Contemporary dynamics in religious practices: community multiple embeddedness and conflicting encounters between Buddhist monks and the laity in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Informed by the concept of discourse community (DC), this empirical research involving 759 participants critically explores the conflicting encounters between Buddhist monks (monks) and the laity in Sri Lanka owing to unorthodox discursive practices emerging from community multiple embeddedness (multiple embeddedness). A discourse community consists of a group of people who pursue specific goals and engage in practices (discursive practices) common to them; multiple embeddedness occurs when members of such a community share common goals and practices unique to different discourse communities. What is new in this research is that it unravels the root causes of unorthodox practices of monks which pose challenges to traditionalist discourses relating to Buddhism. A wealth of evidence derived from the qualitative data reveals that monks can no longer adhere to their ordination practices in pristine reality since they are being subjected to new social dynamics in tune with a variety of imperatives; hence, the boundary between monkhood and worldliness is increasingly becoming blurred engendering conflicts instead of peace.

Keywords: peaceful co-existence; Buddhist monks; conflicting discursive practices; multiple embeddedness; socio-religious interactions

Public significance statement

This study explores socially unacceptable practices of Buddhist monks as a result of their active interactions with two discourse communities: university students and politicians in Sri Lanka. Most lay persons are disillusioned with these relatively new behaviour patterns of monks as opposed to the teachings of the Buddha. Hence, conflicting encounters between monks and lay persons are not uncommon. In these contexts, the need for reconciliation and peace initiatives is strongly felt.

Introduction

Traditionally cherished discursive practices of Buddhist monks (monks) have undergone changes as has never been before, particularly in Asia (Harris, 2001; Ulanov & Badmaev, 2015). Taking monks in Sri Lanka as a discourse community (DC), this empirical research critically explores their multiple embeddedness and the resultant conflicting encounters with the laity. Being aware of the fact that DCs are by no means fossilized or non-dynamic societal entities, some practices unique to monks could still be identified, and they are referred to as 'ordination practices' which have been preserved and maintained since the late 6th century BCE. However, this community is currently facing formidable challenges to retain its heritage.

In Sri Lanka, Theravada Buddhism is practised as opposed to Mahayana. The former holds a conservative view that Buddhism should be based solely on the teachings of the Buddha whereas the latter promotes flexibility and localisation. According to Buddhist chronicles, monks should remain novices or apprentices in observing the duties of preordination period until they reach the age of 20 when they become eligible for higher ordination. For a monk to be ordained or to be enculturated and assimilated into this community with the status of a full-fledged monk, he has to undergo an ordination procedure and the accompanying ceremonious rituals usually organised and performed by a senior monk in a temple premises (Gombrich, 1995; Swearer, 2010). It is mandatory that monks should follow ordination practices in order to lead a spiritual life with monastic discipline. These practices include, but are not limited to, the following: familiarity with the teachings of the Buddha; maintenance of the tradition of Buddhist way of life; responsibility for educating the followers; participation in a variety of discursive practices such as delivering sermons, chanting religious verses, organising religious festivals; tolerance and understanding; commitment to nonviolence and sympathy for the suffering; dependence on

followers for food and other necessities; abstinence from intoxicants, stealing, sensual pleasure, telling lies, accepting money, and killing, any living being (Gombrich, 1995; Rahula, 1974; Rathanasara, 1995). These criteria of ordination practices are an integral part of this DC, and they constitute Buddhist monkhood.

For centuries, monks have been counselors to Sinhalese Buddhist rulers in Sri Lanka (Rahula, 1966, 1974), and since the country gained independence in 1948, advisors to political parties in power, and also not in power, while fostering Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology (DeVotta, 2007; Bartholomeusz, 2002). Some monks themselves have been politicians representing people in parliament and directly involved in state affairs. Today, it is a usual occurrence for politicians and politically important people to pay courtesy calls to Chief Monks prior to their official assumption and resumption of political roles, a practice which constantly reminds people of the supreme power vested in monks. The cumulative effect of this socio-political and historical situatedness of monks is that semiotically they possess and exhibit an image that signifies undeniable and indisputable power and authority. However, in recent years, the advisory roles of some of these monks have turned out to be aggressive or militant roles, diametrically opposed to their ordination practices. Another dimension is the politicisation of the institution of Buddhism in more conspicuous ways unprecedented in the history of Sri Lanka.

Despite the ceremonious ordination rites, this DC is currently facing challenges to retain its intrinsic identity in a broader context of society. At a macro level, new social dynamics relating to ethnicity, religion, language, and power, and also the scourge of a 29-year-old civil war have in the past five decades or so jolted the foundations of this DC, losing the confidence of its stakeholders: the laity. The societal architecture of Sri Lanka is characterised by a prominent feature where religion, ethnicity, and politics are intermingled in ways more contradictory than complementary.

Sri Lanka is a small island in the Indian ocean with a multicultural population of approximately 22 million. Endowed with a rich cultural heritage, it gained independence from the British administration in 1948. Indisputably, and not surprisingly too, the post-independence Sri Lanka has witnessed more inter-ethnoreligious conflicts than inter-ethnoreligious cooperation and peace and the latter has often been confined to tokenist discourses (Chandrasoma, 2021; Grant, 2009)). However, when this article was being revised in July 2022, a new wave of hope emerged from a group of predominantly young people including monks clamouring for an immediate end to gross mismanagement of the economy and the rampant corrupt practices of some politicians in Sri Lanka. This avant-garde movement has ousted the president and the prime minister of the country; the future developments remain unpredictable. It is beyond the scope of this article to comment on the current political, economic, and social issues adversely affecting the people of this country.

Literature Review

To the best of my knowledge, empirical research on the nexus between monks and multiple embeddedness in terms of DCs published in English refereed journals is rare. Much of the literature on monks is premised on the analyses of political and religious animosities, social inequalities, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology, majoritarianism, and ethnoreligious exclusiveness among followers of Buddhism in a Sri Lankan context. (De Votta, 2007; Mihlar, 2019; Morrison, 2020; Stewart, 2014). Some scholars have also highlighted the fossilised and lethal combination of religion, ethnicity, and politics which hinders peaceful co-existence. In particular, they have made diachronic analyses of this socio-political phenomenon (e.g., Ali, 2014; Gunatilleke, 2018; Herath & Rambukwella, 2015). The dehumanising impact of hate speech or words of violence in ethno-religious and socio-political contexts in South Asia has also attracted the attention of some scholars (e.g., Piazza, 2020; Pohjonen & Udupa, 2017; Samaratunge & Hattotuwa, 2014).

Theoretical framework

Multiple embeddedness: primary DC and secondary DC/s

In the context of this study, multiple embeddedness is construed as a socio-religious phenomenon where several different DCs are embedded within each other ushering in complex socio-religious implications. The main characteristic of a DC, according to Swales (1990, 2017), is that its members possess common goals and discursive practices that reflect their social identities. People usually construct, modify, and abandon their identities by observing who they are for themselves and who they are in relation to others in society. In this sense, community embeddedness and disembeddedness (Paffrath & Grabow, 2022) involve a self-regularization process (Turner, 1987).

Multiple embeddedness occurs when a particular DC is embedded in one or more DCs. These instances invariably necessitate boundary crossing from one DC to another. For example, a monk teaching in a public school while pursuing studies at a university on weekends belongs to three DCs: first, the monks as a DC, which I might call the primary DC, second, the monks as teachers in a DC, and third, the monks as university students in a DC. The last two can be identified as secondary DCs, and they foreground deviation from common goals and practices of a primary DC. These situations pave the way for multiple embeddedness where some monks become active members of various DCs in addition to their own as a result of their varied preferences contingent on values, beliefs, attitudes, ideologies, and discursive practices. Discursive practices are the practices unique to a particular discourse community. For example, discursive practices of monks include, but are not limited to, delivering sermons, organizing various religious ceremonies, providing advice to the laity, propagating the teachings of the Buddha, attending funeral rites, and meditation.

I have used critical discourse analytic perspectives (CDA) for data analysis purposes. This multidisciplinary paradigm, which places much emphasis on implicit meanings of

discourse, enabled me to critically investigate issues pertaining to religion, ethnicity, identity, politics, societal power structures, and education (Wodak, 2011). Furthermore, extra sentential dimensions of utterances can be subjected to rigorous critical scrutiny using the resources of CDA. Even at word/phrase level, participants in this research made specific lexical choices, and CDA enabled me to decipher their concealed meanings in terms of social, cultural, and political implications.

Multiple embeddedness in monks ranges from university students, teachers, politicians, activists, journalists to astrologers, migrant students, indigenous doctors, and investors. In view of this wide canvas, this study specifically focuses on university students and politicians as monks' secondary DCs.

Methodology

Research sites

I embarked on this research in the first week of June, 2019 and it was completed in the last week of September, 2021, taking almost 27 months due to unforeseen circumstances (COVID 19 pandemic). This study is anchored in six research sites in Sri Lanka: a Buddhist temple in a semi-urban area, and a university with colleges located in Colombo, Rathnapura, Kandy, Galle, and Kurunegala where I was teaching a core discipline while being engaged in this research. These sites add a strong ethnographic element and a demographic diversity to this research.

Research questions

I have used two research questions to manage the content, establish a clear focus, and enhance the research strength:

- How are monks implicated in conflicting encounters with the laity owing to multiple embeddedness?

- What impact do unorthodox discursive practices of monks exercise on the laity?

Research instruments and participants

As research instruments, nine qualitative interviews, and a closed-ended anonymous questionnaire in English completed by 750 adult subjects were used. The interviewees comprised three monks and six laypersons from the semi urban area. Seven-hundred-fifty adult participants drawn from the five districts (150 from each district) completed the closed-ended questionnaire. The majority of these respondents (426) were Buddhist working students enrolled in different English medium courses at five colleges of a university in Sri Lanka. The questionnaire was designed to elicit vital information about monks' unorthodox discursive practices and their impact on laypersons.

I used three main criteria for selecting these 759 research participants who voluntarily took part in this research after completing informed consent forms: first, their English speaking ability, second, age (25-65), and third, demographic representation. All the participants were able to speak and understand general English so that I could understand them and I could also be understood by them. Demographically, these adult participants from five districts represented a truly cross sectional population from different walks of life: bank clerks, monks, shop keepers, students, taxi drivers, teachers, and various office workers.

Ethical considerations

This research complies with the human research ethics guidelines of the University of Technology Sydney. Prior to the interviews and administration of the questionnaire, it was explained to all participants that their biographical information and institutional identities would be treated in the strictest confidence during and after the interviews, and that recorded interviews were for research purposes with the possibility of subsequent publication.
The nine interviewees were identified by their preferred names: three monks from a temple in a semi urban area: Kassapa, Rathana (second-year university students), and their chief monk, Wanawasi; six nearby laypersons: Danushka, (primary school teacher), Sunil (retired police

officer), Douglas (television journalist from a national television channel), Wikrama (shop keeper), Donald (final year university student)), and Viraj (provincial reporter for an English newspaper).

Data Collection

The anonymous questionnaire was completed by 750 respondents two months prior to the nine qualitative interviews. This arrangement enabled me to prepare interview questions with specific focus on monks' unorthodox discursive practices. Time slots (30 to 45 minutes) for completing the questionnaire were allocated to each respondent and the researcher had one meeting with each individual participant for this purpose.

The mutually agreed-upon nine interviews, each ranging from 45 to 60 minutes, were recorded and transcribed. At times, code mixing occurred using the respondents' first language (Sinhala), and such words/phrases were italicised in the text with their English equivalents within brackets. Unstructured and informal interview questions were in plain English and occasionally simplifications were introduced. Primary data were obtained from the above mentioned sources whereas influential scholarly publications, media reports, and the social media constituted the secondary data.

Data Analysis

The primary data from the transcripts of the recorded interviews were correlated with the qualitative data from the completed anonymous questionnaires. The following table with 10 items listed in it illustrates some salient information stemming from the interviews:

Table 1. Anonymous questionnaire data from 750 respondents

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
1. Buddhist monks should study only at *pirivenas* (traditional monastic educational institutes).	682	21	47
2. Buddhist monks' participation in violent demonstrations cannot be acceptable.	721	29	0

3.	There are often conflicts between monks and *dayyakayan* (laity) due to monks' misbehaviour.	664	72	14
4.	Ragging by Buddhist monks at universities should be banned.	750	0	0
5.	All Buddhist monks should avoid political activities.	732	18	0
6.	Most people respect monks because of their yellow robes without considering their bad (unethical) behaviour in society.	581	162	7
7.	These priests in urban areas greatly influence the ones in rural areas.	542	123	85
8.	According to newspaper reports, some Buddhist priests are engaged in unethical practices.	607	122	21
9.	Buddhist monks should change their traditional moral values in keeping with the changes in society.	08	736	06
10.	Most lay persons seem to be unhappy about Buddhist monks' disregard for *upasampada* values. (Ordination practices).	564	168	18

Results

Power in Street demonstrations

Universities by virtue of their being the traditionally acknowledged highest seat of education not only construct, and disseminate knowledge of various disciplines but they also contribute to defining power relations in new social dynamics. Multiple embedded monks as university students are also implicated in these power structures. For example, Kassapa, one of the monks I interviewed from the semi-urban temple, commented on the irresistible desire to follow other students' participatory roles and strategies particularly in street demonstrations which frequently turn out to be violent in the vicinity of the capital city of

Colombo. He further added that such activities usually occur on the spur of the moment, and that they are neither premeditated actions nor errors in judgment:

> Researcher: … As you know street demonstrations are very common these days and most university students take part in them. I've seen few monks also joining these demonstrations. This is obviously against Buddha's teachings, What do you think?
>
> Kassapa: Yes, this is new to us and against Buddhism. They do it because other students do it. They follow them…
>
> R: Monks in rural areas also make demonstrations in streets, but they are not university students. Why do they also behave like that?
>
> K: This is bad influence. They copy us, and it happens as you know…

Kassapa's comment, "This is bad influence. They copy us, and it happens" denotes new discursive practices seeping from urban areas into rural areas. The polarised relations between the laity and the monks due to these discourses of violence were revealed at the interview I had with Danushka, a primary school teacher:

> Researcher: What do you think of Buddhist monks' violent activities in the streets?
>
> Danushka: I watch TV news every night, and I was watching TV last weekend. I saw how Buddhist monks fighting in the streets. Yes, very near the parliament building. Very common these days. Against these private medical colleges. You know *Upadhi Kada* (Degree shops or boutiques)
>
> R: Who are these monks?
>
> D: From the campus. They have no fear because people are silent. They should not do that. I am Buddhist but I can't see that behaviour. So how can we follow them? It is a problem...

The fact that the teacher "can't see that behavior" and the rhetorical question, "So how can we follow them?" clearly reveal a social dimension of the discourse of religion centred on an unacceptable discursive practice which is capable of thwarting the sensibilities of the Buddhist laity. It also condenses the identity crisis of the monks and also the speaker: "I am Buddhist, but I can't see that behaviour." Moreover, the rhetorical question framed in the second person plural 'we' also adumbrates the conflictual relations between monks and the laity, emerging from multiple embeddedness and the resultant unorthodox discursive practices.

Dhanushka's \innocent remark "They have no fear because people are silent" epitomises at a social level the Gramscian notion that people accept power without questioning or challenging (Gramsci, 1971). It is noticeable that large scale violent demonstrations organised by university students including monks in urban areas have morphed into new practices in the form of acts of protest in mostly impoverished rural areas targeting grass root level crucial issues such as wild elephant attacks on people and their property, lack of roads accessing remote villages, poor sanitary facilities, infrastructural facilities for primary and secondary education, drought relief, and various other poverty-related issues. The questionnaire data emphasise the fact that the laity are by no means content with these activities which foreshadow monks' recalcitrant attitude to their ordination practices (see item 2, Table 1).

At extra sentential level, Dhanushka's comments foreshadow the cognitive dimension of communication, too. We can decipher at least three prominent discourses here: political discourse, discourse of higher education, and discourse of the monks. Semiotically, parliament building is a signifier which denotes the presence of parliamentarians as law making and law enforcement authorities and what we witness here is a reference to an enactment of a serious street drama depicting power versus power: the power of monks and

the power of politicians. In fact, these dialogic (Bakhtin, 1986) power structures: the historically concretised power vested in the monks as representatives of the majority Sinhalese Buddhists, and the political power of the members of parliament as representatives of the people who elected them to power, are also part of societal epistemologies which could be fathomed by informed listeners, readers and spectators depending on the mode of communication.

In recent years, there have been a significant number of reports in the local media on the active participation of monks in street demonstrations. A recent newspaper report for example highlights the monks' involvement in demonstrations and also the subsequent legal action against them:

> 21 students who protested opposite the University Grants Commission in a makeshift tent have been arrested. The police noted that there are two monks among the students who have been detained… They were produced before the Hulftsdorp magistrate's court and were placed in remand custody (Staff Writer, March 1, 2020, p. 4).

What, then, are the implications of this unruly behavior of some monks for our understanding of contemporary social dynamics? First, as university students (secondary DC), multiple embeddedness persuades the monks to resort to violence almost spontaneously. These anti-ordination practices are transferred to rural areas through the social media and television, not necessarily through social interaction. As delineated in media reports, they even reach remote areas such as Ambalantota about 260 km from Colombo, the epicenter of street demonstrations:

> At least 21 people were injured during clashes between Sri Lankan government supporters, security forces and a coalition of Buddhist monks and local villagers, in Ambalantota. As monks and villagers marched, government

supporters and police tried to disperse them using tear gas, water cannon and eventually firing hydrants at them. (Ada Derana, January 7, 2017).

Power relations and the discourse of ragging

A discursive practice that has been very popular for decades among many university students in Sri Lanka is ragging, a practice often aimed at humiliating, harassing, and torturing new entrants under the pretext of enculturating or acculturating them into the university culture. Such behavior patterns often manifest themselves as psychologically, verbally, and physically tormenting experiences for freshmen (Matthews, 1995; Premadasa et al, 2011).

The interview I had with Rathana, a second year university student, was a revealing one for several reasons:

Researcher: …Have you seen monks practicing this ragging in the university?

Rathana: Yes, yes, I see them every year. They rag first year monks, and have fun.

Researcher: How do they rag? Have you seen some indecent, I mean, bad things done to them?

Rathana: No, no (laughing). Normal things like (laughing) the difference between the temple and campus.

Researcher: OK so, how did they rag you when you were a first year student?

Rathana: No, no, not much.

Researcher: Really? Why not? Any reasons?

Rathana: Yes. They knew my big temple. Not this temple. They knew from my name. It is a very high level …***Parshavaya*** (sector) and our ***Nayaka Thero*** (Chief Monk) specially...

Researcher: Highly respectable?

Rathana: Yes, yes.

Researcher: Is your temple politically important?

Rathana: Yes, very very important…

Researcher: OK, so your Chief Monk is not happy about this   practice,

I mean ragging?

Rathana: All monks don't like it, but we do because we are also students

Here…

The monk's use of "fun", a term heavily code-mixed by people in Sri Lanka regardless of their first language, foreshadows with its pejorative overtones his attitude and resistance to prevalent anti-ragging discourses. It also underestimates the atrocities experienced by students exposed to ragging, and it may also serve a cathartic function here, at least temporarily, crossing the rigid boundaries of ordination practices of his primary DC.

The meaning behind laughter in the middle of a conversational interview is sometimes difficult to perceive. It could be conjectured that a quite plausible answer in the affirmative is deliberately suspended here by the laughter ('no,no'. [laughing]). Perhaps, the concealed truth might have been that he was subjected to ragging but not to the extent experienced by other monks. This laughter may also indicate Rathana's tension emerging from conflicting practices between his primary DC and secondary DC.

Moreover, Rathana's remark, "we are also students here", demonstrates his strong sense of belonging to the secondary DC: university student community. It also illustrates the radicalisation of discursive practices of Rathana's primary DC as a corollary to multiple embeddedness. The reason for Rathana not being subjected to harsh ragging indicates the hegemonically defined power structures associated with this discursive practice. Viewed from a socio-political perspective, it becomes evident how ragging has also been subjected to politicization adding another power structure either superior or equivalent to religion.

Furthermore, the fact that "all monks don't like it" and that student monks indulge in it problematizes the conflict between ordination practices of this DC and the discursive practices of the secondary DC (university students). According to a recent telecast, 22 university students including two monks were charged with ragging and arrested by the police and remanded on a court order (Hiru Newsreader, 2020). It is worth mentioning here that a staggering 98% of the respondents who completed the questionnaire disapproved of this habit (see item.4, Table 1). A newspaper report further exposes the gravity of this discursive practice:

> … A Sri Lankan court further remanded five Buddhist monk students, who were charged with ragging of a freshman monk student last month, when they were produced before the Matara Magistrate Court yesterday (Colombo Page, August 21, 2018).

Such atrocities and cruelties inflicted on people are forbidden since "Violence in any form, under any pretext whatsoever, is absolutely against the teaching of the Buddha" (Rahula, 1974, p. 5). The two laypersons (Sunil and Wickrama) I interviewed interpreted these episodes as blatant violation of the principles of non-violence and compassion which are fundamental tenets of Buddhism. They further added that the students seem to derive a sadistic satisfaction out of ragging. On the other hand, the news reporter (Viraj) and the television journalist (Douglas) were of the view that telecast of such episodes is newsworthy in terms of spectators' general predilection for witnessing rebellious behavior of certain groups of community who have traditionally been acknowledged to behave in disciplined ways.

According to Wickrama (a village shop keeper), the attribution of responsibility for the unruly and unethical behavior of monks to university-oriented discourses like ragging and street demonstrations is shared by many people in the community (see item 4, Table 1). The

implication here is that such practices are by no means isolated incidents; they are university academic year-based regular events, indeed.

Politics and the rise of hegemony

In recent years, discourses surrounding conflictual relations between Sinhalese Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka have assumed political proportions. Furthermore, interactive texts in the social media have captured some episodes where aggressive university student monks without any compassion or mercy threaten a group of Muslim refugees from Myanmar. For example, referring to police officers who provided protection for the refugees, one anonymous monk unleashed his anger in abusive and pejorative terms: "These police officers with their tummies swollen with beef work only for the whims and fancies of the Muslims". In this single sentence, discourses of ethnicity, Islamophobia, law enforcement agencies, and xenophobia are interwoven in a sarcastic way. The monk codifies his animosity with strong verbal outbursts in Sinhala and occasional code mixing in Tamil and English:

> *...me inne mynmar indala apu bauddain laksha gaanak ghathanaya karapu Mynmar thrasthawadeen...polisiye arakshawa meda den eliyata yanna hadanne. LTTE mathakay, eka minis paurak hadaa gaththa. Ei wage moun kuda lamunge paurak hadaagena uthsaha karanne thrastha waadayak newathath sthapitha karanna. Muslim deshapalakayange uwamanawan matha... harak mas kilo ganan gahala idimichcha badawal sahitha me polis niladharin Thambinge uwamanawan sandaha pamanai katayuthu karanne...ponga, ponga, go back, go back. This is my country. Go back to Mynmar. This is my country.* (The Rohingya Post, September 26, 2017)*).*
>
> *(...Having killed more than a hundred thousand Buddhists, these Mynmar terrorists have landed in Sri Lanka... They are going out with police protection. Remember, LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil EElam) with their*

*human shields. Similar to those, these people have made a shield with small children in order to reintroduce terrorism here, following the Muslim politicians' wish. These police officers with their tummies swollen with beef satisfy the whims and fancies of the Moslems (**Thambinge**). Go back, Go back (**Ponga, Ponga**). This is my country. Go back to Mynmar. This is my country).*

These emotionally charged comments illustrate Islamophobic, xenophobic, and anti-refugee consciousness of the monks and the people (obviously the proponents of anti-Islam discourse) surrounding them, ventilating their nationalist sentiments. It is significant that in the midst of these derogatory remarks levelled against the Mynmar refugees, the monk repeats three times the term "ponga", a Tamil word meaning "go back". Linguistic entanglements are conspicuous here; the official language and the second language in Myanmar are Burmese and English respectively. Tamil is not used in Mynmar, and these refugees are obviously ignorant of the meaning of this Tamil word. However, the monk is using its attributive social semiotic associations with the Tamil ethnic minority in Sri Lanka and the accompanying pejorative connotations to rebuke the refugees for their presence in Sri Lanka.

Another term of contempt, 'Thambiya' with its metaphoric rigour, seems to target the entire Muslim community of Sri Lanka ('Thambi' is a Tamil word meaning 'younger brother'. However, among Sinhala speaking people, it refers to a 'Muslim person'). Within the discourse of refugees or asylum seekers, we notice how the discourse of Tamils and the discourse of Muslims are invoked here through these linguistic manipulations. In making these comments, he uses three languages: Sinhala as the main language, and English and Tamil for code mixing purposes. It evident that these linguistic entanglements and the associated political ideologies demonstrate the nationalist ideology ingrained in the minds of these monks. The triangular nexus involving Muslims, Tamils, and Sinhalese in a Sri Lankan

context merits further analysis. For decades, the majority of Sinhalese people have been at logger heads with the two ethnic minority groups: Tamils and Muslims for political, cultural, linguistic, and religious reasons (McGilvray & Raheem. 2007; Stewart, 2014). Why do people in the three main ethnic groups harbour pessimistic attitudes towards one another? In most instances, historically situated stereotyped negativisation appears to be the culprit.

It is also apparent here that the metaphoric expression "shield" adds to these innuendos, threats, and admonitions couched in abusive terms. In contrast to its social associations, the cognitive dimension of the metaphor can exemplify the long established ethno-religious exclusiveness of the monks. In the monk's remarks, the metaphor 'shield' in 'human shield' is used to link LTTE with the Muslim activists both in and beyond Sri Lanka. In other words, discourses of LTTE and Mynmar refugees along with the Sri Lankan Muslims coalesce into the metaphor 'shield' while relaying the contemporary discourses of Islamophobia, xenophobia, and Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideologies. This amateurish interactive text may also contribute to further perpetuating and concretising these animosities.

The metaphoric impetus of "shield" should deserve further analysis here. A deconstructionist reading of this metaphor would reveal that the monk is using his saffron robe as a shield, which is hegemonised in the local context for wielding more power than the human shield alleged to have been used by the Mynmar refugees. This power obviously helps him demonise the refugees in the absence of any opposition from the crowd including the police. His tone has been dictatorial throughout the episodes, and he challenges and abuses the police officers displaying his self-proclaimed immunity from prosecution. Such behaviour patterns are an affront to the ordination practices monks are supposed to comply with.

According to the questionnaire data, out of 750 respondents, 581 believe that most people respect the saffron (yellow) robe regardless of monks' unethical behaviour in society. The iconicity of the power carved into the saffron robe can also create contexts and

discourses, too. Consider, for example, the monk's claim that Myanmar refugees have come to "reintroduce and establish terrorism again" (*thrastha waadayak newathath sthapitha karanna)* in Sri Lanka. This claim could well be a stretch of his imagination, but it appears to be convincing to the emotionally charged and politically driven mob of supporters. In a Sri Lankan context, the architecture of power in monks and their discursive practices are historically established and defined.

Violent demonstrations with their strong theatrical elements have potential for attracting huge audiences to popular media. However, orthodox lay persons believe that no extenuating circumstances should warrant such behaviour. Media reports very often reflect social reality, and a recent newspaper editorial captures the monks' unethical behaviour patterns in unequivocal terms:

> Buddhist monks today are deeply involved in matters that are incongruous with the teachings of the Buddha. The more militant among them are often seen whipping up racist sentiments which are quite opposed to the Buddha's teaching of love and compassion towards all beings. There are also monks who cause agony and despair to the sick by getting their trade union members to resort to work stoppages in hospitals, whereas, a prime injunction of the Buddha was to treat and care for the sick. There are also monks who have fallen prey to the lure of NGOs while others are deep into business activities. (Editor, *Ceylon Daily News*, March 29, 2019).

Tokenist discourses and asymmetrical power relations

I also interviewed Donald, a Catholic student from a university in a Colombo suburb in the hope of receiving a different identity-oriented view of ragging and multiple embeddedness:

Researcher:.. Do you think Buddhist monks are same as other students? I mean their behaviour on campus.

Donald: Yes, sir. They are normal like us. Can't see any difference.

R: How about ragging and street demonstrations?

D: Yes. They are like us. Only difference is the robes. Buddhist priests are the majority and they can do anything.

R: You mean powerful.

D: Yes sir, powerful, people respect...

Donald's lexical choices such as "robes", "majority", "powerful", "Buddhist priests are the majority", and "they can do anything" reveal the asymmetrical power relations based on minority-majority divide, religion, and the accompanying social semiotic resources such as saffron robes. These attributes appear to be some of the reasons for the monk's intrepid behaviour patterns.

A similar view was shared by Sunil who confessed that he now respects the yellow robe but not the monks. The iconicity and the metaphoric intensity of the saffron robe are foregrounded in his utterances illustrating the social and cognitive dimensions of this metaphor:

Researcher: …Why do you respect the yellow robe only?

Sunil: I was a ***dayakaya*** (Member layperson) in a temple, but things not right, so I changed to another temple.

R: What things not right?

S: Lot of things like no discipline, smoking and…

R: So who are these priests?

S: ***Nayaka Swaminwahanse*** (Chief Monk) is OK but the young educated ones the problem.

R: Can you please explain 'young educated ones'?

S: Yes, they are the campus (university) ones...

R: And why *Nayaka Swaminwahanse* is OK?

S: *Unnanse* (Venourable He) follows the old way, the discipline way…

According to Sunil, "the old way, the discipline[d] way" is preferable to the new values of the "young educated ones", or "the campus ones". What we witness here is a conflicting encounter between the clergy and the laity emanating from the multiple embeddedness and unorthodox discursive practices.

Campus (university) culture and challenges to official hierarchies

Campus culture and challenges to official hierarchies were important issues discussed with the chief monk of the temple. He emphasised that most young monks have a tendency to absorb patterns of behavior that are largely confined to laypersons while the elderly ones prefer to lead a traditional way of life with monastic discipline:

Researcher: ... young monks seem to move away from the traditional way of life in and outside of a temple. What do you think?

Wanawasi: It is true. Young ones studying in campus. They are different from us and difficult to correct them. R: Why? Why is it difficult to correct?

W: Things around us are also different. The society has changed. You can see FACE BOOK and other things. These things confuse young monks. You can see all of them have cell phones. Watch films and teledramas. We advise them and but as you know no point. Our **dayakayas** (the laity) are upset about this…

Wanawasi's observation that "Things around us are different. The society has changes. You can see FACE BOOK and other things", denotes common knowledge at social level. Viewed from a cognitive perspective, the glamour of the social media and the

sophisticated devices such as cell phones have obviously enticed young monks into unorthodox discursive practices. In particular, his emphasis on "FACE BOOK" stood out at the interview targeting the discursive practices associated with "the young ones in campus". As Rathanasara explicates, "Entertainment, pleasure seeking, and music" are part of worldly life (1995, p. 49). Therefore, watching films and teledramas is a taboo for ordained monks.

According to Wanawasi, much to the dismay of the clergy and also the laity, instances of some gainfully employed young graduate monks deserting their temples in favour of worldly cravings are not rare. Tertiary qualifications are often a spring board for young monks to secure employment, particularly in the education sector. Their reluctance to follow the advice and guidance given by chief monks mark the beginning of the radicalisation process culminating in the secularisation of a series of ordination practices.

Incongruous literacy practices: interdisciplinary impasse

Multiple embedded discursive practices at times contribute to creating confusion among the laity. For example, Rathana confessed that in a sermon, he followed the procedure for making a visual presentation which he often accomplished in the academy observing generic integrity. However, according to him, the responses from the laypersons in the audience were very discouraging as evidenced by the comments such as '*Api pansalata aawe naatya balanda n eme; apita ona honda bana; api aawe Honda bana ahanda*' (We didn't come to temple for watching dramas. We need good sermons; we came to listen to good sermons). What is echoed in these remarks is that this literacy practice frequently used in academic discourse has proved to be unpalatable to the laity and that such innovative approaches are deemed to be attempts at aestheticising Buddhist sermons. Sermons in a Buddhist temple, usually held in the evenings are highly ritualistic discursive practices where formal invitation is given to a monk in advance, and immediately before the sermon certain offerings are made using betel leaves in addition to elaborate seating arrangements for the

monk befitting respect and honour. In such a formal situation, these traditional speech genres (e.g. sermons) are introduced and they are common ordination practices. However, Rathana deviated from this traditionally honoured genre by introducing in the midst of his sermon a visual text - a genre incongruous with the ordination practices. This is a situation where interdisciplinary discursive practices (Chandrasoma, 2010; Bhatia, 1993) can create deleterious effect on the laity. Moreover, this episode illustrates the discourse process from a common discursive practice to a literacy practice in the academy premised in cognitive domains.

Discussion

Most monks embedded in the secondary DC of university students are represented in televisually disseminated discourses of violence, reprisals, reprimands, and threats ranging from pelting stones and throwing various other debris to physical harassment and verbal abuse in street demonstrations in Sri Lanka. Very often, these monks target members of law enforcement agencies in the front line who usually erect various barriers preventing the mob of students from reaching the political authorities. According to 721 respondents who completed the questionnaire, monks' participation in violent demonstrations is not acceptable at all.

At the interview with Wanawasi, multiple embeddedness emerging from monks being university students and the consequent impact on monasticism was convincingly illustrated. In particular, his reference to 'Young ones studying in campus' is also linked to generation gap segregating the senior monks without university education from the young student monks pursuing tertiary education. According to him, these young monks' intrepid and assertive behavior patterns have frustrated the laity: 'Our **dayakayas** (the laity) are upset about this').

During the interviews, it was apparent that monks were directly involved in political discourse with conspicuous leanings on the Sinhalese majority while being oblivious of their

role as monks in society. Hence, in these situations, temples have become discursive sites or domains for amalgamating politics, ethnicity, language, and religion. Usually divided between political parties and campaigning for the ruling parties as well as opposition parties, political voice of monks becomes predominant and their media presence extraordinarily prominent during the months before a general election in Sri Lanka.

The chaotic atmosphere in temples emerging from the discursive practices associated with multiple embeddedness was the theme of the chief monk's responses to my questions. He was disgruntled at the behavior patterns of young monks pursuing studies at universities in Sri Lanka. According to him not only do these episodes of unruly behavior of monks frequently highlighted on national TV channels generate bewilderment as well as abomination, but they also create in the minds of laypersons a sense of disillusionment. The newspaper reporter I interviewed labeled such bouts of rebellious behavior as "*Appiriyai*" (disgusting), and "*kalakanni*" (deplorable). Item nine (Table 1) reflects the overwhelming majority of the respondents (736) who are opposed to monks' deviation from their orthodox religious practices.

Very few would dare to challenge these anti-ordination practices by virtue of the inordinate power resided in monks. Such challenging moves can stir instant social, political, and religious uproar often leading to litigation in a society where nationalism and Buddhist religious ethos are concretised and interwoven in ostensibly legitimised ways. However, it should be pointed out that the ubiquitous social media with its characteristics of a pervasive and potent public sphere occasionally unravel such anomalies in a sarcastic vein.

Based on evidence in the popular local media, it is abundantly clear that the more monks that are actively involved in street demonstrations in urban areas, the more likely it is this influence spreads to semi-urban and rural areas of the country, and the transferability of

such practices initially occurs through the media as vicarious experiences which subsequently materialise as lived experiences across the country.

Such vicariously transferred discursive practices influence the primary DCs in rural areas in no less potency and vigor than they are experienced as lived experiences by the secondary DCs of monks pursuing studies at universities. For example, acts of protests against elephant attacks on people in rural areas are frequently televised on national TV channels and these demonstrations in the form of erecting barriers across major roads are more often than not organised and led by monks from temples in the vicinity. This does not mean that participation of monks in demonstrations is a surprisingly new phenomenon in Sri Lanka, but the high frequency of such incidents to be witnessed in recent years depicts the anti-ordination practices of the monks. The data in Item 2, Table 1 bear ample testimony to the voice of people opposed to these practices.

According to newspaper reports over the past two decades or so, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of street demonstrations where monks have predominantly figured. The main reasons for these demonstrations range from strike action related to salaries/wages, inadequate infrastructure facilities, suspicious deaths of suspects in police stations, political upheavals to wild elephant attacks on properties of people in rural areas, deforestation, garbage dumping in populated areas, and various other grievances. The collated data obtained from the questionnaire demonstrate that the multiple embedded DCs of monks are not only in conflict with ordination practices but they are also in conflict with the laity. However, peace initiatives to contain the escalation of violence and conflicts in these contexts are almost non-existent.

Conclusion

Discourse community of monks and their practices are in flux despite institutional imperatives such as ordination precepts. Multiple embeddedness and conflicting encounters

between Buddhist monks and the laity in Sri Lanka are tangible consequences of social mobility mostly induced by social interactions, interactions between two or more DCs, and the media discourses. Consequently, conflictual relations exist between ordination practices preserved, honoured and maintained mostly by the senior monks and the multiple embedded new repertoires of discursive practices of relatively young monks, creating a chaotic atmosphere not only in temples but also among the laity.

As this research demonstrates, relations between university educated young monks and *pirivena* educated senior monks are often strained. The laity on the other hand are disillusioned with two conflicting areas: monks' active involvement in political discourse, and the anti-ordination practices indicative of monks' secularisation process. Imbibed in a Theravada Buddhist ethos, most lay persons in Sri Lanka expect monks to play exemplary roles in society. However, they may not be inclined to analyse the contemporary dynamics in terms of multiple embeddedness and the attendant incongruities in religious practices where monks are invariably implicated.

Multiple embeddedness has contributed to creating incongruities, anomalies, and escalating aggression between monks and the laity at varying levels. Its potency will continue to destabalising the foundations of long-cherished ordination practices of monks. In these contexts, the boundary between monasticism and secularism is increasingly becoming porous, signaling novel religious dynamics associated with monks in Sri Lanka.

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