

Towards an Understanding of the Ways of Thinking among Sri Lankans with Special Reference to Their Historical Consciousness

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The main objective of this research is to understand the deep structures in the ways of thinking among Sri Lankans. This is mainly inspired by my preoccupations with the historical consciousness of the Sinhala-Buddhist community in Sri Lanka in the last three decades and the deep political changes in the last two decades. I am using the phrase “ways of thinking” following Najime Nakamura’s definition in his famous work “The Ways of Thinking of the Eastern Peoples” (University of Hawaii Press, 1974). “The phrase ‘ways of thinking’ refers to any individual’s characteristic features of the thinking habits of the culture to which he belongs [...] ‘Ways of thinking’ as here used will designate especially ways of thinking about concrete, empirical questions, which may, on many occasions, involve also value judgments and questions of values in ethics, religion, aesthetics, and other such human concerns” (p.5). The outcome of the research will be presented under the following thematic investigations:

1. Deep structural implications of the voter behavior at elections since 2004
2. The major characteristics of the historical consciousness of the Sinhala-Buddhists
3. Certain patterns of the historical evolution of modern Sri Lanka

According to the key findings here are certain identifiable patterns in the voter behavior in the last decade, which are markedly different from the dominant patterns of voter behavior in the preceding decades. These patterns could be seen as manifestations of certain deeply rooted structural patterns of the Sri Lankan social setting. I argue that they are therefore linked to the “ways of thinking” of the Sri Lankan people, in the sense Nakamura uses the term. So are various manifestations of the historical consciousness, especially, of the Sinhala-Buddhist people in recent times. These patterns which go as far back as the thirteenth century and later redefined by the European expansion in Asia could best be explained in terms of a number of important historical developments that shaped modern Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Historical consciousness, Sinhala-Buddhists, Ways of Thinking