



CONTOURS OF EMERGING HATE IN SRI LANKA

Hindu Nationalism, Challenges to Inter-Religious
Dynamics, and the Reshaping of Tamil Identity



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1. INTRODUCTION

In years following the brutal civil war in Sri Lanka, new forms of extremism and religious fundamentalism have emerged in the country.¹ These movements are underpinned by narratives that portray non-Buddhist minority communities (i.e., Muslims, Christians, and Hindus) as threats to the nation. In particular, ultra-nationalist Sinhala-Buddhist groups, such as the Bodu Bala Sena², have propagated anti-Muslim sentiment through coordinated online and offline misinformation campaigns. This enduring political climate of anti-Muslim hostility was compounded by a series of terrorist attacks by Islamist militants on Easter Sunday in April 2019, targeting churches and luxury hotels across Sri Lanka. The aftermath witnessed increased policing, state surveillance, and the normalization of discrimination against Sri Lankan Muslims.³ The effects were particularly pronounced in the country's Eastern Province, which was both the site of one of the Easter Sunday bombings (Zion Church in Batticaloa), and home to individuals identified as suspects in the attacks.⁴

While Sinhala-Buddhist driven anti-Muslim campaigns have dominated national discourse, there are also emerging signs of Hindu nationalist groups gaining influence at the grassroots level in Sri Lanka. In 2016, the Siva Senai was established in the Northern Province with a stated mission to protect Hindu heritage and communities in the North and East from what it describes as “Sinhalization” and from the growing influence of religions such as Christianity and Islam.⁵ “Sinhalization” is a term used to describe the perceived imposition of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-religious identity through settlements, institutions, and religious sites in areas historically inhabited by Tamil and Muslim ethnic communities in the Northern

and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Similar yet smaller groups promoting Hindu nationalism have likewise emerged within these provinces. Their impact has also been noted by Christian religious leaders, who report that their communities are being targeted by Hindu groups promoting ideologies such as Hindu nationalism or Hindutva, often with links to right-wing organizations in India.⁶

Against this backdrop, this report seeks to map and analyze the presence of three Hindu nationalist groups in Sri Lanka: Siva Senai, Rudra Sena, and Ravana Sena. It examines their presence, activities, and efforts to exploit inter-community grievances and expand their influence from 2016 to the present. This study utilizes a qualitative approach that combines content analysis of news media reports, policy and research documents, and Facebook pages and profiles in Tamil and English, supplemented by additional social media sources.

The report finds that the narratives advanced by these Hindu nationalist groups center on anti-Christian and anti-Muslim sentiment tied to religious conversion, women's attire, cattle slaughter, and interfaith marriages. Their activities also include attempts to influence electoral behavior through appeals to Saiva-Hindu identity, mobilization around contested Hindu religious and archaeological sites, and the cultivation of transnational linkages with Indian Hindu nationalist digital platforms, politicians, and public figures, along with tactical collaborations with Sinhala-Buddhist actors.

Overall, the emergence and growing viability of these groups reflects a shifting political landscape in Sri Lanka, shaped in part by the weakening of both Tamil nationalist parties and Sinhala-Buddhist ultra-nationalist formations.

2. ETHNO-RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS IN SRI LANKA

The majority of the population in Sri Lanka practices Buddhism, followed by Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity as minority religions. Buddhists are overwhelmingly Sinhalese, which forms the largest ethnic group in the country. The Tamil community is the country's largest ethnic minority and includes both Hindus and Christians, while Muslims constitute a distinct ethnic group who practice Islam and primarily speak Tamil.⁷

Given Sri Lanka's religious diversity, Article 10 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religion to all citizens. However, Article 9 of the Constitution explicitly grants Buddhism the "foremost place," obligating the state to protect and foster it. This position has been viewed as controversial,⁸ as legal scholars argue that granting Buddhism the "foremost place" effectively elevates the status of Buddhism above other religions, contradicting Article 10's guarantee of religious freedom for all.

The discrepancy in legal protection for religious communities underlines a fissure in practice. Since the end of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009, there has been a steady rise in the organized targeting of Muslims. Between 2014 and 2018, several anti-Muslim riots occurred in different parts of the country.⁹ Such anti-Muslim sentiment and rhetoric intensified significantly after the 2019 Easter attacks and during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when Muslims were denied their right to burial and were portrayed as "super spreaders" of the virus.¹⁰

In November 2019, Sri Lanka's newly elected president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, openly championed Sinhala-Buddhist values, suggesting the need to protect themselves from other ethno-religious groups.¹¹ This stance materialized in discriminatory policies such as attempts to introduce a "one country, one law" system, which ignored the customary laws of minority groups.¹² In 2020, a Presidential Task Force was established to identify and allocate land deemed of archaeological importance in the Eastern Province, which had been under heightened surveillance since the Easter Sunday attacks the year prior.¹³

Whilst anti-Muslim rhetoric has dominated national-level discourse, at the grassroots level, both Christian and Hindu minorities have also been vulnerable to religiously motivated violence. According to the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), which records incidents of violence against religious minorities, Sri Lankan Christians have frequently been subjected to discriminatory actions, threats, intimidation, and coercion, often carried out by state officials.¹⁴ These actions predominantly target Christian clergy, pastors, and places of worship. Similarly, Human Rights Watch reports that Hindus in Sri Lanka have been denied access to certain places of worship, witnessed damage to religious idols, and seen Hindu religious sites re-designated as Buddhist sites, particularly in the Northern and Eastern provinces where Hindus constitute a majority.¹⁵

Ethno-religious dynamics in Sri Lanka are thus complex and mediated by the politicization of identities. The emergence of Hindu nationalism as a mobilizing force, however, has been a unique and historically contingent phenomenon.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using qualitative content analysis of publicly available data from 2016 to October 2025. 2016 marked the formation of the Siva Senai group in Sri Lanka, considered a key inflection point in the rise of organized Hindu nationalist activity in the country.

To enhance validity and reliability, the analysis employed data triangulation across multiple source types and languages. Materials included print and digital media reports, official country assessments, research publications, and social media content. Data collection was conducted in both Tamil and English to capture local, regional, and international perspectives.

The research team systematically reviewed over 50 news articles covering incidents linked to the three Hindu nationalist groups Siva Senai, Rudra Sena, and Ravana Sena. Sources included mainstream and independent media outlets within Sri Lanka, local Tamil-language newspapers in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, Indian media, and selected international news platforms.

In addition, 25 research reports and policy briefs published by national and international entities were examined. These included country assessment reports issued by the United States, United Kingdom, and Australian governments, as well as analyses by human rights watchdogs and organizations monitoring religious freedom and intercommunal violence. Diaspora-run platforms, advocacy group publications, and commentary by Sri Lankan and Indian scholars and journalists were additionally reviewed.

Building on prior research documenting the digital presence of Hindu nationalist groups, the study also conducted a social media analysis beginning with the official Facebook page of Siva Senai and its founder.¹⁶ A snowball sampling technique identified related accounts through tagged posts, shared content, mentions, cross-posts, and evidence of offline collaboration. Facebook was found to be the primary platform for organizational communication, mobilization, and narrative dissemination among these groups.

Pages or profiles were reviewed if they (i) publicly self-identified with groups such as Siva Senai; (ii) repeatedly shared or amplified content from these groups or their organisers; (iii) displayed evidence of offline engagement, such as organizing or participating in events; or (iv) posted content targeting other religious groups, specifically Christians and Muslims. Profiles that focused solely on personal religious expression or unrelated devotional content were excluded.

In total, 16 relevant Facebook pages and profiles were reviewed, of which four were identified as the most active. Their posts primarily focused on narratives targeting Christian and Muslim communities. Each post was translated (where applicable), and organized by date, author, location, and key message. Posts were then categorized by the nature of activity (e.g., protest, leaflet campaign, meeting) using a systematic labeling approach developed through an initial

review of the dataset. Categories were refined iteratively to capture recurring forms of mobilization and messaging, ensuring consistency and comparability across entries.

Social media analysis aimed to trace rhetoric, narratives, and mobilization strategies rather than measure volume or engagement, prioritizing qualitative depth and contextual verification. Additional social media platforms, including YouTube channels and X (formerly Twitter), were cross-referenced for press statements and event coverage. These sources supplemented the analysis of Facebook posts by providing triangulation and contextual understanding.

The overall findings from incidents reported in newspaper articles, research reports, and social media posts were thematically organized and categorized into key areas of focus, discussed below. These include the prevalence of anti-Christian and anti-Muslim narratives; political engagement and attempts at influencing voters; the protection of Hindu worship sites and archaeological heritage; transnational engagement with Hindu nationalist actors globally; and collaboration with Sinhala-Buddhist groups and Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka.

4. HINDU NATIONALISM IN SRI LANKA

Hindutva or Hindu nationalism, is a right-wing political ideology that promotes India's national identity as a homogenous Hindu identity.¹⁷ The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) serves as the fountainhead of Hindutva, with thousands of affiliated groups in India and abroad that champion and propagate its ideas. India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the RSS's political arm, draws its ideological foundation directly from this movement.

The Hindutva ideology extends beyond the promotion of the idea of a homogenous Hindu identity within India. It is also closely tied to notions of land and territory, shaped by history and mythology. Central to this vision is the idea of "Akhand Bharat" (Undivided India), an irredentist project in which the present-day borders of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka are united under the Hindu "rashtra" (ethnostate).¹⁸ The RSS actively promotes the idea of an Akhand Bharat.¹⁹

Over the years, Hindutva has resonated and gained traction not only among Hindus in India but also across the diaspora globally,²⁰ including within other South Asian countries such as Nepal,²¹ Bangladesh,²² and Sri Lanka. In 2015, the RSS reported that its "shakhas" (branches) had expanded to 39 countries,²³ although in 2024, *Organiser*, the official English weekly publication of the RSS, noted that it does not maintain official branches overseas, but has inspired many organizations abroad.²⁴ The regional diffusion of Hindutva ideology has given rise to parallel narratives in Sri Lanka that have adopted and localized aspects of its discourse.

Recent research focused on religious freedom and extremism in Sri Lanka consistently flag the growing influence and anticipated expansion of Hindu nationalism within the Northern, Eastern, and Central provinces of the country.²⁵ In 2023, attorney-at-law and former Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka, Ambika Satkunanathan, highlighted the emergence of Hindu right-wing groups within the Tamil community.²⁶ She pointed to the growing influence of Hindu nationalist actors on social media and their increasing presence in offline spaces.

Satkunanathan noted that these groups deploy anti-Christian and anti-Muslim rhetoric to depict these communities as "enemies," emphasizing that "Tamil community needs to realize that right-wing Hindu groups are not working for the benefit of the Tamil community. They make Muslims and Christians into enemies, all the while enabling abusive state action against Tamils and undermining Tamil demand for rights."

The following year, Hashtag Generation, a Colombo-based watchdog organization monitoring online hate speech in Sri Lanka, reported on the steadily growing presence of Hindu nationalist groups, which mainly target Christians and Muslims.²⁷ Their monitoring revealed that "while numerous Hindu extremist accounts and pages remain highly active, resistance to content and sentiments posted by followers appears to be minimal."

At the international level, the presence and activities of these Hindu nationalist groups have also been flagged. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom,²⁸ the World Evangelical Alliance,²⁹ and the governments of the United Kingdom³⁰ and Australia³¹ have all raised concerns about the activities of Hindu nationalist groups in their respective country reports on Sri Lanka in recent years.

The emergence of Hindu nationalism in Sri Lanka threatens to undermine communal relations within the country. According to legal scholar and current Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka, Gehan Gunatilleke, “Hindu antagonism towards Muslims in India, often manifesting in discrimination and violence, has influenced and encouraged mirror antagonisms towards Muslims in Sri Lanka.”³² Gunatilleke further observes that the rise of Hindu nationalist groups in Sri Lanka has begun to challenge the internal dynamics of the Tamil ethnic community.³³ Since Tamils in Sri Lanka identify as either Christian or Hindu, the exclusive emphasis on Hindus promoted by Hindu nationalist organizations risks creating internal rifts on religious lines within the Tamil ethnic community. Likewise, the anthropologist Sharika Thiranagama notes that “their [Hindu nationalist groups] strategy is not to begin with politics but to build networks in civil society, shaping everyday cultural and religious practices.”³⁴

In October 2025, the Sri Lankan government, under the National People’s Power (NPP) administration, established advisory committees to counter distorted religious interpretations propagated by “fringe groups.” Officials described the initiative as a measure to “examine and respond to distorted or misleading religious interpretations that emerge from time to time” in Sri Lanka, which have in the past been responsible for public unrest.³⁵

4.1. HINDU NATIONALIST GROUPS IN SRI LANKA

This section examines the emergence and activities of three prominent Hindu nationalist organizations operating in Sri Lanka. It traces their development and presence in the country since 2016, highlighting their ideological roots and organizational structures.

4.1.1 SIVA SENAI

The most active Hindu nationalist group, Siva Senai, was established in 2016 in Vavuniya, located in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province. The organization presents itself as a movement to mobilize and protect Hindus against what it describes as threats from other religious communities. Its founder and chief organizer, Maravanpulavu Sachchithananthan, a former United Nations official turned Tamil nationalist and publisher, plays a central role in shaping its ideological direction and public messaging.

According to Sachchithananthan, the motivation to form the organization was the belief that Hindus in Sri Lanka face “threats” from Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists. He stated, “Sri Lanka is not a secular country like India.³⁶ It is a Buddhist theocratic nation. Our Constitution says Buddhism is a priority religion. They [Buddhists] are getting government money. Christians get money from Christian nations, and Muslims get money from Arab nations. Hindus get nothing.”

He further claims, “In Mannar and Mullaitivu, [Hindus] face challenges from the Catholics and in Vavuniya it is from the Buddhists who are colonizing through the imposition of Buddhism.”³⁷ In the Eastern Province the Hindus face threats from Muslims.” The Siva Senai’s primary objective is to prevent religious conversions of Hindus, calling it “the biggest problem for us”.³⁸

In his statements, Sachchidanathan often invokes the teachings of 19th-century Sri Lankan Hindu scholar and revivalist Arumuga Navalar, who defended and promoted native Hindu traditions in opposition to Christian missionaries.³⁹ The activities of Siva Senai place strong emphasis on promoting a “Saiva identity.” Saivism is a sect within Hinduism, centered on the worship of Lord Siva, and one of many expressions of broader Hindu identity. Commenting on the name of the group, Sachchidanathan states, “We thought of many names, but since most Hindus in Sri Lanka are Saivites, we felt that something associated with Siva would be appropriate. So we chose Siva Senai.” The group frequently invokes the idea of Sri Lanka, especially its Northern and Eastern regions, as “Siva Bhoomi,” meaning “Land of Lord Shiva”, and portrays it as an area sacred to, or intrinsically linked with, the Saiva community.⁴⁰

The formation of Siva Senai in 2016 was widely covered by both Sri Lankan and Indian media outlets, prompting a range of immediate reactions warning of the danger posed. Several Sri Lankan politicians criticized its establishment. Former Member of Parliament Dinesh Gunawardena argued that such organizations posed a threat to peace in the country: “Our island nation has just come out of a bloody war. We don’t need a religion-based political outfit like Siva Senai. We are aware of what the Shiva Sena is doing in India. I don’t think that we need something like that here.” Meanwhile, former Member of Parliament from Jaffna, M.A. Sumanthiran stated that, “Assertion of a religious identity is not a bad thing. But at this stage, we don’t need it. Our identity is Tamil identity. We are totally secular. There are Hindus, Christians, and Muslims among the Tamils. All are equal. We can’t divide them on the basis of religion....such organisations can take extreme positions. We already have a Buddhist extremist organisation, Bodu Bala Sena (BBS). Birth of another extremist organisation opposed to BBS ideology is a very dangerous thing. It can create enmity between different religions. Both are called Sena, meaning army. Whatever may be their good intention, but the perception is negative. We can’t have outfits with the names like Sena.”⁴¹ Similarly, Sri Lankan economist Ahilan Kadirgamar commented that a movement modelled on India’s Shiv Sena “can become uncontrollable.” Another former Member of Parliament, Murugesu Chandrakumar, expressed concern that Siva Senai’s emphasis on “external threats” from other religious groups ignored “internal problems” such as caste inequalities and injustices within Sri Lankan Hindu society.⁴²

During its formation, Siva Senai stated its intention to seek external support, including funding from India and the Tamil diaspora,⁴³ as well as the desire to work with like-minded organizations. In an interview for India-based outlet The Hindu, Sachchidanathan stated that the group was created after consultations with several Hindu nationalist organizations in India, including the Shiv Sena political party in Maharashtra, as well as organizations such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the Hindu Jana Jagruthi Samithi. He further reinforced their involvement: “Organisations such as the RSS, VHP and the BJP are very supportive of this move. I have met the leaders and discussed this in detail.”⁴⁴ In India, the Shiv Sena political party

expressed support for the Siva Senai, in addition to the leader of the Sanjay Raut party who made an endorsement that “Our party is a Hindu party. We support the cause of Hindus all over the world. We support Siva Senai [in Sri Lanka]”.⁴⁵

Moreover, the nature of Siva Senai operations has led to state scrutiny for potential criminal or illegal activities. In September 2018, Sachchithananthan was summoned by the Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) of Sri Lanka for an inquiry regarding his international travels.⁴⁶ During the interrogation, he was requested to present evidence of the organization’s registration, bank accounts, and details of foreign travel. In 2021, he was again questioned by the TID over alleged links to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)⁴⁷. The LTTE was a Tamil militant organization that was based in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. However, the outcome of these investigations has not been made publicly known.

In addition to the strong presence of Siva Senai, two other Hindu nationalist groups, Rudra Sena and Ravana Sena, are active in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

4.1.2 RUDRA SENA

In 2020, Rudra Sena was formed in the Northern Province. Rudra Sena centres its narrative on ‘othering’ Christians by blaming them for the conversion of Hindus, thus mirroring the messaging of Siva Senai. Members of Rudra Sena are often seen supporting Siva Senai and Sachchithananthan. The group asserts the idea of Saivism as central to Tamil identity, similar to the Siva Senai.

Rudra Sena calls Christian-led conversions a form of “planned genocide”,⁴⁸ invoking historical memories of the Hindu community’s resistance to colonialism and Christian missionaries, as well as opposing beef consumption by Muslims. On Facebook, the group describes itself as an organization “against the religious conversion of Hindus and Buddhists to Christianity and Islam”.⁴⁹ While the Siva Sena was formed to protect the Hindu community from what it describes as “Sinhalization”, Rudra Sena adopts a contrasting strategy. Through a shared resistance to religious conversion, it attempts to align with Buddhists to broaden and expand its support base.

4.1.3 RAVANA SENA

In 2016, Ravana Sena was formed in Trincomalee, located in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province. Its founder K. Senthuran states that he founded the movement in response to what he perceived as the gradual takeover of the Trincomalee district by Muslims.⁵⁰ While the online presence of Ravana Sena is relatively muted, it remains active on-the-ground by organizing protests and commemoration ceremonies in the Eastern province. For instance, in 2025, the group held a vigil in Trincomalee to commemorate the 2006 massacre of five Tamil students during the Sri Lankan civil war.⁵¹

Ravana Sena is part of the same Hindu nationalist ecosystem but its footprint is narrower than Siva Senai or Rudra Sena. Its activity is largely confined locally to Trincomalee, and expressed

through episodic, place-specific mobilizations (e.g., vigils, protests) with a comparatively limited and inconsistent online record. Given that our methodology for this study prioritizes traceable, multi-source corroboration across platforms, Ravana Sena generated fewer verifiable data points over time; accordingly, it features less prominently in the subsequent analysis than Siva Senai and Rudra Sena.

These three Hindu nationalist groups function as socio-religious and political movements. Over time, Siva Senai and Rudra Sena have especially collaborated closely, driven by shared goals and converging rhetoric.

4.1.4 ONLINE ECOSYSTEM

Since their formation, Siva Senai and Rudra Sena have maintained a consistent online presence. Both groups use Facebook as their principal online base, which functions as the main platform for outreach and mobilization. Siva Senai's founder and chief organizer, Maravanpulavu Sachchithananthan, maintains a public Facebook profile with approximately 1,900 followers. In addition, several active Facebook pages operating under the name "Siva Senai" and affiliated with the group were identified, with a combined following of around 15,000 users. Similarly, Rudra Sena uses Facebook as its primary platform for outreach and has a combined following of roughly 9,800 users.

The activities of Hindu nationalist groups in Sri Lanka are frequently reported by Indian Hindu nationalist media and digital platforms, such as "Struggle for Hindu Existence", an India-based blog dedicated to amplifying issues faced by Hindus across the globe; "Organiser", the weekly mouthpiece of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS); "Sanatan Prabhat", the publication arm of the Goa-based Hindu nationalist organization Sanatan Sanstha, which has been accused of several criminal activities, including alleged involvement in the killing of journalist Gauri Lankesh, a critic of Hindu nationalism; and "The Commune Magazine", a Tamil Nadu-based outlet flagged for publishing Hindu nationalist content. These platforms provide visibility by highlighting the activities and involvement of Hindu nationalist groups in Sri Lanka. This includes endorsing campaigns by organizations such as Siva Senai against religious conversion, thereby extending their outreach to a broader global Hindu audience within India and its diaspora.

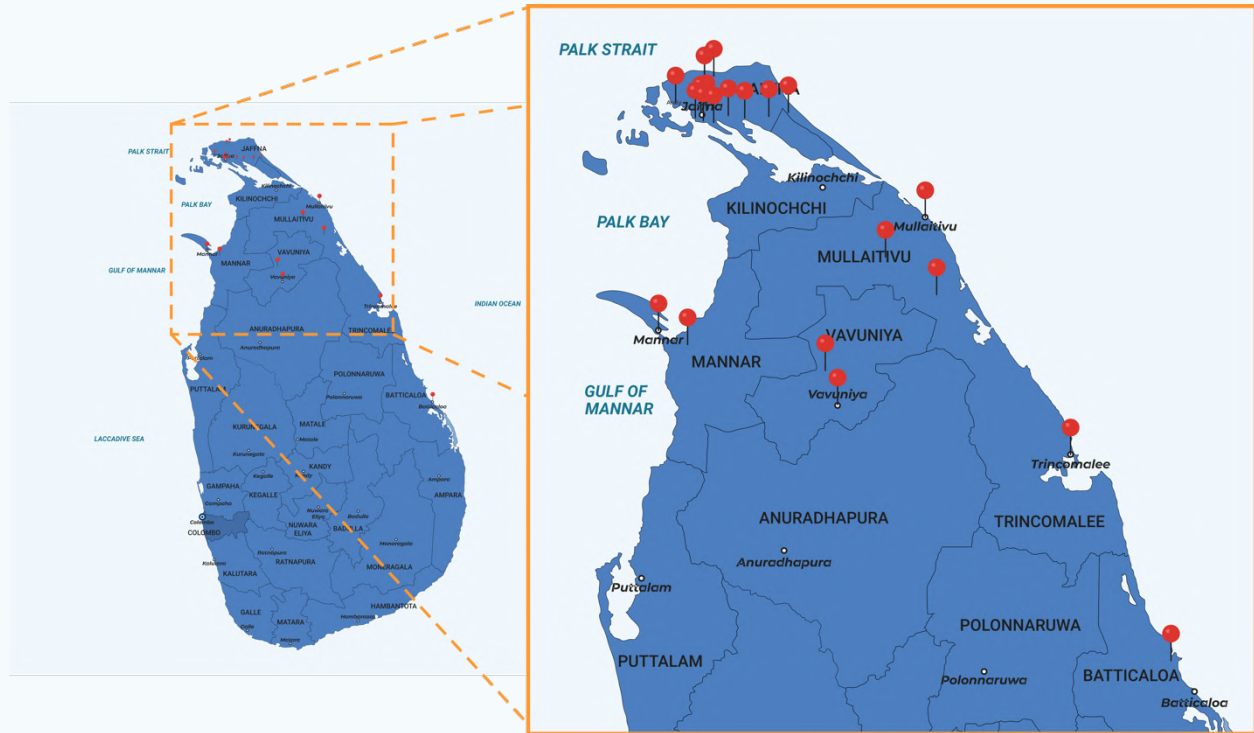
The flow of online communication is bidirectional. Several Hindu nationalist platforms amplify the narratives of groups in Sri Lanka, which also circulate and reinforce discourses originating from India. The penetration of Indian Hindu nationalist narratives is evident in the growing adoption of Hindutva vocabulary and symbols by Sri Lankan actors, including the use of the Bhagwa Dhwaj, the saffron flag associated with Hindu nationalism in India, across digital platforms and in offline demonstrations.

Their online rhetoric also mirrors the idioms and framing common to Hindu nationalist discourse in India, employing terms such as "Love Jihad" (a conspiracy theory alleging that Muslim men marry Hindu women to convert them to Islam) and "Hindu Genocide." In this way, online spaces

have facilitated transnational linkages between Hindu nationalist supporters in both countries, enabling the rapid circulation of shared narratives, symbols, and mobilization frames.

4.1.5 LOCATIONS OF OFFLINE ACTIVITIES

The following map illustrates the key locations of offline activity and involvement of the Hindu nationalist groups identified in this study.



5. PATTERNS OF EMERGING HATE

This section presents a breakdown of the types of messaging propagated by the three Hindu nationalist groups of Siva Senai, Rudra Sena, and Ravana Sena. It highlights the broader themes and narratives promoted by these groups, as well as their organizing around key issues and the periods in which these activities took place.

5.1 ANTI-CHRISTIAN SENTIMENT

During its formation, Siva Senai articulated a clear mandate focused on stopping the conversion of Hindus to Christianity. This concern was closely linked to demographic anxieties about the decline of the Hindu population in the Northern and Eastern provinces. In Sri Lanka, debates around the introduction of an anti-conversion bill have circulated for years, largely driven by the Buddhist clergy.⁵² Despite recurring legislative attempts to criminalize religious conversion, no such law has been enacted in the country. However, cultural and societal attitudes at the grassroots level frequently remain biased against conversions by independent or evangelical Christian groups. Such conversions are often depicted as coercive or manipulative rather than voluntary, making discussions regarding religious conversion a highly sensitive topic. Beyond anti-conversion rhetoric, Hindu nationalist groups have also expressed dissatisfaction over the appointment of members of the Christian community to administrative positions at the local level in the Northern Province.

5.1.1 ANTI-CONVERSION RHETORIC

A central narrative driving Hindu nationalist mobilization in Sri Lanka revolves around opposition to Christian conversion. In 2017, India-based Struggle for Hindu Existence reported that Siva Senai was conducting “Dharma Sikshan” (moral education) programmes in Vavuniya district, to counter Christian conversions among Hindus and to encourage those who had converted to Christianity to return to Hinduism.⁵³ It was framed as part of a “conversion conspiracy” and alleged that in one area of South Vavuniya, Christian missionaries were attempting to convert Hindu families. That same year, Struggle for Hindu Existence claimed an alleged attack by Catholics on a Hindu worship site and nearby households in Mannar, a district in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, describing it as an attempt to “Christianize” the locality.⁵⁴

In 2020, the chief organizer of the Siva Senai staged a hunger strike in front of the Bishop’s House in Jaffna, “demanding an end to the religious violence that is taking place in the North” and holding Catholics responsible.⁵⁵ In 2021, Siva Senai demanded that the Sri Lankan government ban the American Ceylon Mission, accusing the Mission of engaging in religious conversions in Tellipalai, Jaffna.⁵⁶ Later that year, a series of posts on the group’s Facebook page appealed to the Sri Lankan government and local politicians to implement anti-conversion laws to prevent Christians from converting Hindus.



Facebook post by Siva Senai expressing opposition to religious conversions and calling for anti-conversion law. Photo: Siva Senai via Facebook

Siva Senai has an active presence in Mannar district which hosts a large Christian population, predominantly Catholic, living alongside Hindu and Muslim communities. The group's activity and presence is driven by the belief that Mannar was historically inhabited by Hindus prior to Portuguese colonization and the subsequent spread of Christianity.⁵⁷ In a Facebook post, Siva Senai alleged that "Catholics are committing serious atrocities against Hindus in Mannar district" and claimed that they are "ready to publish a list of Catholics persecuting Hindus".⁵⁸



Siva Senai is with Raj Raju and 12 others.
8 February 2021 · 🌐

காக்கையும் எருமையும்
மறவன்புலவு க ச்சிதானந்தன்
சிவ சேனை

ஏய் எருமை! நீ கருப்பாக இருக்கிறாய்!
அழகில்லாமல் இருக்கிறாய்!
வெள்ளை நிறப் பசு என்னைப்போல் எவ்வளவு அழகு?
எருமையை பார்த்து காக்கை சொன்னது.

வணக்கத்துக்குரிய செபமாலை அடிகளாரின் இன்றைய மன்னார் உரை காக்கையைப் போன்ற உரை.
வணக்கத்துக்குரிய செபமாலை அடிகளார்

மன்னாரில்
பொத்துவில் தொடக்கம் பொலிகண்டி வரையான
நடைபயணிகளை வரவேற்று உரையாற்றுகையில்

இலங்கை சிங்கள பௌத்தருக்கு மட்டும் உரிய நாடல்ல எனக் கூறியிருக்கிறார்

அவர் கூறுவது முற்றிலும் சரி.
அவர் ஒன்றை உரை மறுக்கிறார்

மன்னார் மாவட்டம் கத்தோலிக்க மறைமாவட்டம், கத்தோலிக்கருக்கு மட்டுமே உரிமை அன்று

சிங்களவர்கள் தமிழருக்கு எதிராக கொடுமை நிகழ்த்துகிறார்கள் என வணக்கத்துக்குரிய செபமாலை
அடிகளார் கூறுவது போலவே

மன்னார் மாவட்டத்தில் கத்தோலிக்கர் இந்துக்களுக்கு எதிராகக் கடுமையான கொடுமைகளை நிகழ்த்தி
வருகிறார்கள்

முசலியில்

நாண்டாளில்

மடுவில்

மாந்தை மேற்கில்

மன்னார் நகர பிரிவில்

கத்தோலிக்கர்கள் இந்துக்களைக் கொடுமைப்படுத்தும் பட்டியலை நான் வெளியிடத் தயாராக இருக்கிறேன்

முதலில் உன்னைத் திருத்து

பின்பு மற்றவர்களை திருத்தலாம்

நீயே கொடுமைக்காரன்

உனக்கு என்ன யோக்கியதை இருக்கிறது

மற்றவனைக் கொடுமைக்காரன் என்று சொல்ல?

வணக்கத்துக்குரிய செபமாலை அடிகளார் அவர்களே சிங்கள புத்தத்துக்கு எதிராகக் கருத்து சொல்ல முன்

மன்னார் ஆயிரட்டம் செல்லுங்கள்

இந்துக்களுக்கு எதிரான கத்தோலிக்கக் கொடுமை வேண்டாம் என்று அவரிடம் கேட்டுக் கொள்ளுங்கள்

இயேசுவின் பெயரைச் சொல்லிக்கொண்டு

இயேசு சொன்ன அத்தனை நல்ல உபதேசங்களுக்கு எதிராக

மன்னார் மாவட்ட கத்தோலிக்கர் இந்துக்களைக் கொடுமைப்படுத்துகிறார்கள்

மனித உரிமை ஆணையம் முன்பும்

ஐக்கிய நாடுகள் மனித உரிமை ஆணையத்திலும்

அனைத்துலக மனிதநிப்புச் சபை போன்ற அமைப்புகள் முன்பாகவும் பட்டியலிட்டு

முறையிடக் கூடிய சாட்சிகள் என்னிடம் உள்ளன.

சிங்கள புத்தரைப் போன்று

மன்னார் கத்தோலிக்கரைப் போன்று

இந்து சமயத்தவர் மற்ற சமயங்களை நசுக்க முயன்றார்

என்று ஒரு நிகழ்ச்சியோ சாட்சியோ வணக்கத்துக்குரிய செபமாலை அடிகளாரால் காட்டமுடியுமா?

Lancroto Dr Seixas இலாங்கிறோ செய்யாசார் மன்னாரில் பணிபுரிந்த போர்த்துக்கேயப் படைமின்

குடிசார் அலுவலர். அவர் சொல்கிறார் மன்னார் சைவ மக்கள் மென்மையானவர் எதிர்க்கும் வலுவற்றவர்

அமைதியானவர் அடக்கமானவர் என. அன்று தொடக்கம் இன்று வரைக்கும் அப்படியே இருக்கிறோம்

சைவமக்கள்

மன்னார் கத்தோலிக்க மறை மாவட்டத்தின் வணக்கத்துக்குரிய செபமாலை அடிகளார் அவர்களே,

காக்கைகள் எருமைகளை அழகற்ற கருப்பினமே என அழைக்கலாமா?



👍🔥 54

7 comments 25 shares

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Facebook post by Siva Senai expressing anger toward Catholics in Mannar
Photo: Siva Senai via Facebook

Several posts accuse Catholics in Mannar of violating the sanctity of Hindu temples, citing incidents of vandalism, and contain statements aimed at the Catholic Bishop of Mannar.⁵⁹ In March 2021, Siva Senai published a book titled Mannar Sivabhoomi, meaning that Mannar district was the “Land of Lord Shiva”, suggesting that it belonged to the Saiva community.⁶⁰

In January 2022, Rudra Sena established a moral school in Jaffna to provide religious education to Hindu children as an initiative to “escape proselytizing traps”.⁶¹ In May, the group organized a leaflet distribution campaign in Jaffna. The leaflet read, “Proselytizers plan to eradicate Tamils in this country by uprooting their way of life, culture, and worship by converting the Shaivites in the Tamil homeland. Tamil people of Sri Lanka should no longer allow this to happen. Our identities such as Tamil, Hinduism, and culture should not be given up and we should follow them and live as pure Tamils.”⁶² Two months later, Rudra Sena carried out another leaflet distribution during the consecration ceremony of the renovated Thiruketheeswaram Hindu Temple in Mannar, with messaging against conversions to both Christianity and Islam.⁶³

In 2022, Siva Senai similarly carried out a counter-poster campaign in Kokkuvil, Jaffna in response to a Christian faith group’s publicity for an event in the area, which the group interpreted as an attempt at conversion. Siva Senai’s posters stated that “Kokkuvil is a Siva Bhoomi (meaning “Land of Lord Shiva”, or an area sacred to the Saiva community) with no space for religious conversion.”⁶⁴ In the same year, the group condemned posters allegedly promoting conversion that had been circulated around the Nallur Hindu Temple in Jaffna. According to Siva Senai, more than twenty of its youth members attempted to locate those responsible but were unsuccessful. Together with Rudra Sena, they removed the posters around the premises and set them on fire at the site, proclaiming that those responsible would “realize the depth of their mistake” once identified.⁶⁵

The following year, in April, Siva Senai organized a protest in Achuveli, Northern Province, against Christian worship in a former weaving mill converted into a prayer site. The group claimed that the worship caused excessive noise and disrupted residents.⁶⁶ That same year, Rudra Sena distributed leaflets targeting Christians and Muslims on the day of the Hindu festival Maha Shivaratri at Thiruketheeswaram Hindu Temple in Mannar, calling religious conversions by both groups a form of “planned genocide.”⁶⁷ In June, Rudra Sena and Siva Senai jointly organized an event honouring the anti-colonial and anti-conversion resistance of Hindus.⁶⁸ Later in September, Rudra Sena distributed 5,000 leaflets around Nallur Hindu Temple in Jaffna with the slogan, “Am I a responsible Hindu?” urging resistance to conversion.⁶⁹ The following October, Rudra Sena launched its second moral education school in Arali South, Jaffna, enrolling more than thirty students. During the event, the group explained to parents “about the dangers of religious conversion.”⁷⁰ In December, Rudra Sena reported alleged attempts by Christian groups to convert Hindu patients near the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, threatening that if authorities failed to act, the group would take measures to stop such activities which they deem to be a “threat to national security”.⁷¹

In July 2024, Siva Senai again ran a social media campaign in Mannar alleging that the Catholic festival at the Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu had replaced the traditional Hindu “Aadi Pooram” festival. They condemned the celebrations at the Shrine and demanded a return to “traditional roots” by reinstating the Aadi Pooram festival for Hindus. In October, Siva Senai gathered around seventy Hindu youth in Jaffna for a private meeting, urging them to spearhead the organization’s campaigns against what it described as “foreign religions” and the “onslaught of the Christian church against the Hindu community.”⁷²

5.1.2 PUSHBACK AGAINST INDIAN EVANGELICALS

Alongside anti-conversion campaigns, Hindu nationalist groups in Sri Lanka have specifically targeted evangelical Christians from India, leveraging the force of immigration authorities. In March 2023, Siva Senai launched a poster campaign opposing the scheduled arrival of Indian Christian Pastor Paul Dhinakaran in Jaffna. Posters in the area stated that Jaffna is a “Siva Bhoomi” (meaning “Land of Lord Shiva” or an area sacred to the Saiva community) and discouraged the arrival of Christian Evangelists. More than fifty members of the Hindu community from the Manipay area, including members of Siva Senai, protested that Dhinakaran was entering on a business visa to conduct conversions, calling it a violation of immigration rules. Immigration officials subsequently apprehended Pastor Dhinakaran and his team, revoked their visas, and ordered their departure. Siva Senai had prepared to stage a larger protest if no action was taken, but withdrew after the deportations. Commenting further, the chief organizer of the Siva Senai accused Dhinakaran of previously preaching to a pastor allegedly engaged in proselytization in the Kilinochchi district in the Northern province.⁷³

In February 2024, Organiser, the official English weekly mouthpiece of the RSS, reported on alleged conversion attempts in Sri Lanka by evangelicals from Tamil Nadu, India. The article reported on the deportation of two women from Tamil Nadu who had been engaging in conversion activities in Chundikuli, Jaffna. Commenting on this incident, the chief organizer of the Siva Senai further spoke regarding the expulsion of Indian Pastor Mohan Lazarus from Chilaw, located in the North Western Province of Sri Lanka, as well as four foreigners on tourist visas accused of engaging in evangelical activities in Vavuniya.⁷⁴ In March 2025, Rudra Sena reported that Sri Lanka’s immigration authorities had deported a Christian group from Tamil Nadu after Siva Senai flagged them as attempting to convert Hindus in Jaffna.⁷⁵ According to the Organiser, amid the economic hardships faced by communities in Sri Lanka since 2022, evangelicals have been “accused of exploiting the vulnerability of the local population by engaging in forceful religious conversions”.



Poster campaign by Siva Senai in Jaffna, which says:
“Jaffna is a Shiva Bhoomi, Evangelists do not enter”.

Photo: Hindu Post

5.1.3 PROTESTS AGAINST CHRISTIAN APPOINTMENTS

Anti-Christian sentiment extends beyond conversion discourse and the targeting of evangelicals to include direct intimidation towards government officials in Sri Lanka. In December 2022, Siva Senai and Rudra Sena jointly staged a protest in front of the Jaffna District Secretariat against the appointment of a Mullaitivu Government Agent to the position of Jaffna District Government Agent.⁷⁶ They objected to her appointment on the grounds of her personal conversion to Christianity, arguing that it could encourage religious conversions and the spread of Christian congregations. Instead, they insisted that a Hindu candidate should be appointed to the position.⁷⁷ In July 2024, both groups again protested outside the Northern Province Governor’s Office, demanding the removal of a Christian education official in Jaffna, accusing them of taking down Hindu deity images. They cautioned of larger non-violent protests if no action was taken.⁷⁸

The aforementioned efforts by Siva Senai and Rudra Sena, focused on cultivating anti-Christian sentiment through campaigns against religious conversion of Hindus to Christianity, opposition to Indian Christian evangelicals, and resistance to the appointment of Christian officials for government positions, reflect an attempt to construct and normalize a narrative of demographic and cultural anxiety within the Hindu community. Through offline methods such as protests, poster campaigns, and the establishment of moral schools, as well as online posts focused on anti-conversion, the groups diversify their messaging to reach different audiences. Offline efforts primarily appeal to local Hindu communities from rural areas, whilst online posts appeal to younger followers and members of the diaspora. By portraying Hindu conversions to Christianity

as coercive, both these groups attempt to introduce a divisive religious dimension between Hindus and Christians within the Tamil ethnic community in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

5.2 ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENT

The targeting of Muslims by Hindu nationalist groups has centered on several recurring issues, including cattle slaughter and beef consumption, Muslim women's attire, and interfaith marriages. Together, these themes function as key flashpoints for mobilization, enabling Hindu nationalist actors to advance anti-Muslim rhetoric while framing their campaigns around the policing of women's bodies and choices.

5.2.1 OPPOSITION TO BEEF CONSUMPTION

The issue of cattle slaughter is highly sensitive in some Hindu-majority societies, as cows are revered by some Hindus. In India, Hindu nationalist groups have amplified this issue through campaigns demanding cow protection, which have, in several cases, led to the targeting, intimidation, and mob violence against Muslims.⁷⁹ This is often tied to criticism of beef consumption by Muslims and their involvement in cattle trade.

When Siva Senai was founded, one of its key campaigns targeted the practice of cattle slaughter in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, a Hindu-majority region. In 2018, the group staged a public protest in Chavakachcheri, Jaffna, against cattle slaughter. The chief organizer of the Siva Senai undertook a hunger strike and demanded an end to the practice. The protest took place only days before the beginning of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.⁸⁰

In 2020, then Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa revived his earlier proposal (first introduced in 2016) to legislate a ban on cattle slaughter. This move was welcomed by Siva Senai in a press release.⁸¹ Its chief organizer further called on Rajapaksa's government to "regulate evangelistic and jihadi NGOs and their foreign funding" and "legislate restrictions on forced and coercive conversions" which he claimed "will be a boon to Saiva Tamils who are struggling to hold on to their cultural heritage."⁸²

The following year, the Cabinet of Ministers granted approval to publish the amended bills drafted by the Legal Draftsman to ban cattle slaughter. While the government justified the move as a way to strengthen the local dairy industry, critics questioned its underlying motives.⁸³ Siva Senai commended the bill, describing it as a "victory for the continuity of the traditions of this land" and a positive step for the religious and cultural traditions of both Hindus and Buddhists.⁸⁴ However, due to the worsening economic crisis in Sri Lanka during that period, and subsequent changes in government, the legislation did not pass.

In June 2024, Siva Senai and Rudra Sena jointly organized a protest in Arali, Jaffna, demanding once again that the government enact a law to ban cattle slaughter. Protesters carried banners calling for the death penalty for those engaged in the practice.⁸⁵ From July to August 2025, Siva

Senai put up posters in Thandikulam, Vavuniya demanding an end to cattle slaughter, framing the cow as a sacred animal for both Hindus and Buddhists.⁸⁶



Protest in 2024 for anti-cattle slaughter legislation by Siva Senai and Rudra Sena.
Photo: Rudra Sena via Facebook

5.2.2 OBJECTION TO MUSLIM WOMEN'S CLOTHING

Rhetoric around politicizing Muslim women's attire, especially face-covering garments such as the burqa and niqab, has been a longstanding issue in Sri Lanka. In 2013, Bodu Bala Sena, an ultra-nationalist Sinhala-Buddhist group, launched an online petition urging the then Secretary of Defence, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to impose a nationwide ban on the burqa and niqab.⁸⁷ The campaign continued in 2015 by another hardline Sinhala-Buddhist group, Sinhala Ravaya, which demanded that police immediately prohibit the wearing of burqas and niqabs, framing the clothing as a threat to national security.⁸⁸

In 2018, the Hindu nationalist group Ravana Sena amplified this rhetoric in Trincomalee, in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, targeting Muslim women wearing the abaya.⁸⁹ A group of protesters gathered outside a Hindu school in Trincomalee district, demanding that five female Muslim teachers should stop wearing the abaya to school. Protest slogans included statements such as "Send the Muslim teachers away" and "Wearing abayas destroys Hindu culture." Ravana Sena

claimed that Muslim teachers wearing the abaya were imposing their culture on Hindu children and attempting to convert them to Islam.

Following up on this incident, four of the five Muslim teachers requested transfers from the school. The remaining teacher was repeatedly denied permission to work at the school due to her decision to continue wearing the abaya. In 2022, after a verdict from the Court of Appeal, she was reinstated, but her return to teaching at the school triggered further protests. Meanwhile, in Batticaloa, both Hindu and Muslim women have witnessed a noticeable rise in religiosity within their respective communities following the Easter attacks in 2019. Many Hindu women attribute these growing pressures as linked to the “influence of extremist religious factions”. Hindu women point to the influence of RSS, while Muslim women hold their male counterparts and religious institutions more broadly responsible.⁹⁰

In the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, which led to a significant spike in anti-Muslim sentiment and discrimination, the government under Gotabaya Rajapaksa imposed a temporary ban on Muslim women’s veils. This was justified as a security measure to help authorities identify individuals under the emergency law.⁹¹ The move was welcomed by the Indian political party Shiv Sena, which also urged the Indian government to adopt similar steps.⁹² Eventually, in 2021, the Rajapaksa government introduced a proposal to formalize the ban, including a cabinet order to prohibit burqas and other face coverings in public on national security grounds.⁹³



Protests at Hindu College against Muslim teachers wearing the Abaya in 2018.

Photo: M. I. M. Ifas, Al Jazeera.

5.2.3 OPPOSITION TO INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

Interfaith marriage between Hindus and Muslims is an issue frequently raised by Hindu nationalist groups. Siva Senai maintains that interfaith marriages, specifically those involving Muslim men marrying Hindu women, pave the way for conversions to Islam. According to Maravanpula Sachchinathan, Siva Senai's chief organizer, such marriages are part of a broader demographic strategy allegedly employed by Muslims to alter the population composition in Hindu-majority districts.⁹⁴ Siva Senai has repeatedly spotlighted this issue by framing such conversions as efforts to erode the Hindu culture that is distinctive to Sri Lanka.⁹⁵ Sachchinathan often uses the term "Love Jihad", which is also used by Hindu nationalists in India to frame marriage-based religious conversion. "Love Jihad" refers to a debunked conspiracy theory often propagated by Hindu nationalist groups in India, which claims that Muslim men seduce and marry Hindu women in order to convert them to Islam and alter the demographic balance.⁹⁶ Siva Senai also uses this narrative to advocate for the introduction of anti-conversion laws in Sri Lanka, aligning with its broader efforts to stop the alleged proselytization of Hindus by Christians. In 2023, Siva Senai sent a letter to the former leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Maithripala Sirisena, accusing Muslims of engaging in "Love Jihad."⁹⁷

The mobilization of Siva Senai, Rudra Sena, and Ravana Sena around issues such as cattle slaughter, Muslim women's clothing, and interfaith marriages reflects a broader strategy to infuse everyday social and cultural practices of the Muslim community with sectarian meaning. By turning symbols of faith, gender, and diet into markers of communal identity and moral hierarchy, these groups mirror and integrate anti-Muslim discourse frequently used by Hindu nationalist groups in India, recontextualized for the Hindu community in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

5.3 ATTEMPTS AT POLITICAL INFLUENCE

While much of the activity of Hindu nationalist groups in the Northern and Eastern provinces has centred on grassroots campaigns, at times their efforts have extended to attempts at influencing voter behaviour and political engagement. Groups such as Siva Senai have sought to sharpen divisions within the Tamil electorate, especially between Saiva Hindus and Christians.

Siva Senai campaigns became visible during the 2020 general elections. In July, a month before the polls, Siva Senai urged Saiva Hindus to "remember the history" and vote for a Saiva politician in order to reclaim their heritage.⁹⁸ In addition to online activity, the group carried out poster campaigns in areas like Vadamarachchi and Thenmarachchi in Jaffna, and in Vavuniya, with slogans declaring that to protect Tamil nationalism, all Saiva voters must vote only for candidates who protect Saiva and Tamil identity in associations, local government councils, provincial councils, and parliamentary elections.⁹⁹



Poster by Siva Senai during the 2020 General Election asking to vote for Saiva candidates.
Photo: World Socialist Website

At the same time, in May 2020, Siva Senai announced plans to contest elections through the newly formed Thamizh Thesiya Saiva Makkal Kadchi (Tamil Nationalist Saiva People's Party), represented by the Axe symbol. The organization identifies itself as a political party on its Facebook page,¹⁰⁰ however, it does not appear on the Sri Lanka Election Commission's website and is not listed among the country's registered political parties.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, the group stated that it would conduct a door-to-door campaign in the Vanni electoral district to elect a Saiva candidate, insisting that representation from this party was crucial to voicing the concerns of Hindus.¹⁰² However, the party's campaign failed to gain traction among voters, and there is no official record of any seats being won.

While Siva Senai's own political ambitions did not materialize in 2020, discussions about the regional expansion of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) began to surface the following year. In February 2021, then Chief Minister of the Indian state of Tripura publicly commented that Indian Home Minister Amit Shah intended to form BJP governments in neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Sri Lanka under the "Atmanirbhar South Asia" (Self-Reliant South Asia) initiative.¹⁰³ The comment led to several reactions, including from the chief organizer of the Siva Senai, who announced that he would support the formation of such a party in Sri Lanka, and remarked that Hindu activists in the country already had intentions of starting such a party.¹⁰⁴ Yet, Sri Lanka's Election Commission clarified that the country's electoral framework prohibits the operation or involvement of foreign political parties within its territory.¹⁰⁵ Sinhala-Buddhist politicians in Sri Lanka, such as Udaya Gammanpila, also weighed in, stating, "The patriotic people in this country will not allow a foreign entity to enter the Sri Lankan political stage and take over power."¹⁰⁶

In 2024, Sri Lanka held its presidential election following the ouster of Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government amid the 2022 mass protests. During this period, Siva Senai revived its campaign activities, aligning its outreach with the presidential, general, and local elections. In April, Siva

Senai called on Saiva Hindu voters to support a political leader with strong Hindu roots. Poster campaigns were launched across different parts of the Northern and Eastern provinces, urging voters to support Saiva candidates in the presidential race.¹⁰⁷ During a press conference in November, ahead of the parliamentary elections, Siva Senai defamed former Tamil Member of Parliament M. A. Sumanthiran, calling him “unfit for politics” due to his religious beliefs.¹⁰⁸ This was not the first incident where the group targeted Sumanthiran, whom they have consistently sought to discredit on the basis of his Christian faith.¹⁰⁹

Overall, between 2020 and 2024, several unsuccessful attempts were made to form political parties aligned with Hindu nationalist ideologies in Sri Lanka, or to mobilize Saiva Hindu voters to support Hindu political candidates over Tamil Christians. However, these initiatives struggled to gain legitimacy within local Tamil communities or traction at the national level, and often faced criticism from mainstream political actors. These developments reveal a deliberate attempt to politicize Hindu identity in Sri Lanka’s Northern and Eastern provinces. Although their electoral impact remains limited, the symbolic power of these campaigns lies in their ability to normalize sectarian discourse within Tamil politics, recasting religious identity as a legitimate basis for political representation. This mirrors patterns of political consolidation observed in India, where Hindu nationalist movements use religion as a tool for shaping electoral behavior and constituencies.

5.4 PROTECTION OF HINDU SITES AND LAND

The protection of Hindu heritage sites and places of worship, alongside opposition to the imposition of Buddhism and Sinhalization, has been fundamental to Hindu nationalist groups operating in Sri Lanka, especially for the Siva Senai.

In 2017, the India-based Struggle for Hindu Existence reported several incidents in Mannar, including the alleged vandalism and destruction of Hindu temples, and attacks on Hindu households by Christians. In response, Siva Senai had intervened by alerting the relevant local authorities. The organization’s chief organizer urged his “Hindu activist friends” via a “google group” to pressure the Sri Lankan government to protect Hindus. Upananda Brahmachari, editor of Struggle for Hindu Existence, pledged to escalate the matter with the prime ministers of both Sri Lanka and India, as well as with India’s former External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj.¹¹⁰

Two years later, Struggle for Hindu Existence again reported on another incident of attacks on a Hindu temple in Mannar ahead of Maha Sivarathri, a Hindu religious festival, on the 3rd of March and shared videos of the event. The next day, the India-based Vishwa Hindu Parishad also condemned the attacks in Mannar, releasing a statement denouncing the actions of Christian groups. On the 8th of March, Siva Senai organized protests in Jaffna, Mannar, and Vavuniya to condemn these attacks with the following key demands.¹¹¹

1. Respect the Shaive sect, Shaiva people and the Shaiva culture in Sri Lanka
2. Stop with immediate effect the attacks, encroachments of Catholic Christian missionaries done continuously against the Shaivaite religion.
3. Stop all Christian conversion activities.
4. Remove and stop all encroachments, attacks of other religions on Shaivaite holy places.
5. Those who win the election by getting the Shaivaite votes should stop working against their interests.
6. All the encroachments done so far on Shaivaite holy places should be removed and due compensation should be given.
7. On 3.3.2019 at the holy pilgrimage place of Thiruketheeswaram the Christian ruffians under the leadership of Catholic father Marks attacked and destroyed the welcome arch of the temple. Rs. 1 crore is demanded as compensation to reconstruct the arch.

Siva Senai has continued to actively speak out about alleged incidents of vandalism against Hindu temples. In 2021, for example, it published a Facebook post about the desecration of a Hindu Temple in Mirusuvil, Jaffna.¹¹²

In Sri Lanka, disputes over contested land, archaeological sites, and ownership have become prominent issues in the Northern and Eastern provinces in recent years. These disputes are viewed as coordinated state efforts involving the Archaeology Department, Forestry Department, and the military. Buddhist monks have often supported state actions, which are seen as attempts to claim land traditionally belonging to the Tamil and Muslim communities living in these areas. Such efforts frequently involve designating land as sacred Buddhist sites or as forestry reserves, thereby preventing Hindu communities from carrying out their religious practices.¹¹³

In September 2020, Siva Senai's chief organizer visited two of the most contentious sites with ongoing conflict between local Hindu communities and Sinhala-Buddhist monks: the Hindu Temple on Vedukkunari Hill¹ in Vavuniya,¹¹⁴ and the contested site in Kurunthumalai² in

¹ In 2018, the Department of Archaeology identified the Vedukkunari Hill site as an archaeological reserve, while Hindu devotees maintain that it is an ancient place of Hindu worship. In 2023, several Hindu idols near the Vedukkunari Hill were desecrated or stolen by unknown individuals, leading to tensions in the local community and protests by Tamil civil society condemning the destruction. In April 2023, the local court ordered government authorities not to obstruct worshippers at the site and instructed them to provide security for future worship conducted at the site. In 2024, during Maha Shivaratri celebrations near the site, police arrested Hindu worshippers who attempted to conduct overnight rituals despite restrictions, which led to protests demanding their release. While Hindu groups continue to demand full freedom of worship, the site remains disputed, with calls for worship to proceed without damage to the heritage area.

² In 2018, a group that included Buddhist monks attempted to install a Buddha statue at Kurunthumalai, an archaeological/heritage hill site in Mullaitivu District. Local Tamil Hindu residents opposed the move, and a court case followed. In September 2018, the Mullaitivu Magistrate's Court ordered that no new construction be carried out on the hill, allowed Hindu worship to continue, and directed the police to maintain public order. In subsequent years, some claimed that Kurunthumalai contains the ruins of an ancient Buddhist shrine. During the administration of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, state bodies, including

Mullaitivu.¹¹⁵ A few years later, the Siva Senai leader mentioned that Hindu and Buddhist organizations decided to jointly build a Hindu temple in the contested Kurnuthurmalai site, based on consultation with Buddhist monks.¹¹⁶ In January 2024, members of Siva Senai held a meeting with Buddhist monks at the site.¹¹⁷ The significance of this collaboration between Siva Senai and Buddhist monks is explored further in section 5.6 below.

Meanwhile, in April 2024, members of Siva Senai attempted to secure positions on the administrative board of the Hindu temple at the contested site in Vedukkunari, Vavuniya, during a meeting with the temple's current board and local devotees. The latter objected to this move, stating that Siva Senai had not issued any statement of support during their year-long struggle to protect and retain ownership of the worship site for Hindus.¹¹⁸

While one might expect Hindu nationalist groups like Siva Senai to consistently challenge attempts to impose Buddhism at contested sites in Hindu-majority areas, their responses vary depending on the specific issue. In the cases of Kurunthurmalai in Mullaitivu and Veddukkunari in Vavuniya highlighted above, Siva Senai has taken a more collaborative approach with the Buddhist monks involved. Local Tamil communities reported fear that such collaboration between Siva Senai and Buddhist monks was intended to deflect international criticism of Sinhalization efforts in the Northern province.¹¹⁹ However, in other cases, such as the ongoing dispute in Thayiddu, Jaffna, Siva Senai has taken a different stance.

In 2023, Siva Senai became involved in the high-profile case of Thayiddu in Jaffna, where a Buddhist temple had been allegedly illegally constructed with the support of the Sri Lankan military on land owned by Tamil families. During a meeting convened by the former leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Maithripala Sirisena, the chief organizer of the Siva Senai drew a comparison between the construction of the Buddhist temple in Thayiddu and the Babri Masjid incident in India. In 1992, the Babri Masjid, a centuries-old mosque in Uttar Pradesh in India, was demolished by Hindu nationalists, leading to widespread communal violence. Sachchithananthan warned that unless action is taken, the Buddhist temple at Thayiddu could face a similar outcome as the Babri Masjid, making a clear incitement to violence.¹²⁰ In March 2025, members of Siva Senai pledged during a press conference in Jaffna to resolve the Thayiddu land dispute within six months, whilst stating that the land rightfully belonged to Tamils.¹²¹

In addition to involvement in such disputes, the influence of Hindu nationalist groups has also reportedly begun to change traditional Hindu worship practices in Sri Lanka. These changes include shifting patterns of worship, the influence of Indian cultural expressions, different deities prioritized for veneration, and alterations in the languages used for religious recitation.¹²² In

the Department of Archaeology, often alongside the military were reported to engage in heritage-management activity at the site. In 2021, the then State Minister for National Heritage took part in events that included placing a Buddha statue and conducting Buddhist ceremonies at the site, with participation from Archaeology Department officers and military personnel. Local Hindu communities contested such activities as contrary to earlier court orders. From 2022 onward, local court decisions ordered the removal of newly built structures and statues and prohibited further construction. In June 2024, more than 200 people, including Buddhist monks, visited the site on pilgrimage and performed worship. As of mid-2025, the Buddhist shrine built at Kurunthurmalai remains in place despite court orders to remove or halt construction.

areas such as Batticaloa in Eastern Sri Lanka, Hindu nationalist aligned groups are reported to be conducting trainings to encourage changes in worship practices followed by Hindus in Sri Lanka, and attempting to impose a more standardized and orthodox form of Hindu worship.¹²³

The above incidents of intervention by Siva Senai illustrate how the group has leveraged tensions surrounding Hindu religious sites and archaeological heritage in the North and East to advance its influence. Whether through strategic alliances with Sinhala-Buddhist groups at the contested site of Kurunthormalai in Mullaitivu, or by taking a firm stance against the construction of the Buddhist temple on Tamil-owned land in cases like Thayiddy, the group presents itself as a protector of Hindu community interests. These contested spaces have created a strategic vacuum that Siva Senai has capitalized on in the absence of an adequate state response to the grievances of local Hindu communities. Beyond involvement in land disputes, the training activities and efforts of Hindu nationalist groups to reshape local worship practices by potentially diluting traditions distinct to Sri Lankan Hindus and aligning them more closely with Indian Hindu modes of worship, signals consolidating attempts towards a universal Hindutva identity.

5.5 TRANSNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Since its founding, Siva Senai's chief organizer, Maravanpulavu Sachchithananthan, has expressed interest in collaborating with like-minded groups. Over the years, these efforts included outreach to the global Hindu diaspora and engagement with Indian politicians and public figures who support or amplify Hindu nationalism. Through these interactions, Siva Senai aims to draw attention to the challenges faced by Hindus in Sri Lanka and calls for transnational solidarity and support.

According to a now-archived page of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) website listing Hindu organisations operating in Sri Lanka, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad Sri Lanka are included, alongside several other Hindu organisations such as the All Ceylon Hindu Congress, Chinmaya Mission, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), and the Vivekananda Society. The page notes that their activities in Sri Lanka include running Hindu schools, conducting Sunday schools, organising children's and youth camps, supporting temple-based community programmes, and holding events such as Ganesh Utsav.¹²⁴

On several occasions, Indian Hindu nationalist platforms have amplified or endorsed Siva Senai's messaging and activities. In 2017, Siva Senai was conducting campaigns to raise awareness among Hindu communities about conversions to Christianity. In October of that year, Upananda Brahmachari, Chairman of the Struggle for Hindu Existence website, released a press statement expressing solidarity with Siva Senai's efforts and urging the Sri Lankan government to take action to halt religious conversions of Hindus.¹²⁵ The same outlet has repeatedly reported on several incidents in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, including an alleged episode in 2022 in Muttur, Trincomalee, where a Buddha statue was erected on a hilltop already housing a statue of the Hindu god Pillaiyar, framing it as part of the ongoing Sinhalization in the North and East.¹²⁶

The transnational activities of Siva Senai have expanded to include direct engagements with Indian ideologues, diplomats, and political leaders. For instance, in 2019, Rajiv Malhotra, an Indian-American Hindutva ideologue and founder of the Infinity Foundation, interviewed Maravanpulavu Sachchithananthan. A Facebook post by Malhotra publicly noted that Sachchithananthan “has been connected with Infinity Foundation’s work”.¹²⁷ In 2021, Sachchithananthan met with India’s then-ambassador to Sri Lanka, Gopal Baglay, during a visit to Jaffna, where they discussed India-Sri Lanka relations, including calls for the restoration of a Hindu temple in Kachchatheevu Island in Sri Lanka.¹²⁸ The following year, Sachchithananthan met with the leader of the Tamil Nadu-based right-wing “Hindu Makkal Katchi” (Hindu People’s Party), Arjun Sampath, during a visit to the Hindu temple under renovation in Abu Dhabi. Sampath has previously expressed public support for Sri Lankan Hindus.¹²⁹ In an article by Sanatan Prabhat, the publication arm of the Hindu nationalist group “Sanatan Sanstha”, it refers to Sampath stating that “the atrocities on Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka should not be viewed only as attacks on Tamil people, but as atrocities on Hindus in Sri Lanka”.¹³⁰

During Sri Lanka’s 2022 economic crisis, Sachchithananthan further appeared in a video interview with Animitra Chakroborty, the General Secretary of Bengal Volunteers, on the organization’s official YouTube channel. Sachchithananthan spoke about Hindus in Sri Lanka as disproportionately disadvantaged during the crisis, as well as demographic anxieties over the perceived increase in the Muslim population through religious conversions, and Siva Senai’s shared mandate with the Bodu Bala Sena against Christians and Muslims.¹³¹

While the messaging and activities of groups such as Siva Senai have primarily focused on perceived threats to Hindus within Sri Lanka, their activism has increasingly expanded beyond national borders to align with broader narratives of global Hindu persecution. In 2021, Sachchithananthan called upon the United Nations to end what he described as “Hindu genocide” in Bangladesh.¹³² Later in 2024, members of Siva Senai staged a protest outside the UN compound in Colombo, carrying posters with slogans such as “Stop Hindu genocide in Bangladesh.”¹³³ This took place in the backdrop of the removal of the country’s long-time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina following nationwide student protests in Bangladesh. During this turbulent period, Indian Hindu nationalist groups weaponized on sporadic incidents of violence against Hindus in Bangladesh to create a false narrative of a “Hindu genocide”.¹³⁴

India’s BJP leaders have also sought to reframe Sri Lanka’s Tamil ethnic issue through the lens of Hindu marginalization. Notably, in 2023, BJP Tamil Nadu leader K. Annamalai addressed the British Tamil diaspora by stating that “he would never forget the atrocities committed against Tamils in 2009 and pledged that India’s Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, would deliver a political solution for Tamils”. He urged the Tamil diaspora “to work with him, BJP and the Indian Government” during the speech. Annamalai also pointed to the decline in the Hindu population in the Northern and Eastern provinces, asserting its detrimental impact on the region’s culture.

3

The Malaiyaha Tamils are descendants of indentured labourers brought into Sri Lanka by British colonial authorities during the 19th and early 20th century, primarily from South India, to cultivate land and work on plantations in the central highlands.

He drew attention to the emergence of Buddhist archaeological sites in these areas, which has caused tension between Hindus and Buddhists. Annamalai additionally spoke of the longstanding issues faced by the Malaiyaha Tamil community in Sri Lanka who continue to face poor educational and economic outcomes.¹³⁵

In 2024, following Narendra Modi's re-election as India's Prime Minister, members of Siva Senai gathered in front of a Hindu temple in Jaffna to celebrate the BJP's electoral victory. In 2025, the chief organizer of the Siva Senai posted on Facebook celebrating the formation of a group in Delhi called the "Hindu Sangarsh Samiti", which loosely translates to Hindu Resistance Committee.¹³⁶ This group is affiliated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and was formed with the aim of responding to threats faced by Hindus globally, including with a stated interest in protecting Hindus in Sri Lanka.¹³⁷

The cross-border interactions between Siva Senai and Hindu nationalist actors and platforms in India, highlight the increasing transnationalization of Hindu nationalist discourse. Although limited in scale, these linkages demonstrate that narratives of Hindu marginalization circulate across national boundaries. It reframes local issues and grievances in Sri Lanka's North and East within the broader ideological currents of Hindu nationalism. This process also resonates with the Akhand Bharat narrative: an expansive vision of a unified Hindu civilizational space that transcends present-day political borders, thereby positioning Sri Lankan Hindus symbolically within a larger pan-Hindu framework.

5.6 COLLABORATIONS WITH BUDDHIST MONKS

During its early formation, the Siva Senai's agenda included opposition to the increasing Sinhalization of the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka and perceived threats from Buddhists to the Hindu community. Despite opposing Sinhalization, Hindu nationalist groups have strategically aligned themselves with Sinhala-Buddhist ultra-nationalists over shared campaigns against religious conversion and cattle slaughter targeting Christians and Muslims.

In 2015, the ultra-nationalist Sinhala-Buddhist group Bodu Bala Sena expressed inspiration from the Indian paramilitary group Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, but was not overtly supportive of Siva Senai when the group was established in 2016.¹³⁸ Ultra-nationalist Sinhala-Buddhist groups in Sri Lanka, such as Bodu Bala Sena, Ravana Balaya, and Sinhala Ravaya have long campaigned in favour of anti-conversion laws and cattle slaughter, while Siva Senai openly endorsed and supported these demands.¹³⁹

In 2018, during a hunger strike in Jaffna against cattle slaughter attended by Hindu and Buddhist religious leaders, Siva Senai's chief organizer, Maravanpulavu Sachchithananthan, claimed, "Sri Lanka is a Hindu and Buddhist land. It does not belong to any other people." This was an abrupt shift from his usual stance of Sri Lanka as a "Siva Bhoomi" (meaning "Land of Lord Shiva", or an area sacred to the Saiva community).¹⁴⁰ Similarly, when Rudra Sena was formed in 2020, its Facebook page outlined its mission as opposing the religious conversion of Hindus, as well as Buddhists, to Islam and Christianity.¹⁴¹

In 2023, Siva Senai addressed a letter to the former leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Maithripala Sirisena, drawing attention to the shared concerns between Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka related to religious conversion, interfaith marriages, and cattle slaughter, which were framed as threats posed exclusively by Muslims and Christians. The letter stated that if the group's proposals in support of Hindus were implemented, Hindu voters would rally behind Sirisena, who is a Sinhala-Buddhist.¹⁴² In the same year, a Facebook page and YouTube channel under the name "Hindu-Buddhist Association" were launched in Vavuniya, promoting events jointly organized by local Buddhist and Hindu groups.¹⁴³ The Hindu-Buddhist Association is backed by a Sinhala politician, and locals in Vavuniya have raised concerns about the association's involvement in local conflicts, including disputes over contested religious sites.¹⁴⁴

In January 2024, Siva Senai members met with Buddhist monks near the aforementioned contested Kurunthumalai archaeological site in Mullaitivu. This site has been a flashpoint of tension since 2018 due to the alleged illegal construction of a Buddhist temple in the area. The meeting was viewed as an attempt to project an image of ethnic and religious harmony between Hindus and Buddhists, amidst ongoing tensions within communities regarding the contested site.¹⁴⁵ In May, Siva Senai led demonstrations in Nallur, Jaffna, condemning the Muslim community for engaging in cattle slaughter. The demonstrations were attended by both Hindu leaders and the chief Buddhist monk from the Naga Temple in Jaffna.¹⁴⁶ In the same month, a group called the Hindu Federation of Sri Lanka requested that former president Ranil Wickremasinghe pardon the Buddhist extremist monk Ven. Gnanasara of the Bodu Bala Sena, who was serving a sentence for insulting Islam.¹⁴⁷

The alliances between Siva Senai and Rudra Sena, and Sinhala-Buddhist ultra-nationalist groups, reflect a tactical convergence rooted in shared hostility toward Muslims and Christians. Even as Sinhala-Buddhist groups like Bodu Bala Sena have declined in prominence at the national level, Hindu nationalist organizations continue to sustain and localize these discourses to maintain their political relevance and traction. This strategy seeks to mainstream anti-Christian and anti-Muslim narratives through selected issues in Sri Lanka's North and East provinces.

6. CONCLUSION

This report examines the growth and influence of Hindu nationalist groups in Sri Lanka. Using a qualitative approach that draws on news media coverage, official country assessments, academic research, and social media analysis, it documents the reach, activities, and mobilization strategies of these groups as they exploit intracommunal grievances.

Our findings show that Sri Lankan Hindu nationalist organizations are primarily engaged in promoting anti-Christian and anti-Muslim narratives, attempting to shape electoral politics in the Northern and Eastern provinces, mobilizing around the protection of Hindu religious sites and land disputes, cultivating transnational linkages with Indian Hindu nationalist networks, and strategically collaborating with Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists on select issues.

Notably, the involvement of Hindu nationalist groups in land and religious site disputes across the Northern and Eastern provinces highlights the ways in which religion is used by such groups as a tool to assert political influence and relevance. A 2024 report by the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Sri Lanka noted that the intensification of land conflicts in the North and East has been fuelled not only by state actions but also by the surge of extremist Hindu nationalist rhetoric, an aspect that continues to remain underreported.¹⁴⁸

This trend reveals how weak governance and ineffective mechanisms for resolving land disputes have created fertile ground for such movements to embed themselves in these conflicts. By further aligning with Sinhala-Buddhist groups around shared campaigns against Muslims and Christians, Hindu nationalist organizations have found a means to legitimize and mainstream their rhetoric under the banner of religious solidarity. As noted by former Human Rights Commissioner Ambika Sathkunanathan, these groups have moved beyond ideological alignment to forge operational relationships with Buddhist monks, state authorities, and factions within the military.¹⁴⁹

The continued expansion of Hindu nationalist groups and their rhetoric of “othering” religious communities adds new layers of complexity to Sri Lanka’s path to reconciliation and social cohesion. By drawing on existing grievances at the local level, these groups have introduced a new dynamic into relationships among the country’s Hindu, Muslim, and Christian minority communities. Through threatening rhetoric and acts of intimidation toward Muslims and Christians, they have sought to redefine ethnic and political concerns as moral and religious issues. In doing so, Hindu nationalist actors have positioned themselves as defenders of Hindu identity in Sri Lanka’s Northern and Eastern provinces.

At the political level, these developments reflect how Hindu nationalist movements have capitalized on the vacuum left by the weakening of Tamil nationalist parties and the fading influence of Sinhala-Buddhist ultra-nationalist groups.¹⁵⁰ By localizing elements of Hindutva ideology, they attempt to substitute religion for ethnicity as the primary marker of political identity in the Tamil-majority North and East. Through a combination of religious mobilization,

social media outreach, and selective political engagement, these groups promote a narrative of protection and revival that appeals particularly to youth. This turn toward religious mobilization could undermine the secular ethos that has historically underpinned Tamil nationalism as well as introduce new intra-minority divisions.¹⁵¹ This, in turn, encourages Hindus to distinguish themselves from other minorities, fracturing the relationship between Hindu, Muslim, and Christian communities.

In October 2025, the Sri Lankan government's initiative to establish advisory committees to counter distorted religious interpretations propagated by fringe groups presents an important opportunity to monitor the activities of these groups and address their growing influence at the local level. This initiative can be further strengthened through sustained research in collaboration with faith-based leaders, independent watchdog organizations, and direct engagement with communities in the North and East. These efforts are essential to better understand how these groups consolidate influence, forge alliances, and mobilize followers at the grassroots level.

Overall, the findings of this report reveal that the emergence of Hindu nationalist groups in Sri Lanka is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader transnational diffusion of Hindu nationalist ideology across South Asia. This development carries far-reaching implications for governance, reconciliation, and pluralism in shaping Sri Lanka's long-term future. It signals the rise of a new religio-nationalist discourse that, if left unchecked, risks entrenching sectarian divisions and undermining the country's democratic and multicultural fabric.

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