

# **“Ethnic Revivalism and Identity Politics”: Legacy of Anagarika Dharmapala Identity Politics in the Post-war Sri Lankan Context**

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Production of legends based on ethno-nationalist identity politics is commonplace in the postcolonial Sri Lankan society and, invoking the past while hailing such legends, by and large is a feature of constituting or moulding the ethno-nationalist subject in the post-war context. Among many much hailed “national heroes”, the names, Anagarika Dharmapala and Arumuga Navalar occupy an important position in Sinhala and Tamil nationalist discourses respectively. This is a qualitative study in which selected texts by Navalar and Dharmapala, and texts in which their ideas are represented are analysed. Correspondingly, this study takes into account texts from newspapers and social media as well. Key-informant interviews were also conducted to flesh out the argument.

Even after a prolonged war which ravaged the country for 30 years, it is quite surprising and perturbing to see that many people in Sri Lanka resort to populist identity politics. This paper investigates some issues as to why the masses have not been able to transcend populist political culture which dominated state building in the immediate postcolonial society in Sri Lanka. For this purpose, the legacy of Navalar and Dharmapala in the post war context in Sri Lanka is explored. As a part of grieving the dead and disappeared, making arrangements to compensate for the loss of wealth and property, and undertaking various tasks to bring justice for the innocent whose rights were violated during and after the war, a radical interrogation of post-colonial and post-war, identity politics is fundamental to achieve sustainable peace in Sri Lanka. Extremist ideas of Navalar and Dharmapala are often quoted in social media, political debates, classrooms and scholarly discussions (wittingly or unwittingly) reinforcing ethno-nationalist values. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink

the portrayal of Navalar and Dharmapala in relation to the perpetuation of majoritarian politics and religious fundamentalism in the post-war context. What Dharmapala promotes and Navalar advocates are two sides of the same coin. Uncritically accepting their views on Sri Lankan society and culture can be viewed as one obstacle which impedes the establishment of trust and sustenance of peace among citizens in Sri Lanka.

**Key words:** *Ethno-nationalism, Identity politics, Sustainable peace.*