) of an existing village deity (*Bandara deviyo*), it becomes possible to properly propitiate him in the annual village ritual and to claim that there is an ancient tradition in the village of Ravana veneration. My specific research perspectives contribute to a more in-depth understanding of how the alleged historical connection of Ravana to a specific area is extended to an ethnic connection. I have indicated how, by following local principles in the pantheon, Ravana is creatively connected to a specific area and its present-day inhabitants. As Ravana becomes the ancestor of the villagers, the villagers are turned into his descendants, and this specific envisioning of the villagers makes claims of ownership of the country possible.

My spatial, material, and ritual perspectives show that the extraordinary mountain and the people living in its surroundings together constitute a unique past-present nexus of the alleged connection of Ravana to the Hela (the *yakshas* in particular) and Sri Lanka. Although on a local level only a small group of people actively maintain these ideas, the connection of the villagers to Ravana has gained momentum beyond the area. In the process of *Ravanisation*, some Sinhalese Buddhists claim that the people living in Lakegala area are the descendants of Ravana and/or the ancient *yakshas*. The villagers are thus the living embodiment and continuation of the ancient inhabitation of the *yakshas* who were present in Sri Lanka at Ravana's time (approximately 6,000 years ago). This provides alleged evidence of ancient and indigenous inhabitation of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka because the *yakshas* living in Lakegala area are believed to have been present in the country prior to any foreign invasion (especially the visit of Vijaya). In the process of *Ravanisation*, these villagers are envisioned as the first inhabitants of the country, the embodiment of ancient and continuing presence of the Sinhalese in the Sri Lanka, and therefore – following ethno-nationalist principles – the true inheritors of the country. My specific research perspectives substantially contribute to understanding how Ravana's alleged historical connection to the Hela takes shape on a local level, what the relevance of this connection is to a local community, and how it is employed by a segment of the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists in the post-war period to make claims about Sinhalese ownership of the country.

Lakegala has also provided insight into how actual sites are relevant to the envisioning of the abstract idea of an ancient Hela civilisation in Sri Lanka. The outstanding monolith is reproduced in the process of *Ravanisation* as one of the key sites that stands firm

in the landscape as a reminder of the glorious days of Ravana's Hela kingdom. King Ravana is believed to have roamed around in the area, and more recent interpretations of the mountain as a runway for the *dandu monaraya* or its astrological and time calculation functions are examples of how several sites in the country are now marked as 'remnants' of a glorious Hela civilisation in Sri Lanka.

At my other case study, the ethnic connection of Ravana to the Hela (or Sinhalese) and the marvels of the Hela civilisation were also considered of key-importance. In one of the preparatory meetings of the Medin *maha perahera*, organised by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, it was explicitly stated in one of the speeches that, as long as the Tamils claim that Ravana is their king, they are the oldest race in the country and Sri Lanka will be a Tamil nation.<sup>1077</sup> By organising Ravana rituals, this local community of Sinhalese Buddhists aims to show that the Sinhalese descend from Ravana, and that Ravana – not the Indian prince Vijaya – is the ancestor of the Sinhalese. They have given Hela king Ravana a central position in the Sinhalese Buddhist procession, and he could not be brought closer to his people in the present than by taking him around as their king. The rituals organised at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya play a central role in producing the representation of Ravana as king of the Hela/Sinhalese in the present. The ritual indicates a (post-war) tendency among the Sinhalese to further divide between the diverse ethnic communities within the country (especially the claim that the Sinhalese are different from the Tamils), and the ethnic and cultural independence of the Sinhalese from India.

In Chapter 4, I argued that the elements of Sinhalese self-perception and cultural independence were present in how the Hela concept was used in the past. Hela or Elu as (literary) language, for instance, already opposed the Sanskrit-dominated culture. In the early-twentieth-century Hela movement, it was argued that Hela was an indigenous language and even the mother of all languages. In addition, Hela became used to denote the indigenous ethnicity of the Sinhalese, and this idea gained momentum in the post-war period. Following the claim of ancient and continuing presence of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, the Hela-Ravana perception of the past focusses on the indigeneity of the Hela civilisation (or ethnic independence of the Sinhalese) and the cultural independence (and even superiority) of Sri Lanka. These two characteristics are central to the post-war symbolic interpretation of Ravana as *dasis* Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. I have argued in Chapter 4 that this specific Ravana representation aims to put forward the marvellous skills of Ravana and the Hela. Moreover, it translates (some of them) into concrete present-day practices, and this is where my specific research perspectives come in. I have investigated how some of the skills and marvels came into play at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, and I evaluate here in more detail how my specific research perspectives contribute to a deeper understanding of the present-day relevance of the idea of a marvellous Hela civilisation at a local (community) level.

Indigenous Hela medicine, as invented by Hela King Ravana, is one of the skills that is explored in post-war Sri Lanka. Several men in the country give themselves out as practitioners of the traditional Hela or *rasa vedakama*. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya,

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<sup>1077</sup> Speech delivered by DO28, Pannipitiya, March 11, 2018.

traditional and indigenous Hela medicine is ritualised through, for instance, the use of *kola kenda* (leaves congee) in the Ravana *puja* and the use of *deshiya beheth kola* (local/ indigenous medicinal leaves) in the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*. Both substances revive indigenous (Hela) herbal ‘medicine’ and are closely related to Ravana: Ravana himself empowers the substances because he is allegedly present in the statue(s) during the rituals. The rituals make the marvels of the indigenous Hela civilisation tangible, edible, and visible for public and promote the cultural independence of the Sinhalese against foreign medicine – either ‘western’ medicine or sometimes Indian Ayurveda – not only in the past but also in the present. The rituals and substances are important to ‘translate’ the marvels of the Hela past to the present and to invoke Ravana’s skills for the benefit of the present-day (local) Sinhalese community.

The annual *maha Ravana perahera* brings the element of cultural independence (and superiority) of the Sinhalese into even clearer view. The replica of the *dandu monaraya* taken around in the *perahera* symbolises the aircraft technology mastered by *Ravana* and the Hela. The *dandu monaraya* is the main symbol for Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana to promote the cultural dominance of the Hela civilisation over other countries. The research project ‘Ravana and the lost heritage of aviation dominance,’ started in 2019 by the Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka, revealed the broader ambition behind the representation of Ravana as king of the Hela civilisation and the *dandu monaraya*: it was the Hela who stood at the cradle of any other civilisation. To some Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalists in post-war Sri Lanka, it is not sufficient to claim power over the minorities in their own country nor independence from India; they have constructed a worldview that places the Sinhalese Buddhists at the apex of the entire (ancient) world.

My specific spatial, material, and ritual research perspectives contribute significantly to a broader understanding of the relevance of the representation of Ravana as king of the Hela civilisation for Sinhalese Buddhists in the post-war period, how abstract ideas about the past are ‘translated’ to contemporary practices, and how the multiplicity of its manifestations both signals and contributes to the wider appeal of the Sinhalese Buddhist interest in Ravana in post-war Sri Lanka.

### **Ravana as king and *bodhisatta* in a (Sinhalese) Buddhist timeframe and worldview**

Whereas the representations of Ravana as king of Lanka and as Hela king continue to build on ideas that were present (in Sri Lanka) prior to the post-war period, the representations of Ravana as *bodhisatta* and (aspirant) deity are comparatively more recent. In Chapter 5, I explored the materialising of Ravana at Buddhist sites and argued that most of the Ravana shrines and statues have been constructed in the post-war period – with Kataragama as an important exception. In this section, I summarise and reflect on the relevance of placing Ravana as king and *bodhisatta* in a (Sinhalese) Buddhist timeframe and worldview for the interest in Ravana on a local level and what it indicates about the process of *Ravanisation* in general.

Several Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana have undertaken the effort to relate Ravana to a (Sinhalese) Buddhist timeframe. In the Ravana discourse, the alternative Sri Lankan chronicle the *Rajavaliya* is cited to argue that Ravana lived 1,844 years prior to the enlightenment of Gautama Buddha, and the *Lankavatara Sutra* is selectively employed to argue that Ravana lived at the time of a previous Buddha. These efforts indicate the selective and creative employment of Sinhalese and Buddhist records to distance Ravana from the Hindu worldview and relate Ravana to a (Sinhalese) Buddhist timeframe and worldview. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya the framing of Ravana in a Buddhist timeframe and worldview is taken to a next level. In addition to materialising Ravana's connection to a previous Buddha in the *mandiraya*, the 'historical' king Ravana is placed in the line of Buddhist monarchs (starting with maha Sammata) and the representation of Ravana as a *bodhisatta* is circulating around at this temple site. On a local level, these representations contribute to a justification of the presence of a Ravana *mandiraya* at a Buddhist temple site. The representation of Ravana as a *bodhisatta* – and especially the representation of Ravana as the future *bodhisatta* Maitreya – has inspired several people at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya to 'prepare' Sri Lanka and change their attitudes in preparation for the return of Ravana. The representation of Ravana as *bodhisatta*, a Ravana representation unique to the post-war period, is of broader relevance as well: whereas Ravana's kingship lies in the distant past, the framing of Ravana as a *bodhisatta* gives *Ravanisation* a millenarian perspective. This millenarian perspective conforms to ethno-nationalist perceptions of the future. In the future, Ravana will give a special position to Sri Lanka and restore the glorious days of the Hela. The representation of Ravana as *bodhisatta* further contributes to Ravana as a Sinhalese Buddhist hero, whom the Sinhalese Buddhists can identify with in matters of ethnicity and religiosity. In addition, it relates to the benevolent character of Ravana who not only was a warrior king in the distant past but also still is concerned about Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese. This benevolent aspect is even more prominent in the representation of Ravana as (aspirant) deity.

### **Ravana as (aspirant) deity or local deity**

The most valuable insight that followed from my specific research perspectives is that Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka have created multiple ways to actively engage with ancient Hela king Ravana in the present. An example of this is the 'translation' of the perception of an ancient Hela-Ravana civilisation into concrete practices that can be explored in the present. Traditional medicines, *angampora*, and yoga are claimed to be continuations of ancient Hela practices, and as such these are considered ways to explore (the power of) Ravana in the present.

The representation of Ravana as (aspirant) deity provides an excellent opportunity for people to allegedly relate themselves to Ravana in the present. The representation of Ravana as (aspirant) deity follows the assumption that Ravana as (aspirant) deity is engaged in daily matters. In Lakegala area, Ravana was invoked in the annual village ritual as Bandara *deviyo*, and other ritual practices were performed to him. Whether or not this connection of Ravana to the local deity Bandara *deviyo* is 'historically' true, villagers who



believe at present that Ravana has turned into their village deity *Bandara deviyo* seek his protection over their villages, the crops, and against diseases. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, multiple Ravana rituals that follow the pattern of the *deva puja* in Sri Lankan Buddhism are organised. The *deva puja* is based on the principle of reciprocity of the devotee and (aspirant) deity. I was told that people sponsored a Ravana *puja* to ask Ravana for healing, for instance, or for assistance in exams or business and that Ravana as (aspirant) deity is empowered through the ritual.

At both sites of my research, the rituals are not only commemorations of ancient king Ravana. The rituals, the objects, and statues allegedly make Ravana present as (aspirant) deity. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya the main granite statue and the extensive ritual performances are of central relevance to facilitate the possibility for devotees to allegedly multi-sensorially experience Ravana. Those who attend the rituals are provided the opportunity to consume at the end of the ritual some food items that are offered to Ravana and substances that are used to bathe Ravana with. People who come for the ritual are invited to take part in the presence of Ravana at the time of the ritual. They are invited to contribute to the weekly ritual in a multiplicity of ways: by donating offerings, lighting candles, and through chanting, praying, and kneeling. This creates for them the possibility to ritually nurture and affectionally engage with Ravana and (in reward) to allegedly experience his benevolent care.

My specific research perspectives add to a broader understanding of how a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority engages with Ravana in the present. Ravana is not only the king of the distant past. In his capacity as (aspirant) deity, the possibility is created to allegedly experience Ravana, nurture him and affectionally, and emotionally engage with him. Ravana as (aspirant) deity then becomes someone who benevolently cares for his people in the here and now.

I have primarily framed and interpreted the relevance of the representations of Ravana as king of Lanka and king of the Hela (civilisation) in ethno-nationalist terminology and concepts. Led by the third sub-question of my research regarding how the interest in Ravana relates to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhists country, I have analysed how ideas of the Hela-Ravana past are locally produced in the present and the ethno-nationalist relevance of the materialising, ritualising, and spatialising of these specific representations. The multiple representations and their present-day 'translations' have multiple layers of relevance and I have mentioned several of them throughout my thesis. An example of the multi-layered relevance of a specific Ravana representation is the representation of Ravana as the local deity *Bandara deviyo* in Lakegala area. For some Sinhalese Buddhists, this representation gives credentials to ancient and continuous inhabitation of the Sinhalese in the country, and I have interpreted this as a Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist effort to claim ownership of the country. On a community level, the relevance of this representation of Ravana as local deity lies most probably in the fact that he still can be appropriated by villagers to ask protection over their village and the crops. On a personal level, villagers can also ask Ravana in his capacity as *Bandara deviyo* to protect them

when they enter, for instance, dangerous and forested areas. The multiple layers of relevance of diverse Ravana representations are not mutually exclusive: for some, the local materialising, ritualising, and spatialising of certain Ravana representations serve a larger Sinhalese Buddhists ethno-nationalist agenda, whereas for others the relevance of the specific representation of Ravana as deity remains limited to a local or personal level.

To sense the multiple layers of relevance of certain Ravana representations, I should have, in retrospect, formulated my third sub question as ‘what might be the relevance of these representations to the recent interest in Ravana?’ The major analysis would still be that several representations give credentials to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country, but it would have better justified why I also have investigated the multiple layers of relevance of certain Ravana representations on local levels beyond the ethno-nationalist paradigm.

My specific research perspectives contribute to an understanding of how perceptions of a glorious past are produced in the present and how the materialising, ritualising, and spatialising of the distant past makes Ravana and the Hela civilisation of relevance to Sinhalese Buddhists in the post-war period. Based on my research I offer in what follows some general observations about how the interest in Ravana has developed over the past decade.

### 8.1.2 Some General Tendencies in the Process of *Ravanisation*

There are indications that an interest in Ravana was present among Sinhalese Buddhists throughout the centuries, but it seems that this interest often remained limited to a specific area or community, a select group of people, and frequently remained in the narrative and discursive sphere. The embodiment of the post-war interest in Ravana by a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority constitutes a break with earlier waves of interest in Ravana. In the post-war period, a variety of Ravana ideas and alleged Hela practices have emerged, and this led in some cases to tension and competition. I mention here several examples of multiple and competing ideas that help us sense some of the general tendencies in the process of *Ravanisation*.

One of the millenarian representations discussed in this thesis is that Ravana lies in an unconscious state somewhere in the mountainous areas of Sri Lanka, waiting to be woken up. Although this Ravana representation differs considerably from the *Ramayana* tradition in which Ravana is killed at the battlefield by Rama, it still continues to build on this tradition. The representation of Ravana lying in an unconscious state changes the ending of the narrative by arguing that Ravana did not die after he was hit by Rama’s weapons. Although Sinhalese Buddhists increasingly try to avoid making any reference to the *Ramayana* when it comes to their hero Ravana, several of the post-war Ravana representations have emerged in reaction to the *Ramayana*. As researchers we should be attentive to this process – despite active opposition to a certain tradition, elements of this tradition still resonate in the new phenomenon. Throughout this thesis I have deliberately not taken the *Ramayana* tradition as the normative tradition to measure the Sinhalese Buddhist Ravana ideas against, but I would like to stress in this concluding chapter

that several post-war Sinhalese Buddhist Ravana ideas still relate somehow to the *Ramayana* tradition. It is my general observation that, in the process of *Ravanisation*, although Ravana is increasingly distanced from the *Ramayana*/Hindu tradition, several post-war Hela-Ravana representations and practices resonate – sometimes as a kind of anti-*Ramayana* – elements of the *Ramayana* tradition.

The representation of Ravana as lying in an unconscious state also helps us sense another facet of *Ravanisation*. Although it seems the sky is the limit when it comes to post-war Sinhalese Buddhist Ravana representations, most people decried Mirando Obeyesekere's claim that Ravana woke up in 2012 as madness (or at least doubted this to be true). Even this highly respected author from the Ravana discourse went too far in their opinion. In addition, the expedition undertaken in 2016 by a woman who went into a cave in search of Ravana's body was framed as a call for attention and not taken seriously (or even openly criticised). Whereas a multiplicity of diverse and even competing Ravana representations co-exists among Sinhalese Buddhists, around this specific representation we can notice a certain level of consolidation: it is considered right to say that Ravana remains for over thousands of years in an unconscious state, whereas his waking up in the nearby future or recent past is considered madness. This particular representation indicates that some representations and ideas have become generally accepted, whereas other ideas have not (yet). In general, in the last decade a certain level of consolidation (or solidification, see Section 8.3) of Ravana ideas has taken place in the process of *Ravanisation* with a strong focus on Ravana's connection to the Hela (ethnicity) and Lanka (territory). This consolidation is an ongoing process of approving and disapproving of emerging ideas.

This axis in the process of *Ravanisation* of consolidation and fluidity of emerging ideas in the material and spatial sphere becomes evident in the distinction between the imagined landscape and the religious landscape. I have indicated that the connection of Ravana to some localities in the country seemed to be present in local lore. This connection often consists of a (localised) narrative or creative etymology that relates Ravana to particular local site or natural feature. This connecting of Ravana to the landscape is based on imagination. Several sites included in the imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka are polysemous and sometimes relate to multiple mythistorical imaginations. On a local level, for instance, a cave in Lakegala area can be envisioned as either Sita's cave or Kuveni's cave (Box 7.1). On a national level, whether the world heritage site Sigiriya was constructed by Ravana or his stepbrother, or King Kashyapa I (Section 5.2.1), is a matter of debate. I consider the polysemic character of sites in the imagined landscape as crucial to investigate shifting dynamics of mythistorical imaginations on a local and national level. In contrast to the imagined landscape, the religious landscape of *Ravanisation* shows a more univocal and permanent character of the materialising and spatialising of the post-war interest in Ravana in the landscape. The statues and shrines are explicitly constructed to commemorate Ravana and will remain permanently present in the landscape unless they are demolished. These statues have a univocal meaning as they all intend to represent Ravana, and his name is often inscribed on the shrine so that visitors should not mistake him for someone else. The religious landscape

of Ravana shrines and statues in Sri Lanka is more recent than the imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka. The Ravana shrines and statues indicate that an alternative Sinhalese Buddhist perception of the past has gained a more permanent character. The imagined landscape, though older and more fluid than the religious landscape, is not less important because the polysemic character of sites creates the possibility for competition between multiple mythistorical imaginations.

A very common representation in the process of *Ravanisation* is the claim that Ravana was the king of Lanka, which is often equated with present-day Sri Lanka. This makes the island Sri Lanka the designated country of this famous ancient king and his marvellous civilisation. Moreover, some have considered the ancient Lanka as a far more extensive country than present-day Sri Lanka. This Lanka included other countries and continents as well. In the post-war period we sense in the process of *Ravanisation* a tendency to uphold Sri Lanka as the centrepiece of the world, a chosen country, and the cradle of civilisation. The international relevance of Ravana and Sri Lanka also becomes evident in the designation of Ravana as *sakvithi* Ravana or universal monarch (equivalent of the Sanskrit designation of *chakravarti* king). The universal or world-famous monarch Ravana has, despite his international ambitions, selected Sri Lanka as the seat of his kingdom. Other countries may only share in the abundance of this king and the privileged position of Sri Lanka. The tying up of Ravana and the Hela civilisation to very specific localities and communities in the country is essential to provide this Sinhalese Buddhist worldview with credentials. The connection of Ravana to Lakegala and its villagers as well as the perception of Sigiriya as Ravana's or Kuvera's palace do not only have relevance on a local or national level; these alleged connections to specific localities provide a spatial backbone to the Sinhalese Buddhist worldview that places the Lanka of the ancient Hela at the apex in the process of *Ravanisation*. This claim is not only based on alleged territorial connections but also on ancient Hela practices. Based on specific local ideas, encompassing claims are made about the position of Sri Lanka in relation to other countries. An example of this is the indigenous Hela medicine and the representation of Ravana as a physician who, according to some, has invented all types of medicines in the world. Based on my fieldwork, it is my suggestion that this increased focus on the superiority of Sri Lanka by a segment of the majority Sinhalese Buddhists is developed extensively in the post-war period and that this development constitutes a major difference with earlier (local) waves of interest in Ravana (although this idea has underlain several claims) and several other Sinhalese Buddhist mythstories. The focus on the superiority of the Sinhalese reflected in the post-war worldview signals an increased self-perception among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority in the post-war period instigated by post-war triumphalism.

Whereas I have mainly concentrated on concrete practices and manifestations, I have several times touched upon a more intangible component of *Ravanisation*. Several Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana explained to me that they gained special insight through yoga or meditation. Yoga was considered by most Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana a practice that was invented by Ravana and a practice that should be explored in the present to explore Ravana's way of thinking and to develop a 'right'

mindset. Meditation gave some even the capability to visualise Ravana and communicate with him. At the time of my fieldwork, I was often invited to join yoga classes and was told that meditation would be a fruitful way for me to explore the marvels of Ravana and the Hela past. As a researcher, I found it difficult to engage in these activities as it did not suit very well with my personality, and I was not convinced that meditation would provide me any insight relevant to my academic research. I preferred to 'go out' and 'see' concrete manifestations of the Sinhalese Buddhist interest in Ravana instead of exploring a personal relationship with Ravana. Despite my reservations towards this focus on yoga, it is important to mention this materiality-spirituality axis of *Ravanisation* in my concluding chapter as I consider both poles inseparable and crucial to understand the length and depth of this post-war phenomenon. Personal experiences with Ravana or his power through dreams and meditation have often inspired people to translate words into action. Materiality and concrete practices are often imbued with spirituality. As I see it, spirituality is not a separate dimension of *Ravanisation* but an important motivating force for people.

The embodiment of the post-war interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists translates ideas of the glorious past to the present in a variety of ways. I find these translations crucial to understand the appeal of the phenomenon on a personal level, local level, and even on a national level. For some Sinhalese Buddhists, Ravana is mainly someone who cares about their daily lives and gives them comfort and peace of mind. For others, however, great things will happen to Sri Lanka on a global level when people come to accept the Hela customs and lifestyle or when Ravana returns. These notions underlie many of the Sinhalese Buddhist post-war Ravana representations and practices. I reflect in the next section in more detail on how the revitalisation of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka relates to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country.

## 8.2 Theoretical Reflection

The concepts introduced in Chapter 3 have served as heuristic devices to investigate and interpret several of the aspects of *Ravanisation*. Though I have employed a number of concepts, I take up here the two concepts/theoretical insights that were most central to my research question and definition of *Ravanisation*. In Section 8.2.1, I evaluate sub-question 3 of my research: how is the interest in Ravana related to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country? I specifically reflect on how the concept hegemony, as defined by David Rampton, has helped me to sense and interpret some of the elements of *Ravanisation* as well as on what the limitations of this concept were for my specific research. In Section 8.2.2, I reflect in more detail on the concept revitalisation, a central part of my definition of *Ravanisation*.

### 8.2.1 *Ravanisation* and the Hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist Ethno-Nationalist Perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist Country

In this thesis, I have employed the concept hegemony, as defined by David Rampton, in the context of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism. According to Rampton, the socio-political representation of Sri Lanka – in which territory, state, and nation compose a bounded unity revolving around a majoritarian axis of Sinhala Buddhist religion, language, culture, and people – has reproduced a hierarchy placing the Sinhalese at the apex. Rampton has called this representation hegemonic because ‘[...] it is widely disseminated among the social strata of the Sinhala community, producing a notable congruence between nationalist ideology and popular culture and practices.’<sup>1078</sup> For me, his definition of hegemony has functioned as a heuristic device. It has been useful to investigate *Ravanisation* for two reasons: it helped me sense the relevance of popular culture and practices for (emerging) ethno-nationalist ideas and – as Rampton stresses the heterogeneity of this hegemonic perception – how a multiplicity of ethno-nationalist representations of the past can co-exist in the post-war period.

When it comes to the heterogeneity of the Sinhalese Buddhist hegemonic perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country, I have mainly looked at how the Hela-Ravana representation of the past relates to the dominant *Mahavamsa*-based perception of the past. I have paid considerable attention to several twentieth and twenty-first-century interpretations of concepts and episodes from the *Mahavamsa*. I have done this to indicate how mythologies are employed as mythological backbones to make claims about ownership of the country in the present. To denote this process of using mythologies for present-day ethno-nationalist ideologies, I have taken up Bruce Kapferer’s concept remythologising. Following Rampton’s suggestion that the hegemonic perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country is heterogeneous, I would like to emphasize that I never intended to argue that in the post-war period the *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of the past is replaced by the Hela-Ravana representation of the past. Multiple mythologies are employed in the post-war period by Sinhalese Buddhists to argue that Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese Buddhist country and the Hela-Ravana representation of the past is one of them. Whereas I have noticed a considerable increase of the interest in Ravana in popular culture (especially among, but not limited to, the middle class), the *Mahavamsa* and its interpretations remain normative in some contexts and for a large segment of Sinhalese Buddhists (especially the elite). I was also often told by Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana that Ravana lived several millennia prior to any of the events as recorded in the *Mahavamsa* – thus stories from the *Mahavamsa* could still be of value for events of the recent past. Rampton’s definition of hegemony as heterogeneous is a useful heuristic device to sense that multiple mythologies are employed by Sinhalese Buddhists to argue that Sri Lanka is their country. The post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past, however, gives fuller support to the ethno-nationalist perception of Sri

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<sup>1078</sup> Rampton, *Deeper Hegemony*, 261.

Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country than the interpretations of some sections of the *Mahavamsa*. It traces, for instance, the presence of the Sinhalese in the country further back in time than the idea of the origin of the Sinhalese from Vijaya as based on the *Mahavamsa*. This idea of ancient and indigenous presence of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka fully conforms with ethno-nationalist ideologies that claims of ownership of the country (or a specific territory) are based on ideas of indigenous and antecedent presence. I have discussed in detail how indigenous and antecedent presence of the Sinhalese is ritualised, spatialised, and materialised at and around the two localities of my specific research.

Related to the relevance of popular culture and practices as mentioned by Rampton, I have also shown how the perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country finds a solid mythistorical backbone in the Hela-Ravana representation of the past and how this representation is produced in popular culture and everyday practices. This approach fits well with my ethnographic research perspective and interpretivist research position that focusses on people as social actors and the interpretations that they give. As I have argued in the previous section, the Hela marvels – such as *angampora*, Hela *vedakama*, and aviation technology – do not remain in the past but are practiced today by Sinhalese Buddhists in multiple strata of society. Here Rampton's conception of hegemony has been an excellent research lens because we see that the Hela-Ravana civilisation is not something that remains in the past but rather continues to be produced in the present in popular culture and practices. This production of the Hela civilisation is in congruence with the Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist ideology that the Sinhalese are the rightful owners of the country based on the assumption that the country belongs to the ethnic group that made Sri Lanka into a habitable civilisation. In Chapter 2, I referred to several Sinhalese Buddhist political parties who argue that the national heritage of the country belongs to the ethnic group who made the country into a habitable civilisation. With its focus on ancient and indigenous inhabitation and the marvels of the Hela civilisation, the Hela-Ravana representation of the past gives the Sinhalese Buddhist majority full credentials of ownership of the country.

One of the limitations of my employment of the concept hegemony is that my focus remained limited to representations of the past and its embodiment in the present on a popular level and not in the political sphere. The concept hegemony is frequently used to investigate the political effect and influence of a certain dominant ideology on subordinate groups and the dynamics between elite and the masses. My research was from the outset not designed to include the political or elite component, as I limited my investigation of *Ravanisation* to its development on a grassroots level and even narrowed my in-depth research of *Ravanisation* down to two specific localities in the country. In Section 8.4, I propose that *Ravanisation* on a governmental level is a topic that requires further research.

My answer to sub-question 3 of my research is that the elements of indigenous and ancient ancestry and the focus on a marvellous civilisation in the Hela-Ravana representation of the past relate this phenomenon closely to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhists ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country. In addition, I

have indicated that not all of the Ravana representations that have emerged in the post-war period are grounded in ethno-nationalist ambitions. Some people were, for instance, taken by the local relevance of Ravana to their area or a particular practice that allegedly is invented by Ravana, which they mainly explored for personal reasons.

### 8.2.2 *Ravanisation as Revitalisation?*

In Chapter 1, I set out that I was going to address two levels of revitalisation related to the phenomenon of *Ravanisation*: (1) how the perception of the past that is central to *Ravanisation* relates to resurgence or revitalisation of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism in the post-war period and (2) to what extent *Ravanisation* can be considered revitalisation in the way it continues to build on certain Ravana ideas that can be traced back to earlier movements, texts, and traditions. There is some overlap between these two levels of revitalisation, of course, but I mention here some of my considerations about the limitations and advantages of this concept related to these two levels separately.

I have demonstrated how *Ravanisation* relates to what I have defined as the first level of revitalisation that I was going to address: a specific envisioning of the past at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisation or resurgence. In Chapter 3, I introduced several ethno-symbolist theorists who, in their focus on the mythic, symbolic, and cultural aspects as the core of ethnicity and nationality, have argued that at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations a coherent new set of ideas is reconstructed from pre-existing mythologies and traditions. In Chapter 4, I discussed some key concepts of *Ravanisation*: Lanka, Hela, *dasis* Ravana, and the *yakshas*. These concepts are taken from a variety of records, and in the process of *Ravanisation* they are all interpreted to construct a representation of a glorious past of the Sinhalese. This use of the concepts was in several ways different from their use in their original (con)texts. Although those in the process of *Ravanisation* have argued that certain concepts have a solid validation in ancient texts beyond the *Ramayana*, it is their present-day interpretations that were of my particular interest in this thesis. Following the critique on ethno-symbolist theorists, as expressed by the political scientist Umut Özkirimli, I have explored in this thesis why and how certain concepts are now selected and promoted over others to construct a certain representation of the past instead of trying to provide evidence that some ideas are 'ancient.' This was useful to sense how the recent revitalisation of Ravana relates to a specific post-war Sinhalese Buddhist zeitgeist.

Based on my fieldwork and with the ethno-symbolist theoretical framework in mind, I suggest that the elements of an ancient and glorious past and indigenous inhabitation of the Sinhalese that are taking shape in the post-war period indicate a revitalisation or resurgence of Sinhalese Buddhists ethno-nationalism incited by the victory of the Sinhalese over the LTTE. Fuelled by triumphalist feelings, the position of the Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka as the rightful owners of the country should be (re-)affirmed in every possible way. While Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism was never absent at time of the civil war, the civil war has functioned as a period of disruption with the final defeat



of the LTTE as an important watershed to restrengthen the position of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority. The position of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority was extensively challenged – not at least in the international sphere – during the civil war. Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism is facing an important period of revitalisation based on the triumph over the LTTE, and the post-war Hela-Ravana representation of the past gives them credentials (more than the *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of the distant past) to strengthen their position as rightful owners of the country.

My initial reason to select the concept revitalisation was that I wanted to avoid presenting the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists as an entirely new phenomenon. Therefore, I have given close attention in my thesis to previous waves of interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. I have indicated that the idea of Ravana as king of Lanka was present among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka over the centuries (it was, for instance, mentioned in several colonial records). In the Hela movement, Ravana stood symbol for indigenous inhabitation, and he was gradually turned into a heroic king of the Sinhalese by late Hela representatives. In the 1980s, an interest in Ravana was expressed on a political level by Premadasa. Also, there are indications that folkloric verses (at least some were reported in the 1970s and 1980s) have related Ravana to specific sites in the country. It seemed to me that the interest in Ravana remained on hold at the time the civil war in Sri Lanka intensified. After the civil war, however, it rapidly evolved and has taken new forms.

Throughout my thesis I have sometimes replaced the phrase ‘revitalisation of Ravana’ with the (post-war) ‘interest in Ravana.’ But the concept revitalisation still has value. It helped to make me aware of both the aspects of continuity and invention of the phenomenon of my research. In the Hela movement, the interest in Ravana remained of limited appeal because, according to Nira Wickramasinghe, the defeat of Ravana by Rama did not give the Sinhalese a persona they could easily identify with. Several Ravana representations that have taken shape in the post-war period extensively contribute to the distancing of Ravana from the Hindu/*Ramayana* context. In post-war Sri Lanka, Ravana has turned into someone whom Sinhalese Buddhists can actively relate to in the present. Opportunities created to multi-sensorially experience Ravana at Buddhist sites, for instance, as well as in the alleged Hela practices such as *angampora* and traditional medicine, are important to investigate because they help us sense the popular appeal of this phenomenon and its difference with other (earlier) waves of interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. In addition, Ravana is in the post-war period increasingly framed within Buddhist terminology and placed within a (Sinhalese) Buddhist timeframe and ancient monarchy. This ‘Buddhist’ framing of Ravana is important as it completes the transformation of Ravana into a Sinhalese Buddhist hero.<sup>1079</sup>

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<sup>1079</sup> As I have mentioned, I have not investigated if and how the post-war interest in Ravana gained some foothold among Sinhalese Christians. In addition, I have not discussed in detail the impact of *Ravanisation* on Sinhalese Buddhists’ perspectives on minorities. The claim of ownership of the country made in the process of *Ravanisation* however implicitly indicates less rights for minorities in the present. Also, several of my informants with an interest in Ravana (especially from Colombo) explicitly expressed anti-Muslim

### 8.3 Methodological Reflection

Because I wrote my methodology section (see Section 1.2) after I conducted my fieldwork research in Sri Lanka, I have already discussed why several research methods I prepared prior to my fieldwork turned out to be useless in the field. I have mentioned that ‘interviews’ were not the main strategy of my research, for instance, even though I prepared for my second fieldwork period topic lists of everything I wanted to ask people in the field about Ravana. One major reason why semi-structured or structured interviews were not very suitable to my type of research was that on a grassroots level people were often not used to the formalities of interviews (especially semi-structured or structured interviews). I did, however, conduct several qualitative interviews with key figures in the Ravana discourse – for instance, some famous authors (like Mirando Obeyesekere and Suriya Gunasekera), presidents of popular Ravana research groups (for instance Jalitha Amarasinghe and Dulip Sanjaya), and the famous archaeologist Raj Somadeva. Those (erudite) men were used to being questioned about their research, and once I even had to pay a considerable amount of money to have an interview. Despite the fact that these interviews were dense with information, ethnography was the most useful research method in the field: being immersed in the research setting, participating and observing, and having informal conversations with people I saw on a regular base gave me deeper insight in the multiple dimensions of *Ravanisation* and how and why several Sinhalese Buddhists have translated their interest in Ravana into practice. Whereas most of the interviews were snapshots with people whom I had never seen before and in most cases would never see again after the interview, being around and becoming friends with people who noticed that I sincerely shared with them an interest in Ravana, provided me with the opportunity to familiarise myself with what people did and to ask them in a natural way about details. This relationship with my informants dynamically evolved at one locality that I selected to conduct extensive research: the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Pannipitiya. In Lakegala area, I did not become immersed at the same level as at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. I came to know only at a later phase of my research that I had to gather details about ‘Ravana rituals’ in Lakegala area through conversations, as these public rituals were not organised anymore. For data that I collected through conversations I soon reached data saturation.

When it comes to the presentation of my data in this thesis, I would like to make a remark about the balance between the multiple types of data that I have used and presented in this thesis. There is a slight discrepancy between what I found the most valuable data (informal conversations and experiences in the field) and the data that I have highlighted, especially in the second part of my thesis. In my general introduction to *Ravanisation* (Part II of my thesis), I highlighted fragments from books and interviews

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sentiments. See: De Koning, D.D.C. (2018), Mythevorming en sociale media bij groeiende anti-moslimsentimenten in Sri Lanka [Mythmaking, Social Media, and increasing anti-Muslim sentiments in Sri Lanka, *Diggit Magazine*. <https://www.diggitmagazine.com/articles/mythevorming-en-sociale-media-bij-groeiende-anti-moslimsentimenten-sri-lanka>.

with key authors as the data to build my argument on. However, I first became familiar with several concepts (for instance the popularity of certain tribes) and even the names of key authorities through casual conversations with people who mentioned these ideas to me and referred to names of people from whom they derived their ideas. During my first fieldwork periods, I noted names of people and places, and by snowball effect my knowledge about 'the field' of *Ravanisation* extended. In addition, I noted ideas and phrases repeatedly mentioned to me about Ravana (such as the framing of Ravana as king of Lanka and the Hela civilisation). Since these notes were only fragments of conversations and I only used my recorder in formal settings (and later at the specific sites of my research), I could not formally present these notes in an academically proper way. When I wanted to build an argument, I felt like I had to use more 'hard' and elaborate data that could be checked by others instead of these bits and pieces mentioned to me by 'random' people. Therefore, I have in the second part of my thesis mainly presented fragments from books and interviews conducted with 'key authorities' since I recorded these interviews and specific ideas were extensively explained and well-formulated. Casual conversations, however – for instance, chit-chat on the bus, discussions at the grocery store, and small talk over dinner – remained the central basis for my fieldwork and thus my entire thesis.

In the chapters of my case studies – especially in Chapter 7 – I gave extensive voice to regular villagers and random people who attended and participated in Ravana rituals. Especially in the third fieldwork period, my focus was mainly limited to these two sites, and I often switched on my recorder as I found every conversation worthwhile for my research. The direct quotations in my chapter about the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya are a mix of quotations of random visitors (of Ravana rituals) and people who were explicitly in charge of Ravana rituals or held an influential position. Because the latter were frequently around, I mainly referred to my conversations with them when it came to details of the Ravana rituals. In my chapter about Lakegala area, I also presented a multiplicity of voices, including stories from random villagers and people who held prominent positions in the villages. Especially when I realised that there was a 'Ravana bubble' (and other 'researchers' only gave voice to villagers who gave them information that they wanted to hear), I tried to give equal voice to villagers regardless of their positions and backgrounds and with a special focus on their multiple and paradoxical narratives and opinions.

Why have I given a prominent position to shrines in my thesis to investigate the process of *Ravanisation*? One explanation is that I have a background in religious studies. In addition, it is my view (in retrospect) that several shrines and their initiators have an orchestrating function for the post-war interest in Ravana. For this specific function of shrines, I would like to bring one final methodological concept to the table: solidification. Jurgen Schaflechner has introduced the concept 'solidification (of tradition)' to denote the main process at work around the Hinglaj Devi Hindu temple in Pakistan. From the time of its (re)institutionalisation in 1986 onwards, this temple started to increase in popularity. Several actors and (Hindu) communities with diverse backgrounds wanted to promote a particular interpretation of the site. In his work, Schaflechner encountered

around Hinglaj a cacophony of different truth-claims but found that the local temple committee excluded several of these truth-claims, leading to a solidification – i.e., a tradition's dynamic of becoming solid – of the multiple and diverse narratives of the resident goddess of the temple. The local temple committee propagated a particular narrative about the temple and sought to establish a set of 'normative' rituals, especially at times of extensive festivals. The erection of signs with rules and regulations was important to solidify the religious practices. In other words, the temple committee gained a hegemonic position and reduced the heterogeneity of narratives and traditions that traditionally surrounded the site. As the shrine attracts Hindus from all over Pakistan and beyond, the shrine even plays a significant function to define a 'Pakistani' Hindu identity. For Schaflechner, this solidification is not (only) the work of the temple committee and institutions but '[...] rather the outcome of a set of regulating norms, which are products of, but also producing, the engagement of various communities interacting with each other at the shrine.'<sup>1080</sup> The agenda of the temple committee to propagate and establish a single 'tradition' and the power of the shrine to attract people from all over the country – resulting in a wide circulation of the principles formulated by the temple committee among diverse groups of people – offer, in my view, significant insights into the orchestrating function of shrines and their initiators and committees.

Although there is not one single institution in charge of solidifying a dominant Helaravana representation of the past in the process of *Ravanisation*, several of the processes described by Schaflechner about the Hinglaj Devi temple also pertain to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. I found it a fruitful methodological choice to select this urban Buddhist temple site to investigate both the multiplicity of voices as well as the ambition of Sumanigala Thero to 'solidify' certain (of his) Ravana representations. The Ravana *mandiraya* attracts, more than any other Ravana shrine or place in the country, Sinhalese Buddhists from all over the country who have an interest in Ravana. People with very diverse backgrounds and religious traditions come to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya with diverse ideas about Ravana. For instance, in the Ravana *mandiraya* I once met the (in Sri Lanka) famous actor, singer, and politician Joseph Roger Seneviratne. Seneviratne, a Roman Catholic by faith, just had made a vow to Ravana to install a Ravana statue at the famous pilgrimage site Sri Pada. He explicitly referred to Ravana as a deity and mentioned that Ravana is going to wake up one day from his comatose state.<sup>1081</sup> On another occasion, I met a young man in the Ravana *mandiraya* who was a Mahayana Buddhist. He believed that Ravana was now only an energy he experienced in moments of meditational tranquillity.<sup>1082</sup> The selection of the Ravana *mandiraya* as a site of in-depth research was from a methodologically point of view very useful to sense the multiplicity of ideas and diverse backgrounds of Sinhalese Buddhists with an interest in Ravana. The selection of

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<sup>1080</sup> Schaflechner, J. (2018), *Hinglaj Devi: Identity, Change, and Solidification at a Hindu Temple in Pakistan*, New York: Oxford University Press, 308. For the analyses of the function of the temple committee and the dynamics of solidification, see especially Chapter 6 'Solidifying Hinglaj: Striving for a Uniform Tradition.'

<sup>1081</sup> Informal conversation with R. Seneviratne, Pannipitiya, June 11, 2017.

<sup>1082</sup> Informal conversation with DP6, March 18, 2017.

this *mandiraya* was also important to sense the missionary zeal of several people attached to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya (including Sumangala *Thero* himself) to propagate very specific ideas about Ravana. The idea that Ravana was the king of Lanka and of the Sinhalese was propagated widely through the annual *maha Ravana perahera*. Even more extensive efforts are undertaken to solidify the representation of Ravana as (aspirant) deity. The congregational *pujas*, which take place every week around the same time, familiarise visitors to a certain format for devotional activities. Instructions to conduct a Ravana *puja* at home are included in the popular Ravana books, and statues can be bought at the site to install in home shrines. The extensive materialising and ritualising of Ravana as aspirant deity, as well as the distribution of instructions for devotional activities, contribute to the prominence of this Buddhist site in the process of *Ravanisation*. The site functions – to frame it is in Schaflechner’s terminology – as a nodal point where multiple ideas come together and where certain narrative and rituals elements are solidified through repetition. Alternative ideas are not very openly criticised, but volunteers actively propagate and familiarise visitors with Sumangala *Thero*’s ideas about Ravana. Repeated promotion through festivals and rituals are important in this process of solidification. The Ravana *mandiraya* has a converging function, insofar as it attracts people with an interest in Ravana from all over the country, as well as a diverging function, insofar as the same people disseminate specific Ravana ideas (and even statues) from the temple to other areas.

The concept ‘solidification’ helped me also sense my own role as researcher in investigating an emerging phenomenon in the field and writing about it in an academic thesis. After my explorative research, I developed a specific research lens. Over the years, I narrowed down my research focus. Especially at the time of my third fieldwork period, I was looking for certain details and introduced specific topics in conversations. I was less open to listen to people’s conversations as when I was still very uninformed about Ravana. Especially in the chapters about my case studies, I have sometimes presented my findings as a completed project. The reality was more complicated, of course, and it took me years to select my findings and frame them, analyse them, and present them in a comprehensible and accessible way. Also, my research was only a snapshot, limited to very specific localities and, when I left the localities of my research, things might have considerably changed. Because of my pregnancies in 2019 and 2021 and the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, I have unfortunately had no opportunity to update my research findings after 2018.

By repeatedly bringing up certain topics and themes in the field, discussing my ideas together with other people with an interest in Ravana, and by writing this thesis, I myself also have extensively contributed to the solidification of the post-war Sinhalese Buddhist interest in Ravana. Even the publishing of my preliminary research findings related to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in 2018 in *Religions* set a standard for or inspired other researchers to look at the phenomenon of *Ravanisation* in more detail or publish about the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. Some articles about the Sinhalese Buddhist interest in Ravana were published after 2018 in which, sometimes with direct references to my article, arguments similar to mine are posed. I mentioned in my article, for instance, that

'[w]ith reference to the *Mahavamsa*, it is also frequently stressed in the Ravana discourse that these tribes were present in Sri Lanka long before the arrival of the Indian prince Vijaya. It thus unveils an anti-India sentiment by stressing that these tribes are indigenous tribes.'<sup>1083</sup> D. Witharana, whose 2019 article in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* about Ravana refers to my *Religions* article, has explored '[...] an alternative, autochthonous account of the origins of the Sinhala people that has come to prominence in popular imagination in Sri Lanka today.'<sup>1084</sup> Similarly, Chennai-based journalist Sruthisagar Yamunan published an article 'Why Sri Lanka named its first-ever satellite after Ravana' in June 2019. Referring to my concept *Ravanisation* as 'a form of cultural revitalisation, which portrays [Ravana] as the most famous king, not just of Lanka, but of an ancient and indigenous civilisation,'<sup>1085</sup> he has argued that the naming of the first Sri Lankan satellite after Ravana discloses a post-war cultural ambition and anti-India sentiments among the Sinhalese Buddhist majority. In addition to these two authors, who have explicitly referred to my remarks about the centrality of indigenous ancestry of the Sinhalese in the process of *Ravanisation*, I have also inspired others to visit the Buddhists sites with Ravana shrines studied here. Krishantha Fedricks (who was assistant lecturer Sinhala at Colombo University at the time of our joint fieldwork research), for example, contributed to the article 'Reclaiming Ravana in Sri Lanka' (2019) by conducting fieldwork with me in 2016 at the Bolthumbe Saman *devalaya*. Dishan Madushanka, a student from Colombo University, presented a paper at the second International Symposium on Social Sciences and Humanities in 2019 about Mahamaya and Ravana at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. His main teacher is the sociologist Premakumara de Silva (Colombo University), one of the members of the panel that I organised in Delhi at the Association for Asian Studies in Asia conference (2018). Incidentally, those four contributions were all written or published in 2019, one year after I published my article in *Religions* and organised a panel in Delhi.

As not much academic in-depth research (in English) had been published about the post-war interest in Ravana at the time I finalised my thesis, this thesis is definitely an academic introduction for anyone who is going to investigate the post-war interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists. Based on the limitations of my research, I suggest in the final section of this chapter some topics for further research.

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<sup>1083</sup> De Koning, The Ritualizing of the Martial and Benevolent Side of Ravana in Two Annual Rituals at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya in Pannipitiya, 21.

<sup>1084</sup> Witharana, Ravana's Sri Lanka, 782.

<sup>1085</sup> Yamunan, Why Sri Lanka Named its First-ever Satellite after Ravana. He also refers to Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, senior lecturer of the department of history at the University of Colombo, who also published about the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhist. Unfortunately, I could not find Dewasiri's work on Ravana.

## 8.4 Suggestions for Further Research

In my research, I have investigated how the interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists has taken shape on a grassroots level, concentrating on two very specific localities in Sri Lanka. I mentioned in my introductory chapter that Ravana has been framed by others as a 'political hero' and appropriated in political discourse. In Chapter 2, I referred to several Sinhalese Buddhist extremist groups that are active in the political domain. One of them, the *Ravana Balaya*, is very active in making political statements.

According to David Rampton, the socio-political representation of Sri Lanka that places the Sinhalese at the apex of the society is present among multiple strata of the Sinhala community, producing a congruence between nationalist ideology and popular culture and practices. I have mainly investigated the latter in order to show how several of the ideas expressed about Ravana in the popular domain relate to ethno-nationalist representations of the past. I have also shown how some of the key characteristics of *Ravanisation* relate to general ideological statements about the position of the Sinhalese Buddhists majority in the Sri Lankan society. It is my view that there is a close interaction between politics, Sinhalese ethno-nationalist ideologies, and popular culture and everyday society. Therefore, political issues are not absent from my thesis. However, I have not looked at the political dimension of *Ravanisation* in a strict definition. In Section 3.2.1, I gave the example of how the narrative of King Dutugemunu and his war against a Tamil king was used in the context of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism to define the enemy and present-day antagonisms. The narrative from the *Mahavamsa* about King Dutugemunu was redefined at the time of civil war (continuing after the civil war) and was employed in debates of politicians and to frame the victory of the Rajapakshas over the LTTE. A suggestion for further research would be to investigate to what extent the post-war interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists has taken shape in state affairs, governmental debates, and policy making, and if it has similar relevance to the political sphere as for instance the narrative of King Dutugemunu.

Another theme worthy of more detailed study is related to the historicity of the practice among Sinhalese of connecting Ravana to local sites in the Sri Lankan landscape. As far as I could tell, especially around the localities of Sigiriya and Lakegala, Ravana's connection to the physical landscape was present in lore from the Mathale district in the 1970s and 1980s. About Lakegala I could not find written indications that this has happened earlier, but in the area of Nuwara Eliya, which has been much better documented in colonial records than the Mathale district, the connection of Ravana to the physical landscape was mentioned in nineteenth-century colonial records. I expect that around Sigiriya, an area historically more important than Lakegala, some privately held written records or *kadaim poth* can provide us with detailed insight of how the connection of Ravana to Sigiriya developed in local lore over the past centuries. In Nuwara Eliya, the presence of Indian labour workers has contributed to a consolidation of sites in the landscape related to Hanuman, Sita, and Ravana. In the Mathale district, with exception of the city Mathale, there was no influx of Indian labour workers on a large scale that would

have influenced the imagining of the landscape to the extent to which it has been in Nuwara Eliya. To better historically frame the post-war interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists and the extensive interest in Sigiriya that is recently expressed, it would be of great value if the connection of Ravana to Sigiriya as made by Sinhalese over the past centuries in local lore could be identified. It is my expectation that in some villages in the Mathale district local *kadaim poth* can be found that might contain more information about this. As Sigiriya was not one of my case studies, I have not looked in detail at the articles published by the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka. A brief glance at some RASSL articles suggests, however, that the connection of Ravana to Sigiriya was made by Sinhalese throughout the twentieth century. It seems to me a worthwhile academic project to investigate in detail Ravana's connection to Sigiriya as made by Sinhalese Buddhists throughout the centuries. This specific project would not only provide an in-depth historical framing of the post-war interest in Ravana and the prominence of Sigiriya but also contribute to theories of the dynamics between heritage, lore, and mythologies in general. Especially when a famous site such as Sigiriya rises into prominence as a World Heritage site and an international tourist attraction, there is need for a univocal narrative that outbids other (alternative) voices.

I have indicated throughout this thesis that indigenous inhabitation of the Sinhalese is key to *Ravanisation*. The Hela-Ravana representation of the past actively opposes the descentance of the Sinhalese from Vijaya as derived from the *Mahavamsa*. When it comes to general studies of indigenous inhabitation, the *veddas* in Sri Lanka are mentioned in some academic publications as the indigenous inhabitants of Sri Lanka.<sup>1086</sup> A pioneering and extensive work on this was published in 1911 by Seligmann and Seligmann (*The Veddas*), who found that only a small community of *veddas* remained in Sri Lanka in an area that included greater part of the eastern province, small parts of the north-eastern province, and the Uva province.<sup>1087</sup> According to Seligmann and Seligmann, the *veddas* are the offspring of the son and daughter of Kuveni and Vijaya. After Kuveni was banished by Vijaya and their mother got murdered, the children fled and married each other.<sup>1088</sup> The people of the *vedda* community mainly live by hunting, and their religion is a cult of the dead. They propitiate the spirits of dead relatives, which are referred to as *yakka*.<sup>1089</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere has argued that the propitiation of ancestors is part of the rituals of the *veddas* as well as the *bandara* cult in remote villages of the Sinhalese.<sup>1090</sup> My thesis has mainly investigated how the devotion to Ravana as a local deity in Lake-gala area followed local patterns of ancestor devotion without addressing to what extent

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<sup>1086</sup> It is mentioned in Clough's dictionary that *vedda* means bowman, or the one who lives by bow, and that they are considered the remnants of the aborigines. See: Clough, *Sinhalese-English Dictionary*, 'Wēddá,' 618.

<sup>1087</sup> Seligmann C. G., & Seligmann B. Z. (1911), *The Veddas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1.

<sup>1088</sup> Seligmann and Seligmann, *The Veddas*, 4-5.

<sup>1089</sup> Seligmann and Seligmann, *The Veddas*, 30.

<sup>1090</sup> Obeyesekere, G. (2002), Where Have All the Vāddas Gone? Buddhism and Aboriginality in Sri Lanka, in N. Silva (Ed.), *The Hybrid Island: Culture Crossings and the Invention of Identity in Sri Lanka*, New York: Zed Books, 1-19, 1,2.



elements of *vedda* religious practices are followed in Lakegala area. The reason for this was that in the general process of *Ravanisation* almost no connection was brought forward in the conversations that I have conducted between the alleged indigenous Hela tribes and the *vedda* theory (who are also referred to as *yakshas* as they allegedly descend from Kuveni). Since I have mainly looked at how the Hela-Ravana perception of the past opposes the alleged descendance of the Sinhalese from Vijaya as derived from the *Mahavamsa* (as this was a topic frequently brought forward in my fieldwork), I have not looked into whether and how the tribal system relates to the indigenous *vedda* communities. I have, of course, frequently mentioned how in the process of *Ravanisation* reference is made to Kuveni to point out the presence of the *yakshas* in Sri Lanka, but Sinhalese Buddhists were much more occupied with evolving ideas about the *yakshas* and other tribes prior to Kuveni than after Kuveni. In Lakegala area, however, there seemed to be some merging of and competition between the two ideas of indigenous ancestry of the villagers: the Ravana-*yaksha* ancestry and the Kuveni-*vedda-yaksha* ancestry. In Narangamuva people considered themselves the descendants of Narada *vedda*. Several villagers explicitly mentioned that the children of Vijaya and Kuveni were *veddas* and that Narada *vedda* was one of their descendants who came to the area and established the village of Narangamuva. In Meemure, I was told that the village became inhabited 400 or 500 years ago when two *vedda* brothers accidentally discovered the area when they were hunting (a common practice of *veddas*). Some villagers with an interest in Ravana have merged the narrative of Ravana and the *yakshas* with the narrative of Kuveni and the *yakshas*, arguing that there were *yakshas* at Ravana's time in Lakegala area and that Kuveni was one of those *yakshas* that lived in Sri Lanka centuries after Ravana. In Narangamuva, where the *vedda* ancestry of the villagers was very prominent to the self-perception of the villagers, the inhabitation narrative of the village that was related to Narada *vedda* was not related to Ravana. Due to my specific spatial, ritual, and material focus on how the interest in Ravana has taken shape in these villages, I have not investigated *vedda* stories – especially because most villagers who favoured the *vedda* stories (mostly the villagers who lived in villages other than Ranamure) explicitly opposed that they descended from Ravana. Because the *vedda* communities are almost extinct in Sri Lanka, I recommend that researchers with a particular interest in this topic visit some of the villages in Lakegala area to see what remains there. Also, whereas Kuveni and the *yakshas* were mentioned as a starting point to go back in time to Ravana and his civilisation, it was not elaborated upon in the process of *Ravanisation* how Kuveni's offspring further evolved into the *veddas/yakshas* or how the present-day remaining *veddas* relate to the Sinhalese. In addition, in the process of *Ravanisation* the *yakshas* are extensively praised for working in the metal industry, and hunting – (one of) the key characteristic(s) of the *vedda* community – was never mentioned.<sup>1091</sup> On the contrary, the slaughter of animals was disapproved by Ravana and the

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<sup>1091</sup> Seligmann and Seligmann have suggested with reference to the *Mahavamsa* that '[...] metal must have been known in Ceylon before the invasion of Vijaya.' So the 'metal' aspect of the *veddas* is not completely absent in the work of Seligmann and Seligmann. Seligmann and Seligmann, *The Veddas*, 27.

Hela. Despite this, I consider the (lack of) interaction between the two narratives of indigenous inhabitation in Sri Lanka worth investigating.

As a final suggestion for further research, I hope that someone will continue to investigate the long-term effects of the interest in Ravana in Sri Lanka. In Lakegala area, the Ravana *yakkamas* were only a temporary upheaval. At the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, there were no extensive annual rituals in 2019 and 2020. In 2019, this was due to another large and extremely expensive festival that celebrated the inauguration of Sumangala Thero as the ninth *maha nayaka* of the Siri Sumana chapter of the Amarapura *nikaya*. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the monk from organising a large scale *perahera*, although they did organise a small scale *perahera* at the temple premises in 2020 and broadcast it on social media. In 2021, they got permission to organise a *perahera* that went around in the close neighbourhood of the temple, and people were very enthusiastic and proud that the *perahera* was organised again (although it was much smaller than in 2017 and 2018). What I have noticed from the Netherlands, however, is that rituals and ‘indigenous medicine’ have become increasingly popular in times of COVID-19. The latter, as I have indicated throughout this thesis, is closely related to Ravana. Thus, whereas probably the name of Ravana is not directly mentioned, this idea of indigenous Hela medicine is deeply rooted in a post-war promotion of cultural independence and superiority of the Sinhalese that is extensively developed in the Hela-Ravana representation of the past. Like how drinking ginger-turmeric tea in the Netherlands reminded me of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and Sri Lankan allegedly indigenous herbal tea, the Hela-Ravana representation of the past might – in addition to very explicit practices as I have described – also reverberate in Sri Lanka in practices that indirectly relate to the post-war interest in Ravana. For those who are perceptive, the ‘hidden’ Ravana might take new forms and to use a metaphor from Hinduism: when one of Ravana’s heads is gone a new one will grow.

## APPENDICES

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## Personal Communication<sup>1092</sup>

### Conversations with key-authors/persons in the Ravana discourse including presidents of popular Ravana research groups and initiators of Ravana shrines

- Informal conversation with lay-custodian Ravana *devalaya* at Kataragama, Kataragama, April 17, 2018.
- Informal conversation with member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Colombo, May 6, 2018.
- Informal conversation with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 21, 2017.
- Informal conversation with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Galge, April 12, 2017.
- Informal conversation with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, on the way from Colombo to Dondra, April 12, 2017.
- Interview with *angampora* master, Katuwana, May 14, 2018.
- Interview with Darshana Mapa Pathiranage, lecturer mass communication at Kelaniya University, Kelaniya, February 28, 2016.
- Interview with Jalitha Amarasinghe, president of the Sri Ravana Research Centre and author of several popular Ravana books, Kurunegala, May 11, 2016.
- Interview with Manawe Wimalaratana *Thero*, monk at Galgamuwa and author of books on the *yaksha* language, Galgamuwa, April 25, 2017.
- Interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, author of the book *Ravana King of Lanka*, Madipola, March 15, 2018.
- Interview with Mirando Obeyesekere, author of the book *Ravana King of Lanka*, Madipola, March 3, 2016.
- Interview with PA., lay-custodian of a *devalaya* that is partially devoted to Ravana, Dolosbaga, May 4, 2017.
- Interview with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 19, 2017.
- Interview with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Nugegoda, March 9, 2018.
- Interview with PR1, president of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Nugegoda, May 12, 2018.
- Interview with Raj Somadeva, archaeologist at the postgraduate institute of the university of Kelaniya, Colombo, May 2, 2016.
- Interview with Sri Mal, president of the Universal Knowledge Research Centre, Kurunegala, April 23, 2017.
- Interview with Suriya Gunasekara, author of the book *Ethihasika Ravana*, Pita Kotte, April 5, 2017.
- Phone conversation with one of the people involved in the *Ravana Brothers*, Colombo, April 18, 2018.
- Phone conversation with the person in charge of the Ravana rituals at Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya, Colombo, May 29, 2017.

### Conversations with people related to the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya

- Informal conversation with DN3, attendant of the *maha* Ravana *nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DN4, attendant of the *maha* Ravana *nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018.

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<sup>1092</sup> For details of the transcriptions and consent of the conversations I refer to Tilburg University Database.

- Informal conversation with DN5, attendant of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DN7, attendant of the *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, March 14, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, April 1, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, May 10, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 13, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 15, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, April 16, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, May 6, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, June 3, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, February 25, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 13, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DO3, volunteer Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, April 7, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO4, lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 15, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO4, lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, April 2, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO4, lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, April 16, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO4, lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, April 23, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO4, lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO4, lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, June 4, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO4, lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 23, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DO5, wife of lay-custodian, Pannipitiya, May 21, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO6, one of the main people involved in the annual *perahera* who also commented on the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017, Pannipitiya, March 20, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO8, volunteer Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 24, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DO9, electrician, Pannipitiya, June 2, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO10, volunteer *Tripitaka* office, Pannipitiya, June 3, 2017.

- Informal conversation with DO11, volunteer Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 17, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO13, lay-person who assisted in the annual *maha* Ravana *nanumura mangalyaya* in 2017, Pannipitiya, March 26, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO13, lay-person who assisted in the annual *maha* Ravana *nanumura mangalyaya* in 2017, Colombo, February 27, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DO14, volunteer working at the new shop, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO15, volunteer Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, April 21, 2016.
- Informal conversation with DO16, assistant of the lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, April 23, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO16, assistant of the lay-custodian of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DO18, relative of the drummer who drums in the Ravana *puja*, Pannipitiya, March 21, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DO27, volunteer *Medin maha perahera*, Pannipitiya, March 24, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DO29, volunteer of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 16, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DP1, participant in Ravana *puja*, Pannipitiya, May 21, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DP3, attendant of Ravana *puja*, Pannipitiya, March 12, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DP4, visitor of Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 4, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DP5, visitor of Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 8, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DP6, visitor of the Ravana *mandiraya*, Pannipitiya, March 18, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DV1, regular visitor of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, April 14, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DV1, regular visitor of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 30, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DV2, stylist for *Medin maha perahera*, Pannipitiya, March 24, 2018.
- Informal conversation with DV3, attendant of the Mahamaya *puja*, Pannipitiya, May 20, 2017.
- Informal conversation with DV4, Buddhist nun, visitor of Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, March 24, 2018.
- Informal conversation with R. Seneviratne, Pannipitiya, June 11, 2017.
- Informal conversation with Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2017.
- Informal group conversation DG1, volunteers Mahamaya *perahera* office and DO7, volunteer in charge of sound systems, Pannipitiya, May 31, 2017.
- Informal group conversation DG4, DO1, secretary of Sumangala *Thero*, and DO2 caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 11, 2018.
- Informal group conversation DN8, attendants of the *maha* Ravana *nanumura mangalyaya*, Pannipitiya, March 25, 2018.
- Informal group conversation with the people conducting the Ravana *nanumura* and *puja* at the time my husband joined, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.
- Information received from Martijn Stoutjesdijk, observation and participation in the *nanumura*, Pannipitiya, May 7, 2017.

- Interview with DO2, caretaker at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya and member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Pannipitiya, March 13, 2018.
- Interview with DO26, main *Thero* involved in organising the *Medin maha perahera* in 2017, Pannipitiya, April 3, 2017.
- Interview with Kolonave Siri Sumangala *Thero*, chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, June 5, 2017.
- Interview with Kolonave Siri Sumangala *Thero*, chief incumbent of the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, May 11, 2018.
- Phone conversation with DO2, member of the *Ravana Shakthi*, Colombo, April 24, 2017.
- Phone conversation with DP3, attendant of *Ravana puja*, Colombo, March 16, 2017.

### Conversations with people in Lakegala area

- Conversation 01-01-05-2018RD, Ranamure, May 1, 2018.
- Conversation 01-02-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 2, 2018.
- Conversation 01-03-04-2018RAV, one of the two families left in Ravanagama, April 3, 2018, Ravanagama.
- Conversation 01-05-04-2018NAkap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.
- Conversation 01-29-04-2018RKKap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Ranamure, April 29, 2018.
- Conversation 02-03-04-2018RAV, one of the two families left in Ravanagama, Ravanagama, April 3, 2018.
- Conversation, 02-04-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.
- Conversation 02-06-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 6, 2018.
- Conversation 02-28-04-2018HE, shopkeeper, Hettipola, April 28, 2018.
- Conversation 02-29-04-2018RK, Ranamure, April 29, 2018.
- Conversation 02-30-04-2018NK, Narangamuva, April 30, 2018.
- Conversation 03a-29-04-2018RKKvk, traditional physician, Ranamure, April 29, 2018.
- Conversation 03b-29-04-2018RKKvk, traditional physician, Ranamure, April 29, 2018.
- Conversation 03-02-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 2, 2018.
- Conversation 03-03-04-2018RAVsurkap, relocated *kapu mahaththaya* of the Madumana *deva-laya*, Ravanagama surrounding, April 3, 2018.
- Conversation 03-06-04-2018RPvk, traditional physician, Ranamure, April 6, 2018.
- Conversation 03-30-04-2018NL, Lakegala (Narangamuva), April 30, 2018.
- Conversation 04-04-04-2018NAkap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.
- Conversation 04-05-04-2018NAmonk, monk, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.
- Conversation 04-27-04-2018RK, Ranamure, April 27, 2018.
- Conversation 04-30-04-2018NL, Narangamuva, April 30, 2018.
- Conversation 05-04-04-2018NW, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.
- Conversation 05-05-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.
- Conversation 05-06-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 6, 2018.
- Conversation 06-03-04-2018RKKap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Ranamure, April 3, 2018.
- Conversation 06-05-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.
- Conversation 06-28-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 28, 2018.
- Conversation 06-29-04-2018RKO, Ranamure, April 29, 2018.
- Conversation 06-30-04-2018RKO, Ranamure, April 30, 2018.
- Conversation 07-01-05-2018RA, Ranamure, May 1, 2018.
- Conversation 07-03-04-2018RAMonk, Buddhist monk, Ranamure, April 3, 2018.
- Conversation 07-28-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 28, 2018.
- Conversation 07-29-04-2018RAkap, *kapu mahaththaya*, Ranamure, April 29, 2018.
- Conversation 08-06-04-2018RA, Ranamure, April 6, 2018.

- Conversation 08-28-04-2018RK, Ranamure, April 28, 2018.  
 Conversation 11-04-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.  
 Conversation 12-04-04-2018NA, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.  
 Conversation 12-28-04-2018RK, Ranamure, April 28, 2018.  
 Conversation 13-28-04-2018RA, member of the cultural committee, Ranamure, April 28, 2018.  
 Conversation 14-04-04-2018NPreNA, elderly man who previously owned a shop in Narangamuva, New Pallegama, April 4, 2018.  
 Conversation with member of the cultural committee, Ranamure, April 9, 2017.  
 Conversation with villager G. Meemure, April 18, 2017.  
 Group conversation 01-04-04-2018NAGR at the shop, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.  
 Group conversation 01-27-04-2018NPGR at divisional secretariat, New Pallegama, April 27, 2018.  
 Group conversation 02-02-04-2018RAGR, Ranamure, April 2, 2018.  
 Group conversation 02-05-04-2018NAGR at the Narangamuva school, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.  
 Group conversation 04-02-04-2018RAGR, Ranamure, April 2, 2018.  
 Group conversation 04-03-04-2018NPGR at the shop, New Pallegama, April 3, 2018.  
 Group conversation 04-29-04-2018RAkids, children at Ranamure temple site, Ranamure, April 29, 2018.  
 Group conversation 07-04-04-2018NAGR, Narangamuva, April 4, 2018.  
 Informal conversation with monk, surrounding of Lakegala mountain, April 9, 2017.  
 Recitation of poetry by M.G. Punchimenika, Narangamuva, April 9, 2017.  
 Recitation of poetry by a member of the cultural committee, Ranamure, April 9, 2017.

### Other conversations

- Group conversation at Buddhist site in Colombo with a Buddhist monk and an author, Colombo, June 3, 2017.  
 Group conversation with TY. and SA. Colombo, March 5, 2018.  
 Informal conversation with AN2, leader of *angampora* group, Pannipitiya, May 1, 2016.  
 Informal conversation with AN3, *angampora* student, Maharagama, April 2, 2017.  
 Informal conversation with *angampora* master, Maharagama, March 11, 2017.  
 Informal conversation with BR1, lay-custodian of one of the *devalayas* at the Bellanvila Raja Maha Viharaya, Bellanvila, March 16, 2018.  
 Informal conversation with Buddhist monk, Welimada area, April 17, 2016.  
 Informal conversation with Buddhist monk, Vidurupola, March 11, 2016.  
 Informal conversation with Buddhist monk at Sri Vivekaramaya Viharaya, Rumassala, April 6, 2016.  
 Informal conversation with KD2, the person in charge of blowing the conch at the temple of the tooth, Kandy, March 28, 2018.  
 Informal conversation with KD3, *kariya korala*, Kandy, March 28, 2018.  
 Informal conversation with KG1, lay-custodian of one of the *devalayas*, Kataragama, April 17, 2018.  
 Informal conversation with lay-custodian of Natha *devalaya*, Kandy, March 28, 2018.  
 Informal conversation with people living next to the Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya, May 6, 2016.  
 Informal conversation with relative of Arisen Ahubudu, Dehivala, May 7, 2018.  
 Informal conversation with residing Buddhist nun, Kataragama, April 17, 2018.  
 Interview with AN1, *angampora* student, Maharagama, March 28, 2017.

- Interview with Ankumbura, assistant librarian at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, April 25, 2018.
- Interview with chief incumbent of the Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya, Rambodagalla, March 2, 2016.
- Interview with Indrajith de Silva, Director of Sri Lankan Tourism Board, Colombo, April 19, 2016.
- Interview with Kollupitiya Mahinda Sangharakkitha, the chief incumbent of the Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya, Kelaniya, February 27, 2016.
- Interview with RA., news reporter Sirasa TV, Colombo, March 29, 2016.
- Interview with S. Coperahewa, head of the Sinhala department of Colombo University, Colombo, April 18, 2018.
- Interview with SR., tour guide specialised in *Ramayana* tours, Colombo, March 17, 2016.
- Interview with YR., senior *angampora* student, Colombo, March 31, 2016.

### Other Types of Fieldwork Research Explicitly mentioned in this Thesis

- Explorative fieldwork visit Meemure from April 17, 2017 until April 19, 2017.
- Explorative fieldwork visit Meemure from April 8, 2017 until April 10, 2017.
- Comments on the *Medin maha perahera* in the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017.
- Fieldwork visit Bolthumbe Saman Devalaya, Bolthumbe, May 6, 2016.
- Fieldwork visit Kandy, March 27, 2018 till March 29, 2018.
- Fieldwork visit Kataragama, April 17, 2018.
- Fieldwork visit Katuwana, May 14, 2018.
- Fieldwork visit Koneswaram temple, Trincomalee, May 8, 2017.
- Fieldwork visit Rambodagalla Monaragala Viharaya, Rambodagalla, March 2, 2016.
- Fieldwork visit Ruwanwelisaya, Anuradhapura, April 21, 2018.
- Fieldwork visits, Sri Vivekaramaya Viharaya, Rumassala, February 9, 2015, and April 6, 2016.
- Holiday Sri Lanka 2015. I went for the first time to Sri Lanka from 23 January 2015 until 16 February 2015 to visit several Hindu and Buddhist sites. Part of this holiday was a tailor-made *Ramayana* tour with a tour guide who offered *Ramayana* tours online.
- Observation Kandy, of the ritual and informal conversations with the people waiting in the queue, Kandy, March 28, 2018.
- Observation Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, *Tripitaka* hall, Pannipitiya, 27-05-2017.
- Observation, Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, June 9, 2017.
- Observation, Sri Devram Maha Viharaya, Pannipitiya, February 25, 2018.
- Observation visitors Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. I observed on a regular weekday that two groups of people arrived by a bus (privately hired) to visit the site. The first group came from Anuradhapura. Observation, Pannipitiya, June 9, 2017.
- Participant observation, annual village *yakkama*, Narangamuva, May 17, 2017.
- Participant observation, Huniyam *puja* at the Bellanvila Maharaja Viharaya, Bellanvila, on May 3, 2017.
- Participant observation, performance of *surya namaskar* (sun salutation) with members of the popular Ravana research group the *Ravana Shakthi* at Galge, Dondra, April 12, 2017.
- Speech delivered by DO6 in *Medin maha perahera* preparation meeting. DO6 is one of the main people involved in the organising of the *Medin maha perahera* who also commented on the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017, Pannipitiya, March 15, 2017.

- Speech delivered by DO6 in *Medin maha perahera* preparation meeting. DO6 is one of the main people involved in the organising of the *Medin maha perahera* who also commented on the live broadcasting of the *perahera* on ITN TV in 2017, Pannipitiya, March 17, 2018.
- Speech delivered by DO28 in *Medin maha perahera* preparation meeting. DO28 is one of the people involved in organising the *perahera*, Pannipitiya, March 11, 2018.
- Speech of Sumangala *Thero*, Pannipitiya, March 22, 2017.
- Tailor made tour that included Ranamure. I was taken by Mr. Seelan, a tour guide recommended to me by the director of the Sri Lankan Tourism board, to Ranamure on April 27, 2016.
- Visit of Bali – Welcome to Paradise' exhibition, Leiden, visited November 8, 2018.
- Visit of Uyangamuva (with host and research assistant), Lakegala, April 9, 2017.

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# Scientific Summary

## The Many Faces of Ravana

### ***Ravanisation: The Revitalisation of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in Post-War Sri Lanka***

This thesis presents and discusses my investigation of multiple Ravana representations that have emerged among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority in post-war (after 2009) Sri Lanka. Ravana, generally known as a demon king from Hindu mythology, is in the post-war period by several Sinhalese Buddhists turned into a hero with whom they can identify themselves. In this thesis, I discuss how this post-war interest in Ravana has taken shape on a grassroots level, why and how several of the post-war Ravana representations contribute to a wide(r) appeal of this phenomenon among Sinhalese Buddhists (compared to earlier waves of interest in Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka), and what the Hela-Ravana representation of the past indicates about post-war Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism (especially in its interaction with the Sri Lankan chronicle the *Mahavamsa*, which in the twentieth century became normative for Sinhalese perceptions of the past). The thesis consists of three parts: Part I, General Introduction (Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3); Part II, Introduction to *Ravanisation* (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5); and Part III, Case Studies of *Ravanisation* (Chapter 6, Chapter 7, and Chapter 8).

Chapter 1, 'Introduction: The Many Faces of Ravana in Sri Lanka,' provides a general introduction to the thesis. It introduces the basic narrative of Rama, Sita, and Ravana as known from Hindu mythology. Sinhalese Buddhists in past and present are familiar with fragments of the *Ramayana*, although Sri Lanka never had its own *Ramayana*. Several contributions to the special section of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* on the literary history of the *Ramayana* in Sri Lanka provide examples of how the *Ramayana* and especially Ravana, the king of Lanka, became part of the Sinhalese mythistorical imagination. My discussion of the five contributions to this special section provides a historical background to the topic of my thesis. In addition, I use these articles as points of reference to position my thesis topics, research foci, and methods. After my brief discussion of these articles, I introduce my research question: what kinds of Ravana representations have emerged among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka (2009 onwards), how do they take shape on local levels, and how does the interest in Ravana – including several of these Ravana representations – relate to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country? Following the research question, I then introduce the research topic, timeframe, localities of the research, and research population. I also introduce the concept *Ravanisation*, a term I coin to denote the revitalisation of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka. The concept

revitalisation is selected for two reasons: first, to investigate how the Hela-Ravana representation of the past relates to representations of the past that evolve at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations and second, to create an attentiveness for earlier movements and ideas about Ravana that were present among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka prior to the post-war period. In the remaining part of the first chapter, I introduce my research methodologies. I explain how, when, and why the two localities of in-depth research were selected and which research methods were employed at different stages of the research. I also mention some of the challenges that were faced in the field and in the phase of data analysis. The chapter concludes with some notes on translation and transcription of Sinhala concepts.

Chapter 2, 'Sri Lanka's Ethnic and Religious Diversity,' introduces Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious diversity in the past and present. It provides a specific backdrop to understand some of the dynamics of *Ravanisation* discussed in Part II and Part III. Because my specific focus is on Ravana representations that have emerged at and around Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka, I discuss in this chapter some interactions of Sri Lankan (mainly Theravada) Buddhists with Hindus and sympathisers of Mahayana Buddhism as well as several specific rituals centring on a range of divine beings from the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon. Following an overview of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I explore the development of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism and political Buddhism in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Sri Lanka. I pay special attention to some specific interpretations of sections from the *Mahavamsa*. According to several scholars, this Sri Lankan chronicle, of which the first chapters were written in the sixth century, became the charter for Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideologies in twentieth-century Sri Lanka. My discussion of the interpretations of concepts from the *Mahavamsa* aims to attune us to the immense relevance of mythhistories to frame the present at times of resurgence of ethno-nationalism. In the final section of this chapter, I briefly address the political involvement of Buddhist monks in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These sections illustrate the close entanglement of Buddhism and ethnicity in Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist ideologies.

In Chapter 3, 'Conceptual Framework,' I introduce several theoretical concepts that I employ throughout this thesis. The first subsection introduces the concepts revitalisation and discourse. For the concept revitalisation, I mainly discuss how ethno-symbolist theorists employ the concept to denote the use of pre-existing myth-symbol complexes to create a new set of ideas (ideologies) at times of ethno-nationalist revitalisations. My introduction of the concept discourse – as a field of representations – aims to point in the direction of another concept central to my thesis: representation. According to Stuart Hall, systems of representations convey meaning. Systems of representations are not limited to language. Materiality and rituals also 'represent' meaning and abstract ideas. In this chapter, I also discuss in detail why I employ the concepts ethno-nationalism over nationalism and the concept mythistory over myth or history. Furthermore, I introduce the concept remythologising to denote the process of the use of mythhistories for (ethno-) nationalist ideologies. Because representations of the past are central to Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist claims of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country, I introduce

the concept hegemony as defined by David Rampton in the context of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism. I conclude the chapter by outlining two concepts useful for investigating the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation*: the imagined landscape and religious landscape.

Chapter 4, 'Key Concepts in *Ravanisation*: Lanka, Hela, *Yaksha*, and *Dasis* Ravana,' discusses four concepts that I – based on my research – found central to *Ravanisation*. These four concepts are Lanka, Hela, *yaksha*, and *dasis* Ravana. I mainly explore in this chapter how fragments and concepts from pre-existing records are re-interpreted for present-day purposes. In general, these re-interpretations aim to construct a representation of the past that fixates on a glorious civilisation of the Sinhalese, ancient monarchy, and indigenous inhabitation and ancestry. Relating my findings to several ethno-symbolist theoretical insights that were introduced in Chapter 3 ('re-mythologising', for example, defined by Bruce Kapferer as the reinvention of myths and legends of the past as a [nationalist] ideology), I explore why and how these post-war interpretations are of relevance to the broad appeal of *Ravanisation* in post-war Sri Lanka. One of the findings, discussed in more detail in Part III, is that a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority in Sri Lanka refers to records beyond the *Ramayana* tradition in order to situate Ravana and Lanka within a Sinhalese Buddhist worldview (thus extensively distancing him and his kingdom from the Hindu/*Ramayana* tradition). In addition, Ravana's ten heads (*dasis*) are symbolically interpreted to refer to ten skills, which grounds present-day practices in a glorious ancient past. Although the focus of this chapter is mainly on the discursive and narrative dimension of *Ravanisation*, it also sets the stage for my discussion of the ritualising and materialising of Ravana in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5, 'An Introduction to the Spatial Dimension of *Ravanisation*,' introduces the imagined landscape and religious landscape, both of which are important dimensions of the post-war interest in Ravana among a segment of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority. The chapter starts with an exploration of the imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka. This imagined landscape materialises not only the Hela-Ravana representation of a glorious past but also a revival of ancient days of glory through closely relating Ravana to the current physical territory of Sri Lanka. This landscape is of specific relevance to *Ravanisation* because it enables people to visit these sites and multisensorially experience the alleged marvels of the past in the present. Part of my discussion of the imagined landscape of Ravana's ancient kingdom in Sri Lanka is an exploration of the post-war dynamics between multiple Sinhalese mythstories that have emerged around one specific site: Sigiriya. The discussions reveal a competition that has intensified in the post-war period between the *Mahavamsa*-inspired perception of the origin of Sigiriya as the fortress of King Kasyapa I, on the one hand, and the representation of Sigiriya as Ravana's or his stepbrother's palace on the other. The second part of this chapter introduces the religious landscape of Ravana in Sri Lanka. This section illustrates that the case studies of my research are part of a broader (post-war) tendency in the process of *Ravanisation* of the materialising of Ravana at Buddhist sites. The relevance of the materialising and ritualising of Ravana at two Buddhist sites is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

In Chapter 6, '*Ravanisation at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya: The Ritualising and Materialising of Ravana at a Buddhist Temple Site*,' I present the findings of my in-depth fieldwork on *Ravanisation* conducted at the Buddhist temple site the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya. The first subsection of the chapter introduces the temple site (located in one of the suburbs of Colombo) and the ambitions of the chief incumbent. Several of the general aims and goals of the temple site relate to the revitalisation of allegedly ancient practices of the Hela (Sinhalese). I provide multiple examples of the extensive ritualising and materialising of the temple's goals in order to sense the creative processes of ritualising and materialising of abstract ideas at work at this Buddhist temple site. The second part of the chapter turns to an examination of the extensive materialising and ritualising of multiple Ravana representations at this Buddhist site. It first introduces the Ravana *mandiraya* (palace), as well as its murals and statues, all of which together situate Ravana in a Sinhalese Buddhist worldview and devotional framework. Three specific Ravana representations are then discussed in the context of three specific rituals recently invented at the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya: (1) Ravana as (aspirant) deity in the weekly Ravana *puja* (offering); (2) Ravana as healer in the annual *maha Ravana nanumura mangalyaya* (the festival of anointing); and (3) Ravana as warrior king of the Sinhalese in the annual *maha Ravana perahera* (procession). These rituals, I argue, are central to *Ravanisation* because they create the possibility to multi-sensorially experience Ravana in the present. This chapter comes to a close with an evaluation of the relevance of these rituals for the recent interest in Ravana and a discussion of how the apotheosis of Ravana at this Buddhist site relates to the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country.

The focus of Chapter 7, '*Mountains and Mythhistories on the Move: Multiple Dynamics of Ravanisation with(in) Lore*,' is mainly on the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation* and its dynamics with and within lore. Throughout, I interrogate how rural lore is employed in the process of *Ravanisation* and what it reveals about *Ravanisation*. In order to investigate the spatial dimension of *Ravanisation* and the dynamics of *Ravanisation* with and within lore, I focus on one specific geographical location in Sri Lanka: Lakegala. Lakegala is a monolith located in the rural highlands of Sri Lanka, and this case study counterbalances my investigation of *Ravanisation* at an urban Buddhist temple site (Chapter 6). The first part of Chapter 7 introduces Lakegala area, the villages, and some of the demographics of the area. I also explain how I have conducted my research among the villagers and how my research strategies differ from 'Ravana researchers' who also have expressed an interest in this area. In the second part of this chapter, I present my analyses of multiple Ravana representations related to specific perceptions of Lakegala. For the imagined landscape, I discuss the representation of Lakegala as Ravana's war zone and Lakegala as part of Ravana's ancient kingdom. And for the religious landscape, I explore the ritualisation and materialisation of Ravana as the local deity Bandara *deviyo*. Based on these analyses of the imagined landscape and religious landscape of *Ravanisation* in Lakegala area, I show how these recent representations of Ravana relate to characteristics of ethno-nationalist representations of the past by shedding light on how they are bound

up with claims of ethnicity, territory, alleged ancient traditions, and indigeneity on the part of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka.

In the Conclusion (Chapter 8), I reflect on how the specific research foci of this thesis have disclosed multiple levels of relevance of the post-war phenomenon of *Ravanisation* for Sinhalese Buddhists – that is, relevance on a personal, local, and national level. This is done by bringing together the multiple Ravana representations presented in the previous chapters. Based on my research findings, I make some (tentative) remarks about general tendencies in the process of *Ravanisation* – for instance, the consolidation of certain Ravana representations, the tendency to increasingly frame Ravana in a (Sinhalese) Buddhist worldview and the Buddhist pantheon, and the function of shrines (especially the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya) for the solidification and dissemination of specific Ravana representations. This section is followed by a theoretical reflection on two concepts that were key to my research question and definition of *Ravanisation*: hegemony and revitalisation. Throughout my thesis, I used the concept hegemony to identify the Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalist perception of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese Buddhist country and to analyse the dynamics between the *Mahavamsa*-based perception of the past and the Hela-Ravana representation of the past at a popular, grassroots level. The concept revitalisation allowed me to sense why and how certain pre-existing concepts, traditions, and textual sources are used in the process of *Ravanisation* and how *Ravanisation* (more specifically, the representation of the Hela-Ravana past) signals a resurgence of Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism in post-war Sri Lanka. The final section identifies some of the shortcomings and limitations of the research project. Following from that, the thesis concludes with some suggestions for further research – for instance, a focus on the relevance of *Ravanisation* in the political sphere, the continuation of the Sinhalese Buddhist interest in Ravana in the future, and the interaction between the Hela-Ravana and *vedda* narratives of indigenous inhabitation in Sri Lanka.





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**Figure 7.4** (p. 266): Newspaper article on Lakegala that I found in the Guruvela library (approximately 8 kilometers from Ranamure). Fernando, S. R. (2017, October 22), *Rama Ravana Yuddhaya siduvune Lakegalada?* [Did the Rama – Ravana war take place in Lakegala?], *Lankadipa*. [www.lankadeepa.lk/rasawitha/රාම-රාවණ-යුද්ධය-සිදුවුණේ-ලංකාවේ-57-519220](http://www.lankadeepa.lk/rasawitha/රාම-රාවණ-යුද්ධය-සිදුවුණේ-ලංකාවේ-57-519220) (retrieved February 3, 2020).

**Figure 7.5** (p. 267): Cattle on the Narangamuva main road in Narangamuva. Picture taken by author, Narangamuva, April 5, 2018.

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**Figure 7.8** (p. 269): The *devalaya* located on the Ranamure temple site. Picture taken by author, Ranamure, April 10, 2017.

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**Figure 7.14** (p. 289): Cover of the book *Lankadipati Sri Ravana* written by Ashoka Premachandra. The cover depicts Ravana in his *dandu monaraya* and Lakegala mountain.

**Figure 7.15** (p. 289): Cover of the *Ravana Rava* [Ravana's Echo] magazine published in 2013 by the Laggala-Pallegama divisional secretariat to promote the Ravana *yakkama* in Ranamure.

**Figure 7.16** (p. 299): A *kapu mahaththaya* coming from the *devalaya* to dance around the *kumbaya* (decorated trunk) on the day of the annual *yakkama*. Picture taken by author, Narangamuva, May 17, 2017.

**Figure 7.17** (p. 304): A brand new statue of Ravana as produced by the Sri Devram Maha Viharaya placed between the weaponry of Bandara *deviyo* (including the *kurula bendi ayuda*: weapon in the shape of a bodhi-leaf with a bird on top of it) in the Ranamure *devalaya*. Picture taken by author, Ranamure, April 9, 2017.

**Figure 7.18** (p. 304): Slide 32 as published by the popular research group the *Ravana Shakthi* on their Facebook page. This article mentions that the villagers of Laggala area are proud of their ancestry – dating it back to Ravana's time – and that they refer to Ravana as a deity. Also, they keep some objects that Ravana's used in their *devalaya* and use these in their annual village ritual (*yakkama*). Ravana Shakthi Jathika Sanvidhaniya [Ravana Shakthi National Organisation], (2014, August 23), *Laggala api Ravanage aya Misak Vijayage aya Noveyi* [The People of Laggala are Descendants of Ravana and not from Vijaya]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=282822128576288&set=a.282821315243036&type=3&theater> (retrieved February 7, 2020).

# Glossary<sup>1093</sup>

## S Sinhala

## Sk Sanskrit

## P Pali

<i>abhisheka</i> (Sk)	ritual of anointing or inauguration (as part of the crowning ceremony of a king)
<i>adharmaya</i> (S), <i>á-dharma</i> (Sk)	as opposed to the <i>dharma</i> (teachings), unrighteous
<i>adukku puja, adukkuva</i> (S)	annual village ritual in which a bit of the first harvest is offered to the village deity/deities as thanksgiving and to ask their blessing over the new cultivation cycle. Derived from (Sinhala) <i>adukkuva</i> : pile, heap of things placed one upon another; assortment of provisions ready dressed.
<i>Alaka</i> (S, Sk)	the (capital) city or abode of Kuvera (Ravana's half-brother)
<i>angampora</i> (S)	martial arts, in the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> one of the ten alleged skills of Ravana. From body ( <i>aṅga</i> ) and boxing, fighting ( <i>pora</i> )
<i>apaya</i> (S, P)	a transient state of loss and woe after death, hell
<i>apasara</i> (S), <i>apsara</i> (Sk)	celestial nymph, goddess
<i>arachchi</i> (S)	(petty) village official or <i>grama niladhari</i>
<i>asapuva</i> (S)	hermitage, house adjoining a Buddhist temple for a priest
<i>ashirovada</i> (S)	blessing

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<sup>1093</sup> I refer to the Sinhala definition and transcription of the word, unless it is a Sanskrit or Pali concept that cannot be found in Clough's Sinhala dictionary that I use, or if the context of my research requires it that I (also) refer to Pali or Sanskrit.

<i>asura</i> (S, P)	class of mythological beings, often demons or anti-gods. In the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> the asura are sometimes mentioned as one of the Hela 'tribes'
<i>asipatha</i> (S, Sr)	sword, the course of the sword or knife that kills
<i>aththa</i> (S)	branch
<i>osadhi, oshadha</i> (S), <i>oshadhi</i> (Sk)	medicine, medicinal herb
<i>avurudu baraya</i> (S)	annual ( <i>avurudu</i> ) vow ( <i>baraya</i> )
<i>ayuda</i> (S)	weapon
<i>balaya</i> (S)	force, power
<i>bandara</i> (S)	deified local lords/minor deities of the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon
<i>baraya, bara</i> (S)	(ritual) vow
<i>behetha</i> (S)	remedy, medicament
<i>beraya</i> (S)	drum
<i>bhakti</i> (S, Sk)	devotion
<i>bhasha</i> (S, Sk)	language
<i>bhikshu</i> (S) <i>bhikkhu</i> (P)	almsman, a mendicant, a Buddhist monk or priest
<i>bodhisatvayo</i> (S), <i>bodhisatta</i> (P)	Buddha-to-be, in Sri Lankan Buddhism usually applied to Buddha in his various stages of existence previous to his attaining of Buddhahood
<i>brahmin</i> (Sk)	belonging to the sacerdotal class/caste; priest
<i>buduge(ya)</i> (S)	house of the Buddha/shrine with Buddha statue(s)
<i>chaitiya, chaitiya</i> (S)	place of sacrifice or religious worship, monument, Buddhist <i>dagaba</i> . See: <i>stupa</i>
<i>Culavamsa</i>	twelfth-century sequel to the Sri Lankan chronicle the <i>Mahavamsa</i>
<i>dagaba</i> (S)	A large solid building in the form of a cone raised close to the Buddhist temple and an object of highest veneration. See also <i>stupa</i> and <i>chaitiya</i>
<i>dandu monara(ya)</i> (S)	wooden ( <i>dandu</i> ) peacock ( <i>monara</i> ); in the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> the <i>dandu monaraya</i> refers to Ravana's alleged flying chariot.



<i>dunu</i> (S)	bow(s)
<i>dashamukha</i> (Sk)	ten ( <i>dasa</i> ) faced ( <i>mukya</i> ), being in or coming from or belonging to the mouth or face, ten mouths, designation used for Ravana (with ten heads) in Hindu mythology
<i>dashagriva</i> (Sk)	ten ( <i>dasa</i> ) necked ( <i>griva</i> ), designation used for Ravana in Hindu mythology
<i>dasis</i> (S)	ten ( <i>dasa</i> ) heads ( <i>his</i> ), concept used in the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> to denote Ravana's alleged ten heads as ten skills
<i>deshiya</i> (Sk)	local (indigenous), peculiar or belonging to or inhabiting a country
<i>deva</i> (Sk), <i>devi</i> , <i>deviya</i> (n) (S), <i>deviyo</i> (S, pl)	a god, deity, divine being. In addition, in the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> the <i>deva</i> are mentioned as one of the Hela 'tribes'
<i>deva puja</i> (S, Sk)	offering ( <i>puja</i> ) to a deity ( <i>deva</i> )
<i>devalaya</i> (S, Sk)	residence of the god, temple, shrine (for gods)
<i>dhammadipa</i>	island ( <i>dipa</i> ) of the <i>dhamma</i> (interpretation of Dharmapala of this concept from the chronicle the <i>Mahavamsa</i> )
<i>dharmashalava</i> (S)	hall ( <i>shalava</i> ) for preaching the <i>dhamma/dharma</i> (or <i>bana</i> , Buddhist preaching)
<i>dharma</i> (Sk, S), <i>dhamma</i> (P)	Buddhist teachings, righteousness, moral and religious instructions
<i>Digha Nikaya</i>	'Long collection', 'Long Discourses' of the Buddha, part of the <i>Tripitaka</i>
<i>Dipaya</i> (S), <i>dvipa</i> (Sk), <i>dipa</i> (P)	island, lamp
<i>Dipavamsa</i>	a Sri Lankan chronicle (written in Pali) from the fourth and fifth centuries
<i>divya</i> (S)	celestial
<i>diyavadana nilame</i> (S)	chief lay custodian of the Temple of the Tooth
<i>gala</i> (S)	rock, stone
<i>galen(a)</i> (S)	rock ( <i>gal</i> ) cave ( <i>lena</i> )
<i>gama</i> (S)	village
<i>gambara(ya)</i> (S)	village ( <i>gama</i> ) vow ( <i>baraya</i> )
<i>garu</i> (S)	respect

<i>garuda</i> (S, Sk)	mythical bird
<i>gatha(va)</i> (S, P)	verse, stanza (a poem/verse of worship)
<i>gedara</i> (S)	home
<i>giri</i> (S, P)	rock, mountain
<i>Giridipa</i>	'rock island,' location suggested by the <i>yakshas</i> in the chronicle the <i>Mahavamsa</i> to the Buddha to send them to
<i>goda</i> (S)	land
<i>gothraya, gothra</i> (S)	tribe, family, race
<i>grama niladhari, grama niladhariya</i> (S)	village officer
<i>guha(va)</i> (S)	cave in rock
<i>hatara</i> (S)	four
<i>hatara (satara) varan deviyo</i> (S)	the four guardian deities of the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon; guardian deities of the several quarters
Hela (S)	ancient name of Sri Lanka. In the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> used to denote the (ancient) Sinhalese
<i>hiru devalaya</i> (S)	sun temple
<i>isma</i> (S)	juice
<i>(i)sthri</i> (S)	woman
<i>ithihasa(ya), ethihasa(ya)</i> (S)	history
<i>jana</i> (S)	man, individually or collectively, mankind
<i>jana kavi</i> (S)	folk poetry
<i>janapravada</i> (S)	rumour
<i>jana shruthi</i> (S)	folklore
<i>jathiya</i> (S)	race, nation, lineage
<i>jothisha(ya)</i> (S)	(science of) astrology or astronomy
<i>kadaim poth</i> (S)	boundary books
<i>kaduva</i> (S)	sword
<i>kalpa</i> (S, Sr)	time period measuring the duration of the world, period between creation and recreation
<i>kanda</i> (S)	mountain
<i>kapu</i> (S)	cotton

<i>kapurala, kapu mahaththaya</i> (S)	lay priest, lay custodian
<i>katakatha(va)</i> (S)	rumour, mouth ( <i>kata</i> ), talk, conversation, history ( <i>kathava</i> )
<i>kavi</i> (S)	poetry, song
<i>kenda</i> (S)	congee
<i>kele, kelaya</i> (S)	jungle, forest
<i>kiri amma</i> (S)	'milk ( <i>kiri</i> ) mother ( <i>amma</i> ),' ritually associated with Paththini, nursing mother
<i>kiri ithiravima</i> (S)	(ritual) boiling of the milk ( <i>kiri</i> ) that must overflow ( <i>ithirenava</i> )
<i>Kohomba kankariya, Kohomba yakkama</i> (S)	(Kandyen) village ceremony that aims to bring prosperity to the village and protect the harvest
<i>kola</i> (S)	leaf
<i>komari polla</i> (S)	rod, stick ( <i>polla</i> ), object that in Lakegala area allegedly represents Bandara <i>deviyo</i> in the rituals
<i>kula, kulaya</i> (S)	race, clan, caste
<i>Kumara Tantra(ya)</i>	early tantric text allegedly composed by Ravana. Because it deals with medical treatment it is framed in the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> as an Ayurvedic text
<i>kumbaya</i> (S)	mast, pole of a banana trunk decorated with betel leaves, areca and coconut flowers, that is used in the <i>yakkama</i>
<i>kurulla</i> (S)	bird
<i>kurulla bendi ayuda(ya)</i> (S)	weapon ( <i>ayuda</i> ) with bird ( <i>kurulla</i> ) tight on ( <i>bendi</i> ) it, in Lakegala area this weapon allegedly represents Bandara <i>deviyo</i> in the rituals
<i>ilakke</i> (S)	aim, mark for shooting
<i>lak(a)</i> (S)	(Sri) Lanka, target, aim, beauty
Lakdiva (S)	island of Lanka, designation/name for Sri Lanka
Lanka (S)	the Lanka of Ravana or designation for Sri Lanka
Lankapura, Lankapuri (S, Sr)	city or fortification ( <i>pura/puri</i> ) of Lanka
<i>Lankadipathi</i> (S)	supreme lord of Lanka

<i>Lankeshvara</i> (S)	ruler, lord ( <i>isvara</i> ) of Lanka
<i>Lankavatara Sutra</i>	'Entering into Lanka,' Mahayana Buddhist text of which the first part has been written in the fourth century
<i>lena</i> (S)	cave
<i>loka</i> (S, Sr)	wide space or world, realm, division of the world
<i>maha</i> (S, Sr)	great
<i>maha nayaka</i> (Sr)	head (of fraternity of monks)
<i>maha sammata</i> , Maha Sammata (P)	'the great selected,' designation for first ruler, in Sri Lanka and Burma turned into the name of the first Buddhist king
<i>Mahabharata</i>	famous Hindu epic composed in Sanskrit between 500 BCE and 400 CE
<i>Mahavamsa</i>	Sri Lankan chronicle written in Pali of which the first parts are composed in the sixth century
<i>mal pahan puja</i> (S)	offering of flowers ( <i>mal</i> ) and lamps ( <i>pahan</i> )
<i>maligaya</i> , <i>maligava</i> (S)	palace, residence of a king
<i>mandiraya</i> (S)	royal palace, house, temple
<i>mangalyaya</i> , <i>mangala</i> (S)	festival, feast, marriage
<i>messa</i> (S)	platform
<i>mini</i> (S)	gem
<i>mudra</i> (Sr)	positions or intertwinings of the fingers, hand gesture
<i>murapola</i> , <i>murapala</i> (S)	guard point, watch post
<i>mure</i> , <i>mura</i> (S)	watching, guarding
<i>muruthen bath</i>	rice that is sweetened with honey and jaggery, used in offerings
<i>nanava</i> (S)	to bathe
<i>naga</i> (P)	snake, serpent-like beings or mythical snakes related to the water. In the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> one of the four Hela 'tribes' associated with water
<i>nanumura</i> (S)	ceremony of bathing and anointing
<i>nava</i> , <i>neva</i> (S)	ship

<i>nikaya</i> (S, P)	fraternity, assemblage, branch of priests (of Buddhism)
<i>nirvana</i> (S), <i>nibbana</i> (P)	bliss, destruction of all passions, generally translated as enlightenment
<i>osupen</i> (S)	herbal, medicinal mixture (water, liquid)
<i>oya</i> (S)	stream
<i>pabatta</i> (P)	mountain
<i>paliha</i> (S)	shield
<i>panduru</i> (S)	offering (gift, <i>pandura</i> ) to a deity, a lay practice for which a coin in a white cloth is offered to a deity as a token of promise
<i>parampara(va)</i> (P)	(repeated tradition since) generation
<i>parinirvana</i> (P)	final release from rebirth
<i>perahera, perahara</i> (S, P)	procession, pageant
<i>pirit(ha)</i> (chanting) (S, P)	recitation of Pali texts for protection (Pali: <i>paritta</i> )
<i>pokuna</i> (S)	pond (colloquial of <i>parivapa</i> )
<i>puj(a)</i> (Sr)	offering or rite of worship to a deity or Buddha
<i>pura</i> (S, Sr)	city, fortress
<i>pushpaka vimana</i> (Sr)	floral chariot that became also known as aerial car (often referred to as Ravana's stepbrother Kuvera's self-moving aerial chariot that was taken by Ravana)
<i>polova</i> (S)	earth
<i>poya</i> (S)	full moon, quarters of the moon considered to be sacred by Buddhists
<i>poth(a)</i> (S)	book(s), manuscript(s)
<i>puskola poth(a)</i> (S)	blank ( <i>pus</i> ), leaf ( <i>kola</i> ), book ( <i>potha</i> ), palm leaf manuscripts/books,
<i>Rajavaliya</i>	'list of kings,' a seventeenth century Sinhala alternative chronicle
<i>raja</i> (S)	king, monarch
<i>raksha</i> (S)	class of mythological beings. Their name is derived from <i>rak(sh)a</i> ( <i>karavana</i> ) or to protect. In the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> the <i>rakshas</i> are considered one of the indigenous Hela tribes. See also <i>rakus</i>

<i>rak(sh)a (karanava) (S)</i>	to protect
<i>rakus(u) (S)</i>	demon, designation used in the early-twentieth century Hela movement for the ancient inhabitants of Sri Lanka; <i>rakusu</i> is derived from <i>rakshaa karanava</i> or to protect
<i>Ramakien</i>	Thai version of the <i>Ramayana</i>
<i>Ramayana</i>	famous Hindu epic; its most authoritative text has allegedly been written by the sage Valmiki (in Sanskrit) and dates back between 500 BC and 250 CE
<i>Ramcharitmanas</i>	sixteenth-century poetic retelling of the Hindu epic the <i>Ramayana</i> in Hindi by Tulsidas
<i>Ramakatha</i>	Rama's story
<i>Ramya (S)</i>	pleasing
<i>raṇa (S)</i>	war
<i>ran (S)</i>	gold
<i>rasa (S)</i>	mercury, quicksilver
<i>rata (S)</i>	country
<i>ratha (S)</i>	car, war chariot, vehicle, (procession) chariot
<i>rathana (S)</i>	jewel, gem
<i>rava, raava (S)</i>	sound, echo
<i>Ravana Balaya</i>	Ravana's power ( <i>balaya</i> ), a Buddhist nationalist movement established in 2012
<i>Ravana Kathava</i>	seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Sinhala poem that praises the virtuous deeds of Ravana
<i>Ravana Rajavaliya</i>	fifteenth–sixteenth century Sinhala boundary book
<i>Ravana Shakthi</i>	Ravana's strength, power ( <i>shakthi</i> ), popular Ravana research group established in the 1990s
<i>Ravanisation</i>	concept coined by the author to refer in this thesis to the revitalisation of Ravana in post-war Sri Lanka
<i>rishi (S)</i>	seer, sage, holy person
<i>ruva (S)</i>	image, figure, beauty

<i>sabaragamu(va)</i> (S)	province in Sri Lanka, also used to denote one of the three regional dance traditions in Sri Lanka
<i>sakvithi</i> (S)	universal emperor, monarch
<i>sangha</i> (S)	(Buddhist monastic) order, Buddhist priesthood
<i>sanskrittha(ya)</i> (S)	cultural, artificially produced
<i>sasana, sasanga</i> (S)	(Buddhist) legacy, institution, order, dispensation, period, association
<i>shanti karma(ya)</i> (S)	anti-sorcery rites that seek the blessing of the gods
<i>sil</i> (S)	precept, prescribed duty
<i>sima, himava</i> (S)	boundary
<i>sinhaladipaya</i> (S)	Sinhala Island ( <i>dipaya</i> ), island of the Sinhalese
Siri Laka (S)	noble, beautiful Lanka, designation for Sri Lanka; also used as designation for Lakegala mountain
<i>siv, sivu</i> (S)	four (formal)
<i>stupa</i> (S)	heap, relic chamber/reliquary; a Buddhist monument, <i>dagoba</i> (generally of a pyramidal or dome-like form)
<i>sura</i> (S)	god or deity, similar to the mythical <i>deva</i> , opposite of <i>asura</i>
<i>surya</i> (S)	sun
<i>surya namaskar</i> (S)	sun salutation
<i>svastika</i> (Sr)	kind of mystical cross, four-armed sign that in the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> is related to Ravana
<i>Taksina Kailaca Purana</i>	a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century poetic work on the history of the Koneshvaram (Hindu) temple
<i>Tathagatha</i> (S)	'thus-gone-one,' name or epithet of Buddha given him in allusion to his having come to or obtained the rank of the Buddha in the same way as his predecessors
<i>theruvan</i> (S)	the three gems (Buddha, <i>dhamma</i> , <i>sangha</i> )
<i>theruwan sarana(yi)</i> (S)	May the triple gem bless you, greeting used by Sinhalese Buddhists

<i>Thero</i> (S)	honorific for senior Buddhist monk
<i>thorana</i> (S)	pandal, arch erected on festival occasions and decorated with the young shoots of the cocoa-nut leaves, ferns etc.
<i>Tripitaka</i> (Sk)	three baskets of collections of Buddhist sacred writings, the Pali canon
<i>udarata</i> (S)	up ( <i>uda</i> ) country ( <i>rata</i> )
<i>upahara(ya)</i> (S)	tribute, honour, respect, complimentary gift
<i>uruma(ya)</i> (S)	heritage, legacy, hereditary property
<i>Uttarakanda</i>	The last of the seven books of the <i>Ramayana</i>
<i>vandana</i> (S)	to worship
<i>vans(h)a(ya)</i> (S)	lineage, race
<i>Vargapurnikava</i>	palm leaf manuscript allegedly owned by Manawe Wimalarathana <i>Thero</i> . It has become an authoritative text in the process of <i>Ravanisation</i>
<i>vasam(a)</i> (S)	district, possession, division
<i>veda mahaththaya</i>	(traditional) doctor, physician
<i>vedakama</i> (S)	the practice of medicine, in the process of <i>Ravanisation</i> one of the ten alleged skills of Ravana
<i>vedda</i> (S)	bowman, one who lives by his bow, the alleged offspring of the son and daughter of Kuveni and Vijaya who became considered the indigenous inhabitants of Sri Lanka
<i>ves</i> (S)	dresses of dancers, costume, traditional outfit of Kandyan dancers
<i>veva</i> (S)	lake, pond
<i>viduhalpathi</i> (S)	school principal
<i>vihara, viharaya</i> (S)	a dwelling, habitation, lodging for a Buddhist monk; Buddhist temple
<i>vila</i> (S)	pond, lake
<i>viththi poth</i>	books on (local) history
<i>ya, yakada</i> (S)	iron
<i>yakkama</i> (S)	' <i>yaksha</i> action ( <i>kama</i> ),' often defined as exorcism ritual. In the Lakegala area used to denote the annual village ritual related to the harvest



*yakini, yakshini* (S)

*yak, yaksha, yakkha, yaká* (S)

*yantra, yantraya* (S)

*yashti* (S)

*yuddhaya* (S)

*yuda bera(ya)* (S)

female *yaksha*

name of certain type of non-human beings. In the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon, the concept *yak(sha)* often refers to as demon. They are however also sometimes considered as guardians and related to fertility. In the process of *Ravanisation* *yakshas* are considered one of the indigenous Hela 'tribes'

mystical diagram

(wooden) stick

war

war drum

## Abbreviations

BBS	Bodu Bala Sena
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
JHU	Jathika Hela Urumaya (Political Party)
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)
LSSP	Lana Sama Samaja Party
RASSL	Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka
RB	Ravana Balaya (Ravana Force)
SLFP	Sri Lankan Freedom Party
STIMA	Sri Lankan Traditional Indigenous Martial art Association
SU	Sinhala Urumaya (Sinhala Heritage Party)
UNP	United National Party

# Consent Forms

## Project Information Sheet English

### Project Information Sheet *The Many Faces of Ravana*

Dear sir/madam,

You are being asked to participate in a research project concerning the current popularity of Ravana among Sinhalese-Buddhists in Sri Lanka. This Project Information Sheet explains what the study is about and how I would like you to take part in it. The Project Information Sheet and the attached Consent Form are compulsory for researchers from universities in the Netherlands to conduct their research. Therefore, I would like to ask you to pay close attention to both pages. If you decide to take part in the research, you will be asked to sign the Consent Form. You can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without giving a reason.

The purpose of this project is to gain insight in current popularity of Ravana among the ethnic majority group of Sinhalese and to study how this popularity of Ravana is expressed and mediated through rituals and stories concerning Ravana. The term '*Ravanisation*' will be used in this project to refer to current revitalization of Ravana among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

I would like to interview you about one or several of the aspects of *Ravanisation* and I would like to ask you questions about your thoughts, opinions, and experiences concerning Ravana, as well as events, stories, rituals, places, and people related to Ravana.

The interview will last approximately one hour and will take place at the time and place of your preference. If desired, it is also possible that I will arrange a place for the interview that is convenient for you. For this project up to 25 participants will be interviewed and fieldwork will be conducted at two specific locations in Sri Lanka.

The information provided by you in the interview will be used for research purposes for this specific research project and may be shared with other researchers in the same research field. The data for this research project will be, after completing my dissertation, stored for at least 10 years in one of the data management systems of Tilburg University.

If you would like your personal details to be anonymised in the research output, you can indicate this on the Consent Form. Details about anonymization can be discussed at the time of the interview.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my employer if you need further information.

Thanking you in anticipation,  
Yours sincerely,

Deborah de Koning

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PhD-candidate Tilburg University**

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*E-mail:* [d.d.c.dekoning@tilburguniversity.edu](mailto:d.d.c.dekoning@tilburguniversity.edu)

**Contact details of employer in the  
Netherlands**

**Prof.dr. Herman L. Beck**

*Phone number office in the Netherlands:*

0031 13 466 2591

*E-Mail:* [h.l.beck@tilburguniversity.edu](mailto:h.l.beck@tilburguniversity.edu)

### Project Information Sheet Sinhala

## ව්‍යාපෘති තොරතුරු පත්‍රිකාව රාවණාගේ විවිධ මුහුණත්

හිතවත් මහත්මයා / මහත්මිය,

වර්ථමානයේ ශ්‍රී ලාංකික සිංහල බෞද්ධයන් අතර රාවණාගේ ජනප්‍රියත්වය පිළිබඳව පර්යේෂණ ව්‍යාපෘතියකට සහභාගී වීමට ඔබ විසින් විමසීමක් සිදු කර ඇත. මෙම ව්‍යාපෘති තොරතුරු පත්‍රිකාව මගින් පර්යේෂණයේදී සිදු කරනු ලබන අධ්‍යයනයන් හා එහිදී ඔබව සහභාගී කර ගනු ලබන ආකාරය විස්තර කරයි. නෙදර්ලන්තයේ විශ්වවිද්‍යාල වල පර්යේෂකයන් හට ඔවුන්ගේ පර්යේෂණ සිදු කිරීම සඳහා ව්‍යාපෘති තොරතුරු පත්‍රිකාව හා කැමැත්ත ප්‍රකාශ කිරීමේ පත්‍රිකාව පිළියෙළ කර තිබීම අනිවාර්ය වේ. එබැවින් පිටු දෙක කෙරෙහිම දැඩි අවධානයක් යොමු කරන මෙන් මම ඔබෙන් ඉල්ලා සිටිමි. ඔබ මෙම පර්යේෂණයට සහභාගී වීමට කැමැත්තක් දක්වන්නේ නම් කැමැත්ත ප්‍රකාශ කිරීමේ පත්‍රිකාව අත්සන් කිරීමට ඔබට සිදුවේ. එමෙන්ම ඕනෑම අවස්ථාවකදී හේතුවක් නොදන්නා මෙම අධ්‍යයනයෙන් ඉවත් වීමට ඔබට හැකියාව ඇත.

මෙම ව්‍යාපෘතියේ පරමාර්ථය වනුයේ බහුතර ජනගහනය වන සිංහලයන් අතර රාවණාගේ වර්ථමාන ජනප්‍රියත්වය පිළිබඳ අවබෝධයක් ලබා ගැනීම සහ රාවණාගේ ජනප්‍රියත්වයට රාවණා සම්බන්ධව වාර්තා හා කථා සම්බන්ධ වන්නේ කෙසේද යන්න දැන ගැනීමයි. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ සිංහල බෞද්ධයන් අතර රාවණාගේ වර්ථමාන පුනර්ජීවනය ගැන සඳහන් කිරීම සඳහා මෙම ව්‍යාපෘතියේදී සඳහා 'රාවණාකරණය' යන වචනය භාවිතා කරනු ඇත.

රාවණාකරණය පිළිබඳ එක් හෝ කිහිපයක් අංශ වලින් ඔබ සමග සාකච්ඡා කිරීමට මා කැමැත්තක් දක්වන අතර ඒ සම්බන්ධයෙන් ඔබගේ සිතුවීම්, අදහස් සහ රාවණා සම්බන්ධ අත්දැකීම් පිළිබඳව මෙන්ම සිදුවීම්, කථා, වාර්තා, ස්ථාන සහ රාවණා හා සම්බන්ධ පුද්ගලයන් ගැන දැන ගැනීමට කැමැත්තෙන් සිටිමි.

සම්මුඛ පරීක්ෂණය ආසන්න වශයෙන් පැයක පමණ කාලයක් පවත්වන අතර ඒ සඳහා ස්ථානය සහ වේලාව ඔබගේ මනාපය අනුව තීරණය කල හැක. අවශ්‍ය නම් මා හට ඔබට පහසු වන ආකාරයෙන් ස්ථානයක් හා වේලාවක් සම්මුඛ පරීක්ෂණය සඳහා පිළියෙල කළ හැකිය. මෙම ව්‍යාපෘතිය සඳහා 25 දෙනෙකු සම්මුඛ පරීක්ෂණයට ලක් කෙරෙන අතර ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ තිස්වන ස්ථාන දෙකක් තුළ ක්ෂේත්‍ර ක්‍රියාකාරකම් පැවැත්වෙනු ඇත.

සම්මුඛ පරීක්ෂණයේදී ඔබ විසින් සපයනු ලබන තොරතුරු මෙම විශේෂිත පර්යේෂණ ව්‍යාපෘතිය සඳහා පර්යේෂණ අරමුණු වෙනුවෙන් යොදා ගනු ලබන අතර තවද මෙම පර්යේෂණ ක්ෂේත්‍රයේ වෙනත් පර්යේෂකයන් සමඟ එම තොරතුරු හුවමාරු කර ගනු ලැබේ. මෙම පර්යේෂණ ව්‍යාපෘතියේදී භාවිතා කරන දත්ත මාගේ නිබන්ධනය සම්පූර්ණ කිරීමෙන් පසුව ටිප්බර්ග් විශ්වවිද්‍යාලයේ දත්ත කළමනාකරණ පද්ධති වල අවම වශයෙන් අවුරුදු 10 ක් පමණ ගබඩා කර තබනු ලැබේ.

ඔබගේ පෞද්ගලික තොරතුරු පර්යේෂණයේදී නිර්නාමික ලෙස පැවතීමට අවශ්‍ය නම් එය කැමැත්ත ප්‍රකාශ කිරීමේ පත්‍රිකාවේ දැක්විය හැකිය. තවද සම්මුඛ පරීක්ෂණය පැවැත්වෙන අවස්ථාවේදී නිර්නාමිකකරණය පිළිබඳ විස්තර සාකච්ඡා කළ හැකිය.

වැඩිදුර විස්තර අවශ්‍ය නම් කරුණාකර මා හෝ මාගේ සේව්‍යෝජකයා සම්බන්ධ වන්න.

ස්තූතියි,

විශ්වාසී,

දෙබොරාන් ඩී කොනින්  
ඇමතුම් විස්තර - ඩී. ඩී. සී. ඩී කොනින් එම්ඒ  
ආචාර්ය උපාධි අපේක්ෂක, ටිල්බර්ග්  
විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය  
දුරකථන අංකය (ශ්‍රී ලංකාව)  
0768679719  
විද්‍යුත් තැපෑල - d.d.c.dekoning@tilburguniversity.edu

ඇමතුම් විස්තර - නෙදර්ලන්ත  
සේව්‍යෝජක  
හාචාර්ය. ආචාර්ය හර්මන්  
එල්.බෙක්  
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0031 13 466 2591  
විද්‍යුත් තැපෑල - h.l.beck@uvt.nl



### Consent Form Sinhala

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## Debriefing (only in English)

Dear Sir/Madam,

You have participated in a research project that concerns the current popularity of Ravana among Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. The purpose of this project is to gain insight in ritual and narrative dimensions of this phenomenon. Several research methods are employed to conduct this research.

First of all, the method of participant observation is used at two sites in Sri Lanka. These in-depth studies of the two sites constitute the core of the research project. Together with online documents, documentaries, and popular publications on Ravana they provide the researcher with extensive knowledge on contemporary and diverse expressions of the popularity of Ravana. In addition to an extensive study of the ritual and material objects related to Ravana at those sites, casual conversations and informal interviews are included to gather place-specific and object-specific information. Furthermore, these casual conversations are employed to find out more about personal stories and experiences people may have with Ravana. Finally, qualitative interviews are conducted with keypersons such as organizers of festivals and rituals, monks, priests, and frequent visitors and people who claim to have a special connection with Ravana. This research method is also used for key-informants who have no specific connections to these sites such as authors of popular books of Ravana, and archaeologists.

The research is conducted by Deborah de Koning MA, a PhD candidate from Tilburg University (the Netherlands). As being employed by a university other researchers will have access to the data as well. They also may use the information given by informants in their research output, but only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality as requested by the informant in the consent form.

The project is financed by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and for the fieldwork research conducted in 2017 and 2018 additional funding for a research assistant is provided by J. Gonda Fund Foundation. If you have any questions or remarks you can send Deborah de Koning an e-mail ([d.d.c.dekoning@tilburguniversity.edu](mailto:d.d.c.dekoning@tilburguniversity.edu)) or her supervisor in the Netherlands (prof. dr. H.L. Beck: [h.l.beck@uvt.nl](mailto:h.l.beck@uvt.nl)).

Thank you again for you co-operation.

Kind regards,

Deborah de Koning



# Tilburg Dissertations in Culture Studies

This list includes the doctoral dissertations that through their authors and/or supervisors are related to the Department of Culture Studies at the Tilburg University School of Humanities and Digital Sciences. The dissertations cover the broad field of contemporary sociocultural change in domains such as language and communication, performing arts, social and spiritual ritualization, media and politics.

- 1 Sander Bax. *De taak van de schrijver. Het poëtische debat in de Nederlandse literatuur (1968-1985)*. Supervisors: Jaap Goedegebuure and Odile Heynders, 23 May 2007.
- 2 Tamara van Schilt-Mol. *Differential item functioning en itembias in de cito-eindtoets basisonderwijs. Oorzaken van onbedoelde moeilijkheden in toetsopgaven voor leerlingen van Turkse en Marokkaanse afkomst*. Supervisors: Ton Vallen and Henny Uiterwijk, 20 June 2007.
- 3 Mustafa Güleç. *Differences in similarities: A comparative study on Turkish language achievement and proficiency in a Dutch migration context*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 25 June 2007.
- 4 Massimiliano Spotti. *Developing identities: Identity construction in multicultural primary classrooms in The Netherlands and Flanders*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Guus Extra, 23 November 2007.
- 5 A. Seza Doğruöz. *Synchronic variation and diachronic change in Dutch Turkish: A corpus based analysis*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Ad Backus, 12 December 2007.
- 6 Daan van Bel. *Het verklaren van leesgedrag met een impliciete attitudemeting*. Supervisors: Hugo Verdaasdonk, Helma van Lierop and Mia Stokmans, 28 March 2008.
- 7 Sharda Roelsma-Somer. *De kwaliteit van Hindoescholen*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Sjaak Braster, 17 September 2008.
- 8 Yonas Mesfun Asfaha. *Literacy acquisition in multilingual Eritrea: A comparative study of reading across languages and scripts*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Jeanne Kurvers, 4 November 2009.
- 9 Dong Jie. *The making of migrant identities in Beijing: Scale, discourse, and diversity*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 4 November 2009.
- 10 Elma Nap-Kolhoff. *Second language acquisition in early childhood: A longitudinal multiple case study of Turkish-Dutch children*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 12 May 2010.
- 11 Maria Mos. *Complex lexical items*. Supervisors: Antal van den Bosch, Ad Backus and Anne Vermeer, 12 May 2010.
- 12 António da Graça. *Etnische zelforganisaties in het integratieproces. Een case study in de Kaapverdise gemeenschap in Rotterdam*. Supervisor: Ruben Gowricharn, 8 October 2010.
- 13 Kasper Juffermans. *Local languaging: Literacy products and practices in Gambian society*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 13 October 2010.

- 14 Marja van Knippenberg. *Nederlands in het Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs. Een casestudy in de opleiding Helpende Zorg*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Ton Vallen and Jeanne Kurvers, 14 December 2010.
- 15 Coosje van der Pol. *Prentenboeken lezen als literatuur. Een structuralistische benadering van het concept 'literaire competentie' voor kleuters*. Supervisor: Helma van Lierop, 17 December 2010.
- 16 Nadia Eversteijn-Kluijtmans. *"All at once" – Language choice and codeswitching by Turkish-Dutch teenagers*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Ad Backus, 14 January 2011.
- 17 Mohammadi Laghzaoui. *Emergent academic language at home and at school: A longitudinal study of 3- to 6-year-old Moroccan Berber children in the Netherlands*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Ton Vallen, Abderrahman El Aissati and Jeanne Kurvers, 9 September 2011.
- 18 Sinan Çankaya. *Buiten veiliger dan binnen. In- en uitsluiting van etnische minderheden binnen de politieorganisatie*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Frank Bovenkerk, 24 October 2011.
- 19 Femke Nijland. *Mirroring interaction: An exploratory study into student interaction in independent working*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Sanneke Bolhuis, Piet-Hein van de Ven and Olav Severijnen, 20 December 2011.
- 20 Youssef Boutachekourt. *Exploring cultural diversity. Concurrentieoordelen uit multiculturele strategieën*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Slawek Magala, 14 March 2012.
- 21 Jef Van der Aa. *Ethnographic monitoring: Language, narrative and voice in a Caribbean classroom*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 8 June 2012.
- 22 Özel Bağcı. *Acculturation orientations of Turkish immigrants in Germany*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 3 October 2012.
- 23 Arnold Pannenburg. *Big men playing football: Money, politics and foul play in the African game*. Supervisor: Wouter van Beek, 12 October 2012.
- 24 Ico Maly, N-VA. *Analyse van een politieke ideologie*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 23 October 2012.
- 25 Daniela Stoica. *Dutch and Romanian muslim women converts: Inward and outward transformations, new knowledge perspectives and community rooted narratives*. Supervisors: Enikő Vincze and Jan Jaap de Ruiter, 30 October 2012.
- 26 Mary Scott. *A chronicle of learning: Voicing the text*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert, Sjaak Kroon and Jef Van der Aa, 27 May 2013.
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- 30 Pascal Touoyem. *Dynamiques de l'ethnicité en Afrique. Éléments pour une théorie de l'État multi-national*. Supervisors: Wouter van Beek and Wim van Binsbergen, 18 February 2014.

- 31 Behrooz Moradi Kakesh. *Het islamitisch fundamentalisme als tegenbeweging. Iran als case study*. Supervisors: Herman Beck and Wouter van Beek, 6 June 2014.
- 32 Elina Westinen. *The discursive construction of authenticity: Resources, scales and polycentricity in Finnish hip hop culture*. Supervisors: Sirpa Leppänen and Jan Blommaert, 15 June 2014.
- 33 Alice Leri. *Who is Turkish American? Investigating contemporary discourses on Turkish Americanness*. Supervisors: Odile Heynders and Piia Varis, 9 September 2014.
- 34 Jaswina Elahi. *Etnische websites, behoeften en netwerken. Over het gebruik van internet door jongeren*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Sjaak Kroon, 10 September 2014.
- 35 Bert Danckaert. *Simple present*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Odile Heynders, 29 October 2014.
- 36 Fie Velghe. *'This is almost like writing': Mobile phones, learning and literacy in a South African township*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert, Sjaak Kroon and Piia Varis, 3 December 2014.
- 37 Nico de Vos. *Lichamelijke verbondenheid in beweging. Een filosofisch onderzoek naar intercorporaliteit in de hedendaagse danskunst*. Supervisors: Odile Heynders and Frans van Peperstraten, 16 December 2014.
- 38 Danielle Boon. *Adult literacy education in a multilingual context: Teaching, learning and using written language in Timor-Leste*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Jeanne Kurvers, 17 December 2014.
- 39 Liesbeth Hoeven. *Een boek om in te wonen. De verhaalcultuur na Auschwitz*. Supervisors: Erik Borgman and Maaïke de Haardt, 21 January 2015.
- 40 Laurie Faro. *Postponed monuments in the Netherlands: Manifestation, context, and meaning*. Supervisors: Paul Post and Rien van Uden, 28 January 2015.
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- 80 Jan Verhagen. *Psychiatry and religion: Controversies and consensus*. Supervisors: Rien van Uden and G. Glas, 17 April 2019.
- 81 Gözde Demirel. *The relationship between acculturation and language development of Turkish immigrant children*. Supervisors: Kutlay Yağmur and Fons van de Vijver, 3 May 2019.
- 82 Leon Jackson. *Diversity management in the new South Africa: An acculturation approach*. Supervisors: Fons van de Vijver † and Kutlay Yağmur, 19 June 2019.
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