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CONVIVIALITY, TENSION AND EVERYDAY
NEGOTIATIONS: SUBALTERN COSMOPOLITANISM
AND GOVERNANCE DYNAMICS OF LOW-INCOME
NEIGHBOURHOODS IN COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Abstract

This study aims to understand subaltern cosmopolitanism and governance dynamics in low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Subaltern cosmopolitanism is a relatively new underrepresentation of cosmopolitanism that draws attention to the life of various marginal groups in society. Low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo (known locally as *watta*) are key areas that bring together diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, especially when contrasted to the main societies in Sri Lanka. Despite the fact that economically and socially disadvantaged group of residents illustrates fundamental characteristics of cosmopolitanism resulting from daily interactions with difference, these elements have not been adequately investigated within the cosmopolitanism framework. Ethnography was the key approach used in this study. Participant observation, in-depth interviews and archival records were used to investigate and understand the present and past life of *watta* residents. To analyse the collected data, narrative analysis and thick description, were used. This study found that the *watta* culture is distinct in that it allows different groups to engage in everyday life. Religion is an essential element of *watta* residents through which they have interacted with different groups of people for a long time. However, a small group is involved in governance of the *watta*. This requires outsiders' involvement and brings in party politics, welfare assistance, and development projects which have exacerbated ethnic and religious differences among the residents of the *watta*. Hence, now the *watta* is changing like the majority society, the division in ethnicity and religion arises in the community. This thesis concludes that subaltern cosmopolitanism exists in the low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo, but it has had a significant impact due to the influence of internal and external stakeholders.

Keywords: Subaltern cosmopolitanism, Multilevel governance, Low-income neighbourhoods, Sri Lanka

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Abbreviations

CDC - Community Development Council
 CMC – Colombo Municipal Council
 NHDA - National Housing Development Authority
 UDA – Urban Development Authority
 LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam
 RGS – Royal Geographical Society
 GN - Grama Niladhari
 DSD - Divisional Secretariat Division

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Opening the context

This study focuses on subaltern cosmopolitanism and multilevel governance in the context of low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo. Sri Lanka is multi-ethnic and multi-religious. Since independence, however, the country has seen ethnic conflict on many occasions. The ethnic riots that erupted in July 1983 and led to a thirty-year civil war in Sri Lanka are remembered as a terrible episode in the country's history. In the post-war era, the Sri Lankan government has a significant problem in fostering harmony among diverse ethnic groups. Multi-ethnic low-income areas of Colombo, when contrasted to other regions of the country, provide an example of diverse ethnic and religious groups living together.

In the twenty-first century, living together in such a community is a challenge on every level. Cities are lively social places that bring together diverse individuals and offer the experience of living together despite these disparities (Donald, Kofman and Kevin, 2009). Slums in southern cities contain a wide range of individuals with varying origins and mobility histories (Seabrook, 2007; UN-Habitat, 2016c). However, the physical and social contexts of these low-income neighbourhoods make it difficult for people outside of the settlement to recognize this rich diversity. These areas are widely seen as problematic, unsafe and rife with dystopian characteristics. Nonetheless, unfavourable conceptions of low-income neighbourhoods fail to appreciate the beneficial aspects of this group, such as the coexistence in the lives of their inhabitants (Datta, 2012). These communities are distinguished by the presence of individuals of many ethnicities living in close proximity. Due to their financial status, residents of these areas need to live in a low-income neighbourhood, and they must develop a particular and largely unrecognised expertise and

cultural competency in order to do so. These communities also face a shortage of services, making the social and economic situation of the residents even more precarious (Davis, 2007).

This vulnerability, along with the concentration of poverty and economic deprivation in these areas, has long made them a target for state intervention. They are a primary focus of the 2016 New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat, 2016b) which sets international goals for urban development and has been agreed by all UN Member States. States use a variety of interventions to enhance the lives of low-income residents. The New Urban Agenda calls for coordination 'at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels, with the participation of all relevant actors' (para. 9). The participation of many stakeholders representing various geographical levels obliges low-income citizens to participate in multilevel government. Despite the fact that governance has a substantial influence on people's lives in marginalized areas, research has only seldom focused on the impact of governance structures on residents' social lives.

In Sri Lanka, new initiatives supported by the national government to reshape the urban environment and revitalize the national or local economy also provide a substantial challenge for individuals living in low-income neighbourhoods. Compared to the rest of society, urban subaltern communities of many ethnicities engage extensively with others in these locations. Regular contact in Colombo's low-income neighbourhoods is a mix of conviviality and conflict. However, except for a few studies (Silva & Athukorala, 1991; Silva, 1994), both of which are more than 25 years old, no substantial attempt has been made to

investigate cohabitation in low-income communities in Colombo. The lack of studies concentrating on living together in low-income communities is a significant gap that impacts our understanding of the coexistence that is commonly achieved in these sorts of neighbourhoods.

Colombo's history of coexistence with many ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities dates back to the pre-colonial period. Colombo has long been regarded as a cosmopolitan city due to the cultural variety it has cultivated due to migration, trade and colonization. Interestingly, both elites and working-class groups established means of interacting with diversity within their social strata. Nonetheless, elites' ethnic identity politics progressively influenced the working class in the latter period. As a result, the working class's solidarity was shaky, and their unity was questioned.

Little attention has been paid to understanding the cultural variety of subalterns and how they interact with others in low-income neighbourhoods. In light of this, this study aims to determine the link between subaltern cosmopolitanism and governance dynamics of low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This chapter introduces the study by describing the background and context, the research problem, the research aims, objectives and questions, its significance and, ultimately, its limitations.

1.2 The background to the study

Subaltern cosmopolitanism and multilevel governance are the foundations of this research. Subaltern cosmopolitanism is a relatively new subdiscipline of cosmopolitanism that

focuses on how marginalised people interact with difference. As an ideology, cosmopolitanism is concerned with how people live together. The meaning and interpretations of cosmopolitanism have changed over time, varying with the political and economic situation of the society in question. To be cosmopolitan means that a person is more willing and able to communicate with people from different cultures. According to Hannerz (1990), cosmopolitanism is a person's ability to navigate across diverse cultures through listening, observing, intuiting and reflecting. Cosmopolitanism is a progressive philosophy that has the potential to create peace, promote human rights, appreciate different cultures, cohabit and live in harmony (Appiah, 1997). According to Appiah, cosmopolitanism emphasises that the world is filled with diverse individuals and that everyone must respect and understand one another. In Appiah's opinion, people do not need to follow others' traditions; instead, people must accept and respect them. Cosmopolitanism emphasises how individuals may live with differences resulting from complex variety in a larger community (Beck, 2006).

The study of cosmopolitanism has historically focused on elites and, in the context of migration, on international migration. In this understanding, a cosmopolitan is someone who lives a sophisticated lifestyle, enjoys travelling, has a network of international contacts or feels at ease in any situation. Some researchers, however, disagree with this viewpoint, claiming that this elite group exhibit a more 'parochial cosmopolitanism' (Rajak and Stirrat, 2011) since, despite regular international travel, they tend to meet and socialise with others a lot like themselves. Instead, it is argued that a more genuine form of cosmopolitanism may be found in non-elites who regularly contact people of different races and religions

(Hannerz, 1990; Holton, 2009). Holton, for example, claims that cosmopolitanism may emerge in settings where migrants and locals mix, such as workplaces and communities. This challenges the assumption that elites want to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds. In recent years, the character of cosmopolitan philosophy has moved away from a focus on mobility and elites. As result, researchers have recently begun to focus on non-elite cosmopolitanism.

To scholars, marginalised and disadvantaged individuals are exposed to different others in regular, everyday interactions, resulting in cosmopolitanism. However, in cosmopolitanism studies, this aspect of harmonious coexistence receives the least attention (Appadurai, 1996; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Held, 2010). According to Appadurai (1996), researchers seldom pay attention to the cosmopolitanism of impoverished urban people. Until recently, studies of cosmopolitanism overlooked the great diversity of slums, urban poverty and marginalised communities. According to some empirical evidence, residents in low-income neighbourhoods can be cosmopolitan by engaging with their neighbours and certain socio-spatial situations (Lahiri, 2010; Datta, 2012). In the trajectory of cosmopolitanism, this argument spawned numerous sub-themes. Subaltern cosmopolitanism, for example, emphasises that many marginalised groups in society share cosmopolitan characteristics in a specific micro area, such as low-income settlements (Gidwani, 2006; Bayat, 2013; Zeng, 2014).

Subaltern studies are a recent subdiscipline of postcolonial theory. The term “subaltern” refers to numerous groups in society who are oppressed as a result of power dynamics

(McEwan, 2009). When looking at the non-elite cosmopolitanism of subaltern groups at the micro-level with proximity and interaction, slums and shanties are ideal examples in the contemporary world where people live with difference in everyday life (Ho, 2015). Slums and shanties are important places to study subaltern groups' cosmopolitanism because of their diverse demographic mix. Slums and shanties are no longer the only places where dystopian features may be found. Subalterns in these neighbourhoods have a strong desire to live together despite their differences; yet these progressive characteristics of slum dwellers are not primarily centred on cosmopolitanism (Datta, 2012; Mayaram, 2013; Ramakrishnan, 2014). While examining how various groups interact, this research also focuses on how problems arise in their coexistence.

Multilevel governance describes the combination of policy actions and jurisdiction at multiple levels, including local, national, regional and global (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Goodwin, 2009; Stephenson, 2013). Multilevel governance is more than just a 'nesting' approach to scale; it also brings together diverse public, private and non-profit stakeholders to achieve a common objective (Piattoni, 2009). When considering both the idea and actual setting of multilevel governance, it is clear that slums are inextricably linked to it (Milbert, 2006). Slum governance has a variety of effects on the living conditions of informal communities. To improve slums and shanties, horizontal and vertical linkages of government, non-government and numerous stakeholders representing local, national, and international levels work together (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013).

However, most of these initiatives are top-down, leaving slum dwellers out of the governing structure. The scope for marginalised groups to engage in the decision-making process in neoliberal urbanisation is limited in these initiatives (Bayat, 2000:2012; Davis, 2007; Muzio, 2008). Since low-income settlements are frequently viewed as beneficiaries rather than participants in governance, the low-income neighbourhood has received little attention in studies related to multilevel governance. Because of their inferior standing, low-income groups face significant obstacles in the governing process. Although their decision-making voice is less substantial, slums become focal points for discussions at three levels: local, national and international (Milbert, 2006). Existing studies of informal settlements in the global South focus predominantly on three groups closely involved in slum governance: (i) political parties and politicians (Bayat, 2000; Milbert, 2006), (ii) NGOs and religious organisations (Chidambaram, 2012) and (iii) slum leaders and residential associations (Pearlman, 1976; Auerbach and Thachil, 2016).

Slum governance is operated by groups of stakeholders, including individuals and institutions from many sectors and territories. Political parties, politicians, NGOs and other faith-based organisations intervene in slum governance as outsiders, while slum leaders, residential associations, religious leaders and local politicians work as internal forces. Nonetheless, because these two groups, outsiders and community members are intimately intertwined in governance, it is difficult to draw a distinct line between them (Pearlman, 1976; Milbert, 2006). However, studies have shown that some of these stakeholders' activities exacerbate tensions among people living in low-income communities with a diverse ethnic mix (Devas, 2001; Habyarimana *et al.* 2007; Coelho and Venkat, 2009;

Chidambaram, 2012; Koter, 2013). Because numerous stakeholders are represented at many levels, low-income neighbourhoods constitute a node of multilevel government. Slum residents have to rely on external institutions to improve their existing situation since they do not have the resources themselves. Many individuals and organisations intervene at various levels to reach out to low-income areas.

1.3 The research problem

Existing literature indicates that residents of multi-ethnic low-income neighbourhoods mingle with each other on a daily basis, enhancing cosmopolitan characteristics. Since cosmopolitanism is predominantly viewed as an elite phenomenon and because of their dystopian characteristics, low-income settlements receive the least focus in studies of cosmopolitanism. Similarly, studies show that both internal and external stakeholders have a significant influence on the peaceful life of these communities. But existing literature has not adequately answered how governance dynamics impact the cosmopolitanism of urban subalterns.

To fill this gap, I combine subaltern cosmopolitanism and multilevel governance to understand better how ethnically and religiously diverse communities cohabit in low-income Colombo neighbourhoods and how governance dynamics affect their long-term peaceful coexistence. Colombo is a port city that has long been popular with traders and other migrants. One of the key elements that linked Colombo to other regions of the world was the historic silk route. During the ancient era, pilgrimage and trade brought people from various nations to Sri Lanka (Brohier, 1984; Coningham *et al.*, 2017). The ethnic and

religious composition is directly influenced by trade, colonization, and migration, particularly in the port city of Colombo. Chinese, Arab, and Persian traders utilized Colombo port prior to the conquest of the nation by Western colonists. As a result, several nations interacted with Colombo through trade and economic networks even before Western colonists arrived. Colombo has traditionally been a city with a variety of cultures as a result of this mix of people. When the city was governed by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British from 1597 to 1948, this diversity was further fostered. Colombo prospered as a multiethnic city with people from many cultures for a long period owing to these numerous global links (Hulugalle, 1965; Jayawardena, 1986).

Many of Sri Lanka's current political, economic, and administrative systems have their origins in the British era. During this time, Colombo underwent a transformation into a trading and administrative hub with the inhabitants with diverse culture. Colombo earned a reputation as a cosmopolitan city because of its population who were both natives and foreigners and represented several ethnic groups (Hulugalle, 1965; Brohier, 1984). A major factor in the rise of a specific concentration of working-class tenements was the port's expansion in 1883 and the related industries. They came from the working class, having worked in factories and ports, for example (Perera, 2008; Nagaraj, 2016). Working-class people who represent various ethnicities and religions were forced to live in crowded, unhealthy neighbourhoods close to the city centre and ports due to the high cost of living and the proximity of their places of employment (Kottegoda, 1991:2004; Perera, 2002:2008). Since then, these settlements have developed into multi-ethnic, multi-religious

communities where people interact frequently and have a long history of respect for one another (Silva & Athukorala, 1991; Silva, 1994).

Low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo are key areas that integrate diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic groups to live together, especially when contrasted with wider Sri Lankan society. In these crowded, multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, everyday interactions between various individuals are a mix of conviviality and tension. While the main society is more sharply divided by ethnicity and religion, due to the informality of these neighbourhoods, living together has become a survival tactic. Although this disadvantaged group contains fundamental cosmopolitan aspects as a result of daily interactions with diverse individuals, these elements have not been thoroughly examined in the framework of cosmopolitanism.

Nationalist Buddhist religious organizations that arose in the post-civil war era also pose a threat to Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic cohabitation. (Fernando, 2014; Ali, 2015). Tensions and unrest arose as a result of hate speech and assaults against minority groups in the post-war period. Since the advent of radical Buddhist organizations, anti-Muslim violence, both verbal and physical, has been documented across the country. Furthermore, numerous sub-sectors have developed within major faiths. Sub-sectors of Islamic doctrine have formed in Sri Lanka during the last several decades (Mcgilvray, 2011). This continuous pattern of denominational conflict does not exclude Christianity (Wood, 2012:2013). Religious and ethnic movements may readily penetrate low-income neighbourhoods in the guise of social welfare, as Chidambaram (2012) demonstrates. Radical actions of many religious

organizations have the potential to destabilize multi-ethnic communities. If they enter low-income neighbourhoods with radical views or the goal to propagate religious ideology, the dynamics of peaceful coexistence may be disrupted.

Various initiatives to improve low-income communities in Colombo have been attempted since colonial times. Informal settlers were linked to both state and non-state partners through these activities. Despite the fact that governance has a major impact on the lives of low-income residents, no comprehensive research has been conducted in Sri Lanka to investigate the impact of external variables on the unity of these economically and socially marginalised subalterns. The literature which is currently available on low-income settlements in Colombo concentrates on women and the difficulties they face in securing a living (Kottegoda 1991), social networks and kinship (Kottegoda 2004; Ruwanpura 2008), and eviction and relocation (Nagaraj, 2016; Perera, 2015:2016; Abeyasekera et al, 2019). However, studies are insufficient to understand how various groups interact in low-income neighbourhoods and what challenges they face in everyday life to maintain community unity. This research explores the lives of a multi-ethnic, low-income neighbourhood in Colombo to address this scholarly vacuum.

Wadulla Watta, with its thriving cultural diversity, offers a great setting for researching the cosmopolitanism of subaltern communities. It is a multi-ethnic low-income community in the northern part of Colombo. It is unusual to find a location with such a rich blend of varied groups without any being obviously numerically dominant, even though some other low-income settlements in the city share comparable multicultural traits. The Wadulla

community has also had extensive experience with a variety of migration types, including intra-urban, inter-urban, rural-urban, and estate sector-urban.

Because I had previously worked with a similar community, I was aware of the difficulties in doing an ethnographic study in this settlement. I thus adopted a variety of approaches to become acquainted with the residents, especially with the local leaders. Additionally, I engaged closely with public spaces like the three-wheeler stand and the tea shop, which offer a convenient setting to observe residents of Wadulla going about their daily lives. The three-wheeler driver, Raja, became a close associate of mine, and we frequently engaged in pleasant conversation in the evenings. Numerous elements of the neighbourhood were identified through their interaction with the three-wheel driver in the stand. Another important location where most people in Watta go to buy food is Velan's tea shop. Most days, I came by his shop for tea and a talk, which helped me get to know most of the people in Watta. I made all these approaches gradually, instilling confidence in the Watta people.

The festivals that were held in Watta also made it possible to closely observe how the residents interacted with one another throughout this convivial movement. As an observer, I paid great attention to how individuals from various religious backgrounds come together and support one another. Many respondents in the interviews also emphasized their participation in New Year's and other festivities. All approaches, however, did not go smoothly. Due to my identity as a Sri Lankan Muslim, the initial encounter with the Buddhist clergy in the Watta was unexpected and unpleasant. But later, with the priest's help, I was able to persuade him and get on with the study. Although initially I had difficulties and

needed a lot of time to approach the Watta and get to know the people, later on it allowed for a smooth interaction to perform a twelve-month fieldwork without many difficulties, which are addressed in depth in chapter three.

1.4 The research aims, objectives and research questions

Given the lack of research on urban subaltern cosmopolitanism in low-income neighbourhoods, this research aims to investigate the link between subaltern cosmopolitanism and low-income neighbourhood governance dynamics in Colombo. To do this, I split the overall goal into three main parts. The first question is: **‘Can cosmopolitanism operate in low-income neighbourhoods?’** This involves an analysis of whether cosmopolitan characteristics may be found among the ethnically and religiously varied subaltern groups in Colombo's low-income areas. Residents in these settlements engage with one another every day for a variety of reasons. Their lives are a mix of joy and tension, but they have been together for a long time. So, I used subaltern cosmopolitanism to investigate the interaction between these culturally diverse groups. To collect the necessary information for this objective, I further divided it into the following research questions: what sort of diversity appears in highly congested multi-ethnic neighbourhoods? How do people interact? What factors lead to conviviality as well as tension? How do people overcome issues that arise when they live together with diverse people?

The second research question is **‘How does multilevel governance function in low-income neighbourhoods?’** Due to economic hardship and informality, urban subalterns rely on others for assistance. Despite the fact that literature shows that slums and shanties are

linked to a variety of organizations at various geographical levels, it is still necessary to identify who is involved in slum governance. A number of sub-questions further direct this objective: what external groups interact with the low-income community? What are the internal governance mechanisms operating in the community? Who are key stakeholders in the internal governance of the community? How do external stakeholders connect to these internal mechanisms?

The third research question of this study brings the first two together to examine **‘How does multilevel governance impact the cosmopolitanism of people living in low-income neighbourhoods?’** Previous research in this area shows that the engagement of diverse stakeholders in slum governance may weaken or strengthen low-income inhabitants' cosmopolitanism. Examining the influence of governance on the everyday life of low-income inhabitants in Colombo is necessary due to their dependence on the assistance of others. Although some stakeholders intend to improve socioeconomic condition of these communities, the way they interact with residents may create unanticipated problems. The following research questions were created to focus research on multilevel governance and its influence on Colombo's low-income neighbourhoods: how do external stakeholders involve/interact with low-income neighbourhoods? What are the reasons for those stakeholders' engagement in internal matters of the community? How do internal mechanisms combine with external factors to affect the everyday life of low-income residents? How does tension arise in the community due to the involvement of external actors and internal factors?

1.5 The significance of the study

This study is significant in two ways: first, in terms of its theoretical contribution, and second, as a contribution to Sri Lankan society. This research aims to understand how subaltern cosmopolitanism and multilevel governance interact in a low-income neighbourhood. The applicability of these concepts to low-income neighbourhoods in the global South is rarely mentioned in the literature. In low-income communities, regular contact with culturally varied groups can be recognised as cosmopolitan. Nonetheless, because outsiders' perceptions of these marginal areas are dystopian, this important connection among communities in these places is not widely recognised. As a result, there is a vacuum in the cosmopolitan literature about how subaltern groups interact in everyday life in low-income neighbourhoods.

Similarly, the influence of governance on the social lives of subaltern groups is rarely explored in the existing literature. Slum governance has a variety of effects on the living conditions of informal communities. Low-income neighbourhoods constitute a node of multilevel governance because numerous stakeholders are represented at many levels. Because of their economic hardship, these marginalised people must rely on external institutions to improve their existing situation. Many individuals and organisations intervene at various levels in low-income areas. Some of these interventions are directly aimed at improving the living conditions of subalterns and their environs. Residents in culturally diverse low-income areas are annoyed by some of these interventions. However, a few studies still focus on the influence of multilevel governance on subaltern

cosmopolitanism. These concerns are examined with respect to the city of Colombo in this research.

Ethnic and religious tensions have divided Sri Lankan society for years. As a result, despite Sri Lanka's long history of multicultural tolerance, some people have concentrated mostly on the negative elements of coexisting with diverse communities. This research focuses on Sri Lanka, where these connections have long been obvious but have received little attention. The geographical distribution of Sri Lankan ethnic groups is reflected in the country's cultural environment. Except in a few locations, individuals prefer to live in communities with people of similar ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Low-income neighbourhoods are unusual in this regard and contain a great mix of individuals from many cultural backgrounds. These settlements are defined as distinct geographical areas with diverse cultural patterns of coexistence. Subalterns in these neighbourhoods have a clear tendency to live together despite their differences, yet these positive characteristics of slum residents are not widely recognised.

To address this gap, I combine subaltern cosmopolitanism with multilevel governance to better understand how ethnically and religiously diverse groups live in low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo and how governance dynamics impact their long-term peaceful coexistence. This study adds a new perspective to the existing knowledge of subaltern cosmopolitanism and multilevel governance with low-income neighbourhoods in Sri Lanka.

1.6 The limitation of the research

To understand how ethnically and religiously diverse groups live together in low-income settlements in Colombo, I have selected only one such neighbourhood because of its rich diversity in terms of origin, culture and migration. The purpose of this selection was not to select a neighbourhood that somehow represented similar neighbourhoods, since that would be impossible, but to identify characteristics that were worthy of attention. This is not therefore a representative study, but one that reflects the nature of ethnic and religious diversity in low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo. Although there have been many challenges during this study, I would want to concentrate on the lack of literature that I encountered when I was planning the research. Subaltern cosmopolitanism is a relatively recent subfield in the field of cosmopolitan studies. As a result, research concentrating on this new notion in connection to low-income neighbourhoods is rare. Similar to this, there is little research on multilevel governance and how it affects the social life of urban subaltern groups. Further, studies concentrating on a positive perspective of coexistence are uncommon, despite the fact that cultural diversity and tension are an old concern in Sri Lanka.

Even while several studies concentrated on low-income areas, they also took into account experiences with gender, social networks, and challenges (Kottegoda 1991:2004; Ruwanpura 2008; Nagaraj, 2016; Perera, 2015:2016; Abeyasekera et al, 2019). Although the residents of these settlements are distinct in terms of their ethnicity, religion, and language, they coexist in congested neighbourhoods due to their mutual understanding of one another. Many academics in Sri Lanka did not find the positive side of urban subalterns very

noteworthy. Consequently, it is challenging to focus the study because none of these concepts have been previously investigated in the Sri Lankan context, especially in relation to Colombo's low-income settlements. The goal of this study is especially pertinent to the current Sri Lankan society because of the rising tension and conflict. Therefore, it would be ideal for the study to be carried out again in other parts of the country.

1.7 The structural outline

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. Chapter one introduces the context of the study and sets out the research objectives and questions and the significance of the research. Chapter two reviews relevant literature in more detail and examines the research gap. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section explores literature related to cosmopolitanism and particularly the focus on subaltern cosmopolitanism. The second section focuses on low-income neighbourhoods. Subaltern cosmopolitanism has only rarely been investigated in connection to low-income neighbourhoods. The chapter expands the argument that cosmopolitanism is not solely a characteristic of the elite. The third section of the chapter examines existing research on the relationship between low-income groups and multilevel governance, which is a further gap in the literature. The fourth section turns to the empirical context, examining why Colombo is a good place to study subaltern cosmopolitanism and multilevel governance. The last section of this chapter summarises the debate and expands on the research questions.

The adoption of a qualitative, ethnographic research technique is justified in Chapter three, and the overall study design is explored. The first part of this chapter discusses the origins

and evaluation of Colombo's low-income neighbourhoods. In addition, I explain the reasons for choosing Wadulla Watta as a research area for this study. The second part discusses the techniques I used to become acquainted with the people and the environment. An ethnographic approach was used to understand the culture of this subaltern group in their living environment, discussed in the third section. Methods include observation, interviews, and archive research. The researcher's positionality – an essential factor in ethnographic work – is discussed in the final part.

Chapter four introduces the original empirical material. This chapter examines the history of ethnic identity in Sri Lanka, based mostly on archival materials. It examines how the colonial government divided Sri Lankans based on ethnicity and the social consequences of that division. Based on census data, I focus on ethnic classification in the colonial and post-colonial periods. I argue that ethnic categorisation in Sri Lanka is inextricably linked to the colonial administrators' census. This chapter examines how colonial rulers created ethnicity and how elite organisations used ethnic classification to mobilise their classes. Although there were many interrelationships among ethnic groups and faiths in pre-colonial society, colonial categorisation separated the nation along ethnic lines, destroying working-class unity. This chapter also looks at how identity politics arose in Sri Lanka, how elites continue to benefit, and how it expanded among the working class in the post-colonial era. The second portion examines class formation and identity construction among the elite and working classes in the colonial era. In the final part of this chapter, I consider everyday experiences of living together with diverse ethnic groups in the research area, which has produced subaltern cosmopolitanism.

Chapter five argues that religion is a significant element of Watta residents' lives and how they connect with one another. I pay attention to the events and occasions recalled by individuals of diverse religious groups and explain which memories are positive and which are associated with tension. People use religion to accomplish their goals while supporting the moral foundations for their own lives. Religion is essential to residents' lives, and they are able to change it. The religious landscape of the Watta neighbourhood demonstrates how religious institutions are clustered together and how individuals of many faiths interact with one another. Religion is a key way in which individuals interact with one another. Through the evolution of religious groups, diversity of religious locations, neighbourhood involvement of religious groups and community participation in processions and other religious celebrations, I investigate people's relationships. I conclude that the Watta is evolving in tandem with the rest of society. Individuals are suspicious of one another and have started programs to safeguard their faith and people. In the post-war era, politicians and religious revivalist movements from outside the Watta and religious and local leaders in the Watta have encouraged these ideas. As a result, religion plays a significant role in causing tensions and division among the Watta.

In Chapter six, I explored the key stakeholders who engage with governance in the study area. By examining internal and external stakeholders, I addressed how they influence the key issues in the Watta. The everyday life of the subaltern groups in the study area is strongly related to governance dynamics. A small group determines neighbourhood governance and influences party politics, welfare assistance and development actions, sometimes stimulating divisions. By investigating key stakeholders in Watta governance,

this chapter argues that internal and external politics threaten the existing cosmopolitanism of subalterns in the neighbourhood. The first section of this chapter explores influential people in the Watta and their importance in Watta governance. The second part focus on how external stakeholders approach the Watta and their influence on Watta matters. I conclude that the study area is changing. These changes influence the coexistence of this multi-ethnic neighbourhood. People think that they can get benefits or protection if members of their ethnic group come into power. As a result of this perception, people now like to have ethnic representation from associations to higher political institutions. Despite inhabitants' best efforts to convince the outside world that there are no problems among them, tensions and divisions between ethnic groups are becoming increasingly severe.

Chapter seven looks at how Watta culture is evolving through (i) social networks, (ii) women's participation and (iii) social reproduction. The first section focuses on the importance of social networks in Watta culture, how they are formed, and the threats they face. Second, I highlight the significance of women's role in everyday engagement, how this interaction helped build mutual understanding across various groups, and the problems they confront in maintaining these relationships. The third section focuses on how 'understanding others' occurs through the everyday interaction that most people have practised since childhood, how parents' concerns prevent mixing with other children, and how this may affect Watta culture. This chapter argues that the Watta has a distinct culture that allows diverse groups to engage with each other in everyday interactions. Given the high population density and economic marginalisation, it is challenging to prevent intimate relationships between groups. People gain from social networks in a variety of ways. These

networks provide a venue for various ethnic groups to connect in everyday life while also giving monetary and non-material assistance. In this chapter, however, I examine how growing ethnoreligious awareness undermines current culture and poses a threat to future generations' ability to understand others' cultures through social learning.

In the final chapter, I conclude the study by drawing together responses to the three central research questions: (i) Can cosmopolitanism operate in low-income neighbourhoods? (ii) How does multilevel governance function in low-income neighbourhoods? (iii) How does multilevel governance impact on cosmopolitanism of people living in low-income neighbourhoods? In addition, I review the methodologies used to examine the variety of subaltern groups in low-income neighbourhoods, as well as their importance. The study's overall conclusion is presented in the final section of this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LIVING TOGETHER WITH DIFFERENCE

2.1 Introduction

Cities are vibrant social spaces that bring different people together and provide an experience of living in close proximity with these differences (Donald, Kofman and Kavin, 2009). Migration and natural increase stimulate the urban population's rapid growth in the global South (UN-Habitat, 2016). Internal migration due to differing forms of mobility has become a significant factor contributing to the growth of slums in many cities in the global South (Seabrook, 2007). While urban governance struggles to tackle diverse issues caused by rapid urbanisation, urban residents also face numerous challenges in everyday urban life. Among them, living with culturally different groups has become a significant element of regular interaction, especially in low-income settlements.

Low-income settlements in many cities in the global South have a long history that strongly interacts with colonisation because most were formed during colonial times (Davis, 2007). These settlements struggle with a lack of services, increasing inhabitants' social and economic vulnerability. However, due to affordability and livelihood opportunities, low-income people are trapped in these marginalised locations. In addition, new urban development projects encouraged by governments to regenerate the national or city economy also become a significant challenge for people who live in low-income neighbourhoods. With the support of multiple stakeholders, states make diverse interventions to improve the lives of low-income residents. The involvement of diverse stakeholders representing different territorial levels obliges low-income residents to take part in multilevel governance. Although governance significantly affects people's lives in

marginal places, research has only infrequently paid attention to governance's impact on residents' social lives.

Even though migration stimulates diversity, only specific urban settings allow groups whose ethnicity, religion, class, and caste differ to live together. The low-income settlement is one such place; nevertheless, neighbourhoods' physical and social environments do not allow those beyond the settlement to recognise this rich diversity. Generally, low-income communities are viewed as problematic and dangerous. Despite these negative perceptions, such communities are characterised by people of different origins living together in close proximity. In many places in the contemporary world, people struggle to live with others due to cultural differences. Yet, engaging with culturally diverse groups in everyday life is common in low-income settlements in many cities in South Asia.

Colombo's history of living together with different ethnic, religious and language groups goes back to the pre-colonial era. It has long been considered a cosmopolitan city as it flourished with cultural diversity stimulated by migration, trade and colonialism (Brohier, 1984; Hulugalle, 1965; Jayawardena, 1986; Jeganathan, 1997; Nagaraj, 2016). Interestingly, at the beginning of the colonial period, both elites and working-class groups developed ways of engaging with difference within their social strata. Over time, however, ethnic sentiments and identity politics of elites gradually began to influence the working class and solidarity between groups within the working class became fragile. Despite this, socioeconomic status of this group causes them to remain in low-income settlements.

Nevertheless, attention to the cultural diversity of subalterns and the way in which they mingle with others in low-income neighbourhoods has received little attention.

Subaltern cosmopolitanism emerged as a sub-division of cosmopolitanism relatively recently and draws attention to how marginalised groups engage with difference. Generally, cosmopolitanism is discussed in relation to elites and mobility as they have the privilege to move across cultural boundaries and experience various cultures. Many scholars criticise this view. They argue cosmopolitanism could also be observed among non-elites who generally engage with people belonging to diverse ethnicities and religions. This argument produced several sub-themes within cosmopolitanism. Among them, subaltern cosmopolitanism emphasises that different marginalised groups in society also share cosmopolitan elements in a selected micro space, like low-income settlements.

This chapter develops around two objectives; firstly, it aims to identify the research gap by reviewing literature related to the main theories used in this study. Secondly, it examines how the study area, Colombo, is an appropriate place to research these concepts. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section explores literature related to cosmopolitanism, its contemporary dynamics and the connection with subaltern cosmopolitanism. The second section focuses on subaltern cosmopolitanism and applies it to low-income neighbourhoods. The third section looks at how these low-income settlements interact with multilevel governance and how governance influences these communities. Meanwhile, the fourth section explores why Colombo is suitable to research subaltern cosmopolitanism and multilevel governance, focusing on low-income

neighbourhoods. While summarising the discussion, the final part of this chapter constructs research questions for further investigation through amalgamating theories and empirical evidence.

2.2 Cosmopolitanism: a way of living together

Cosmopolitanism reflects an individual's ability to interact with different people from diverse cultures. Hannerz (1990, p. 239) describes cosmopolitanism as 'a willingness to engage with the Other...a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflection.' Hannerz firmly believes that moral engagement strengthens cosmopolitanism, through which a person can understand and respect others' cultures. On the contrary, Beck (2006), by addressing 'living with Others,' emphasises how people could live with differences together in a broader society because of complex diversity. He notes that practising cosmopolitanism is challenging in the contemporary world but asserts it is necessary to respond to the recent globalised world order and crises like climate change. According to Beck, globalisation is a fundamental element that interconnects different cultures in different locations.

Holton (2009) is critical of Beck's analysis. He argues that neither globalisation nor global crisis is necessarily new. Holton points out that increasing globalisation does not necessarily create increasing political openness. Nevertheless, he accepts that cosmopolitanism is a positive and progressive concept that can promote human rights and peaceful coexistence as well as respect for other cultures. Delanty (2012, p. 2) defines cosmopolitanism as the 'extension of the moral and political horizons of people, societies, organisations and

institutions. It implies an attitude of openness as opposed to closure.’ Vertovec and Cohen (2002, p. 12) state that ‘from the ancient, medieval, early modern and modern period, we can identify different cultures from different ways of mingling with people. So, throughout the world, many cultures formed their ways of cosmopolitanism practices.’ Definitions and interpretation given to cosmopolitanism have changed in different periods based on a society's political and economic situation. It is therefore necessary to investigate this notion's evolution to understand the contemporary meaning of cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism was advocated by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant through his work *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective* (Kleingeld, 2014). Kant refers to cosmopolitanism as a rationale for being a member of a single moral community. He highlights freedom, equality and independence as fundamental characteristics that lead to a cosmopolitan society. In his 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace*, Kant called for a worldwide Federation of Free States to ensure the security and stability of its member states. By establishing a common federal state, he proposes implementing and practising common law and human rights for the entire community without disparities. Vertovec and Cohen (2002) note that Kantian cosmopolitanism's whole idea is to create a worldwide community of humanity committed to universal values. Emphasising Kant's view, Molloy (2017) expresses that Kantian cosmopolitanism considers the whole world as a single society and integrates politics and morality. Although scholars examine the perception of the worldwide community, in contrast Held (2010, p. 40) reviewing Kantian cosmopolitanism, highlights ‘each person is a citizen of the world’; thus, every citizen has to work for a single

society for all human beings. This description implies that while maintaining citizenship in a selected state, a person can work towards a single community for all people.

While classical cosmopolitanism emphasises a need for a single society from a universal perspective, Appiah (1997) argues it is challenging to consider entire groups of people as a single society because the world is diverse. Still, he proposes that cosmopolitanism is a reliable philosophy in a contemporary world of increasing tensions and clashes. According to Appiah, cosmopolitanism implies that people have the liberty to live according to different ideas, different conceptions of what they are up to, what they think is worthwhile. Further, he rightly points out that cosmopolitans do not persuade everybody to be like 'themselves' or have to follow what they do. Cosmopolitanism emphasises that the world is full of different people, to be treated with respect and shown mutual understanding. In Appiah's view, cosmopolitanism does not require people to follow others' cultures; instead, it only requires people to accept and respect them.

In modern times cosmopolitanism is viewed as a normative concept from the perspective of philosophy and politics. Providing attention to philosophical and empirical perspective, Binnie *et al.*, (2006, p. 13) categorise cosmopolitanism into two significant ways: '[F]irst, as a philosophy of world citizenship which simultaneously transcends the boundaries of the nation-state and descends to the scale of individual rights and responsibilities in an apparently increasingly connected and globalised world; and second, as a particular set of skills and attitudes towards diversity and difference.' Existing studies focus on cosmopolitanism through a multidisciplinary approach by blending both normative and

empirical methods in different geographies from the global to the local level. Contemporary studies pay more attention to understand cosmopolitanism in specific contexts rather than in general terms.

Traditionally, cosmopolitanism studies highlight two elements: elites and cross border mobility (Hannerz, 1990; Holton, 2009). Cosmopolitanism typically indicated a person who led a sophisticated lifestyle, who was fond of travelling, enjoyed a network of international contacts or felt at home everywhere. Held (2012, p. 2) coined the phrase 'mobile global elite' to emphasise that cosmopolitanism generally referred to elites who have the privilege to move across borders. Datta (2012, p. 750) is of the view that 'cosmopolitanism has been debated largely in connection with transnationalism and globalisation. Cosmopolitan attitudes and behaviours examined among those who regularly travel across national borders have privileged a North-South focusing on elites, refugees, and expatriates.'

In general, elites are a specific class of people who occupy positions of power or great wealth. This group of people has more opportunity to travel across borders and often engage with different people. Given frequent travel by crossing national and cultural boundaries, earlier philosophers identified elites as mediators of cosmopolitanism. Holton (2009) perceives mobility as a potential factor that could help to understand different people. He expresses that cosmopolitanism may emerge in working places and neighbourhoods where migrants intermingle with local people. Also, they may identify common interests and could establish close relationships through friendship or marriages. However, this is always not a fact because of the increasing travel interest of non-elite

members. Also, it is difficult to conclude that all elites are interested in interacting with different people. In recent years, the nature of cosmopolitan thought mainly related to mobility and elites contradicts this criticism.

Hannerz (1990) argues that the elite's engagement through cross border mobility does not create cosmopolitanism as expected. His criticism centres on the fact that although elites have the privilege to travel across boundaries and engage with different people, they do not engage with everyone. According to Hannerz, elites often interact with a selected group of people, mostly from similar social strata in society. Further, he argues that migrants have a different preference when they engage with an alien culture. Hannerz (1990, p. 240) firmly admits that 'it may be one kind of cosmopolitanism where the individual picks from other cultures only those pieces which suit him (her) self.' According to him, this type of selectivity may operate for the short term, which does not help construct a genuine engagement. Through looking at social networks of migrants, Giellis (2009, p. 271) considers that 'migrants were part of social networks both here (in the new country of residence) and there (in the former country of residence.' Since migrants' engagement with people in the destination is inadequate and selective, they are reluctant to engage with an alien culture fully.

Likewise Appiah, in *Cosmopolitan Patriots* (1997), argues that patriotism is determined through the experiences of the place of origin and destination. If a person had negative experiences in the place of origin and positive experience in the destination, he/she quickly engages and adapts to the new home and culture. In contrast, if a person had a positive

experience in place of origin and a negative experience in a destination, they will be more linked and loyal to their place of origin. In terms of migration and cosmopolitanism, both hosts and migrants should maintain a certain level of compromise with mutual understanding. People who already live in the destination should exhibit 'openness' to strangers, while immigrants also have to be willing to engage with an alien culture.

Besides elite and non-elite perspectives, cities are a central focal point in cosmopolitanism studies (Binnie *et al.*, 2009; Schiller, 2010; Valentine, 2013). Throughout history, cities have played a vital role in cosmopolitanism through trade, transport links, colonialism and different types of migration. These are vibrant social spaces where differences interact with each other in everyday exchanges. In the same way, Donald, Kofman and Kevin (2009, p. 10) highlights cities as the focal point of cosmopolitan studies, adding that 'cities are more than other social spaces raise most acutely issues of how strangers and neighbours coexist and live together with differences in shared spaces.' Studies also tell us that cosmopolitanism is not an entirely new phenomenon; many communities have lived together in a culturally diverse society for centuries (Malpas, 2009; Raco, Imrie and Lin, 2011; Duru, 2013). These types of diverse communities could easily be found in colonial port cities. Yeoh and Lin (2012) identified that cosmopolitanism flourished in colonial port cities for centuries through trade and mercantilism.

Like cosmopolitanism, conviviality is another notion widely used to examine the everyday living experience of a multicultural society, generally in micro geographical scales (Chan, 2013; Wise and Velayutham, 2014; Padilla, Azevedo and Olmos-Alcaraz, 2015; Wessendorf,

2016; Back and Sinha, 2016). Ho (2015) highlights that everyday engagement of different groups in a designated place helps understand how other people share resources and ideas, face issues and negotiate, bringing tensions and conviviality. Cosmopolitanism and conviviality have become essential tools to understand practices and capacities people develop to live together (Noble, 2013). Radice (2016) expresses that although conviviality examines relations across cultural differences, it overlaps conceptually with everyday cosmopolitanism. Radice (2016, p. 432) states, 'conviviality has been taken up in the last decade as a new way of talking about everyday living-with-difference in multiethnic cities which often use to analyse social interaction in the neighbourhood, community settings, and in public places.' Even though cosmopolitanism and conviviality seem to overlap with one another, the way in which these terms are used to analyse the everyday engagement of diverse cultural groups shows a substantial difference in their meanings.

Freitag (2014) argues that although both concepts overlap in certain areas, it is better to use these terms separately to understand their deeper meanings. She uses conviviality from a non-elitist, micro-scale perspective to understand living together peacefully in a culturally diverse society. Freitag (2014, p. 375) is of the view that 'cosmopolitanism and conviviality can be seen as complementing each other, the former tendentially (albeit not exclusively) focusing more on elite interactions and emphasising the interactions of people of different ethnic and religious origin, the latter opening a window onto the quotidian practices of everyday interactions by people regardless of their origin.' Freitag firmly believes that conviviality is an outcome of political rules and specific social norms. According to her, living together is a challenge without rules and norms. Formal and informal rules and regulations

lead to conviviality in culturally diverse societies. For example, to maintain a smooth routine in a neighbourhood, the local leaders or Residential Association could execute specific rules for residents such as how to dispose of rubbish, how to use public spaces, the way in which to attend community matters and fundraise for public events.

Amin (2013) is of the view that living together shows how people play two kinds of roles when they live in multiethnic neighbourhoods. He admits that the interaction between different groups occurs for everyday tasks, such as necessary infrastructure, security and at work in certain places. However, on certain occasions, such as family gatherings, festivals and worship, people strictly adhere to ethnic and religious practices, distinguishing people with different identities. Hitherto focus reveals that conviviality produces a collective effort that generally comes through certain norms and rules that serve a common goal. Both conviviality and cosmopolitanism express the way diverse people live together in a multiethnic community. Nevertheless, the way certain communities attempt to create conviviality is closely associated with rules and norms. In contrast, cosmopolitanism does not encourage implementing certain rules in a culturally diverse community because, sometimes, influential groups could control weaker groups in society through rules and regulations. Instead, cosmopolitanism depends on mutual understanding and moral engagement as key tools for living together in a culturally diverse community.

Massey (1993) coined the term 'power-geometry' to explain how different social groups have diverse influences in a selected space. Massey (1994, p. 150) points out that the 'mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people. Differential mobility

can weaken the leverage of the already weak.' Massey also argues that people's influence on one another and their ability to shape place does not merely depend on mobility. In some areas, immobile people have more control than those who are mobile. However, she stresses that power in relation to mobility is an essential factor, and it shapes relationships among different groups in a place. According to Massey, everyone does not have equally influential power over a place. Different groups have diverse control based on their economic, social, and cultural background. Sometimes this power dynamic could lead to a moral society if it implements and regulates impartially, although it opposes cosmopolitan concept. This power dynamic could lead to implementing regulations for powerless people by influential people, minorities by majorities, and migrants by non-migrants.

Most cities in the contemporary world are established and maintained through various types of mobilities. Migration into cities is closely interconnected with multicultural diversity. As a result, cities are heterogeneous in social, cultural, economic and political perspectives. Yet living together in contemporary cities is a challenging task due to these differences, which frequently leads to tensions and conflicts. Not all places in a town appear as multicultural sites and maintain a smooth fabric of coexistence among different groups (Valentine, 2013; Zeng, 2014). Although cities are still playing a prominent place for cultural diversity, marginalised people cannot afford ongoing developments in many cities. Gentrification projects, visa procedures and resident permits for skilled and non-skilled migrants are examples that show contemporary urbanism marginalises people according to race and class.

As a consequence, social polarisation and inequalities in the inner-city neighbourhood can lead to tension and conflict. Yeoh and Lin (2012) argue that cities are still struggling to recognise cosmopolitanism because of disparities and disputes. Donald, Kofman and Kevin (2009, p. 6) note that different groups living together in cities could be concentrated in selected streets and neighbourhoods because 'migrant cultures may be both exploited and marginalised by urban elites.' However, according to Valentine (2013) not only migrants face challenges in cities; different social groups face challenges to accessing resources. He (2013, p. 6) expresses that 'white working-class community had a perceived sense of injustice and victimhood because of local concerns about unstable forms of employment and poor housing which was projected onto minority groups.'

Recent studies conclude that these tensions and conflict in cities mean that cosmopolitanism does not exist (Beck, 2006; Binnie, 2009; Schiller, 2010; Valentine, 2013). Schiller (2010, p. 414) put it thus: '[C]osmopolitanism has had serious limitations that have restricted its use by those struggling to address the current historical moment and develop new theoretical and political perspectives.' Many cities blend with diverse people with many differences. Living together in these multi-culture communities is also a mixed experience with conviviality and tension, like two sides of a coin. One of the critical reasons for this struggle is that some groups tend to influence other groups in everyday interactions. Although cities are a prominent place to investigate the day-to-day engagement of different cultural groups, all places in a city do not maintain peaceful coexistence because of various issues, as shown previously. Nevertheless, many people still migrate towards cities with many expectations.

Discussion so far has considered cosmopolitanism as a major global project, a universal concept related to elites, mobility and global cities. Cosmopolitanism is used in this study, however, because it keeps us attuned to the many social relations dimensions that make up contemporary cities. This study focuses on non-western, non-elite cosmopolitanism to understand its role in a local context. Scholars argue that marginalised and poor people open to others in everyday engagement, which also produces cosmopolitanism. However, this aspect of peaceful coexistence is the least highlighted in cosmopolitanism studies (Appadurai, 1996; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Held, 2010; Lahiri, 2010; Datta, 2012). Arjun Appadurai (1996) notes that the cosmopolitanism of the urban poor gets little attention among scholars. Until recently, cosmopolitanism has failed to recognise the rich diversity of slums, urban poverty and marginalised groups. As Held highlights, '[U]nfortunately insufficient attention has been given to this [cosmopolitanism of urban low-income residents] in the existing literature, which on the whole tends to ignore the historical experience of non-western parts of the world (2010, p. 4).' This indicates that even after twenty five years this is still considered as to be a problem. Similarly, Vertovec and Cohen note that 'poor, unprivileged and marginal people also live with 'others'. They also create their own way/style of cosmopolitanism (2002, p. 14).'

Is it possible to live together with differences in a diverse society? Though poor people may not have diverse experiences globally, empirical evidence shows that they can also be cosmopolitan by dealing with their neighbours and in selected socio-spatial contexts (Lahiri, 2010; Datta, 2012). Low-income neighbourhoods in cities are such places where we could observe the mingling of different groups and provide evidence that living together is

possible. The following section discusses the possibilities and challenges of living together in multiethnic low-income neighbourhoods in the context of subaltern cosmopolitanism.

2.3 Subaltern Cosmopolitanism in slums and shanties

Subaltern cosmopolitanism describes the cosmopolitanism of various marginal groups (Gidwani, 2009; Bayat, 2013; Zeng, 2014). Emphasising the contemporary relevance of subaltern cosmopolitanism Bayat (2013, p. 180) argues that ‘cosmopolitanism is not limited merely to elite lifestyles, but it extended, especially to include the subaltern experience of intercommunal coexistence.’ He states that interaction between inter-religious and inter-ethnic subaltern groups also could lead to cosmopolitanism. Scholars carried out many interventions to explore cosmopolitan elements from non-elites. These bring different wording/language (Yeh, 2013), including: ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ (Ackerman, 1994), ‘cosmopolitanism patriot’ (Appiah, 1997), ‘working-class cosmopolitanism’ (Werbner, 1999), ‘cosmopolitanism from below’ (Appadurai, 2002) and ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ (Werbner, 2006). These terms belong to a family of concepts that describe the cosmopolitanism of marginalised and underprivileged groups. Among these, subaltern cosmopolitanism is the latest label in a non-elite trajectory that focuses on how marginalised groups live together in a culturally diverse community.

The term ‘subaltern’ was initially coined by the Italian Marxist political theorist Antonio Gramsci in his article ‘Notes on Italian History,’ published later as part of his most well-known book ‘Prison Notebooks.’ Gramsci coined the word subaltern to refer to socially and economically marginalised groups in his period, predominantly working-class people.

However, subaltern studies became a focus of post-colonial critics through the Subaltern Studies Group's works in the early 1980s. Discussion on subaltern themes among a small group of English and Indian historians led to a plan to launch a new journal in India. Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty are prominent figures who led this group. The central objective of this group is to retake the history of the underclass in India, with a focus on people at the lower levels of society rather than the elite. Subaltern studies provide a new kind of history from below, a people's history free of national constrictions, a post-nationalist re-imaging of the Indian nation from the margins, outside mainstream nationalist perspectives. In contemporary literature, scholars widely use the term subaltern to describe an individual or group of inferior status by employing race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or religion.

Many cities in Asia and the South Asian region experienced diversity for centuries, however proper intervention and overall scholarship on cosmopolitanism in these regions remains underdeveloped (Lahiri, 2010. p. 192). Most cities in these regions, especially in South Asia, are diverse in ethnicity, religion, class, caste and language. Compared with the past, these cities lost their cosmopolitan footprints for various reasons; yet, we can still observe different religious or ethnic groups living together in some places (Bayat, 2013). Little of the existing literature suggests that in cities, the cosmopolitanism of different groups is experienced in varied ways. Zeng (2014, p. 138) writes that '[M]ultiplicity of differences and intensity of interactions across ethnic, racial and cultural lines make the city an especially promising site to search for seeds and the manifestation of subaltern cosmopolitanism.'

More informal engagement among subalterns establishes a unique kind of cosmopolitanism in urban settings that scholars rarely focus on.

Zeng divides subaltern cosmopolitanism into two trajectories: 'inwards' and 'outwards (2014, p. 137).' Inward trajectory attempts to identify the subaltern cosmopolitanism of ethnically, racially and culturally different groups in a defined place, which is at the individual level. This trajectory does not include transnational mobility. In contrast, the outwards trajectory focuses on locating broad trans-local and transnational frames. The categorisation of Zeng is closely linked with the cosmopolitanism argument of universal vs local. Simultaneously, inward trajectory focuses on local settings, in contrast outward much closer to a universal perspective. Despite different subaltern engagements, Bayat demonstrates the important and significant role of 'place' in relation to cosmopolitanism. He argues that '[C]oexistence and sharing do not take place in a vacuum. They take shape under specific structures and possess particular geographies (2013, p. 179).' In addition to place, he also highlights 'proximity' and 'interaction' (2013, p. 180) as factors that help different people mingle together. Every place in a city is not turned into a multicultural neighbourhood. Only a few places, mostly low-income communities, become multicultural sites because of migrants.

When looking at the non-elite cosmopolitanism of subaltern groups at the micro-level with proximity and interaction, slums and shanties are geographical scales where people live with difference in everyday life. Ho (2015) highlights that everyday engagement of different groups helps to understand how different groups of people share resources, ideas, face

issues, and negotiation in slums and shanties. Ethnically and religiously diverse groups belong to working classes trapped in these unhealthy neighbourhoods due to their socio-economic vulnerability. People in these neighbourhoods mingle with others irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, caste or language. Mobility, the nature of formation and the demographic mixture of slums and shanties mean that these are prime places to investigate subaltern groups' cosmopolitanism. Slums and shanties are no more exclusive place for dystopian elements. Living together with difference is a significant characteristic of subalterns in these neighbourhoods; nevertheless, these positive elements of slum residents are not substantially focused on cosmopolitanism. However, existing studies that focus on South Asia demonstrate how subaltern groups' everyday interactions establish cosmopolitanism in slums and shanties (Datta, 2012; Mayaram, 2013; Ramakrishnan, 2014).

In a study of squatter settlements in Delhi, Datta (2012) found that the engagement of different ethnic and religious groups in low-income neighbourhoods also leads to cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, she states that negative perceptions of low-income communities such as prejudice, violence, drugs, and organised crime fail to recognise such places' valuable characteristics and have been excluded from cosmopolitan studies. In this research, Datta (2012, p. 749) writes that 'exploring cosmopolitanism among squatters might seem unusual in the context of such widely established connections between slums and communal violence.'. Datta firmly believes that people can easily recognise differences in a village (caste, ethnicity, religion) due to its spatial organisation, but maintaining these divisions is difficult in highly dense squatter settlements. She also explores the intersection of cosmopolitanism and gender. Focusing on a newly married woman migrant to squatter

settlement, the author emphasises that mutual understanding and interaction with others is highly noticeable among women in their everyday engagement. As a reason for this engagement, Datta (2012, p. 746) notes that '[T]heir physical proximity in the congested environment of the settlement was productive of a wider notion of home through fictive kinship ties, which performed parallel roles to one's biological family around rituals, childcare and food practices.' Although slum life is a new experience for many migrants, they gradually learn to cope with the support of neighbours who are generally not from the same ethnoreligious group. This support and care slowly lead to a mutual bond among slum residents irrespective of difference (Kottegoda, 1991:2004).

Mayaram (2013) attempts to identify subaltern cosmopolitanism as it relates to inter-ethnic relations in multiethnic low-income neighbourhoods. According to Mayaram (2013, p. 23) low-income communities consist of both positive and negative elements where 'differences are encountered and confronted, hate speech articulated but also negotiated.' Based on two studies from Mumbai and Delhi, Mayaram emphasises that low-income neighbourhoods are dynamic places that mingled with coexistence and conflict. She finds that different subaltern groups' daily engagement forms cosmopolitan elements in a multiethnic low-income settlement. However, the author is alarmed that a minor incident can severely impact cosmopolitanism among community members. According to Mayaram, slum residents closely interact with their neighbours even though they do not belong to the same group. Sharing, caring and mutual understandings are significant elements stimulated by living together. However, the author emphasises that day to day minor events can lead to fragile relationships between groups along ethnic and religious divides. Datta also

identified a similar phenomenon – clashes among different faith youth groups in everyday engagement. These types of ‘small matters’ generally occur based on the ‘everyday infatuations of young adults’, which can embody the possibilities of communal violence (Datta, 2012, p. 759).

Apart from tensions established within the community, studies show how outside interventions collapse the cosmopolitanism of subalterns in slums and shanties. For example, in a study of the resettlement colony in Delhi, Ramakrishnan (2014) found that relocation of slum residents due to urban development projects broke down their sense of belonging and cosmopolitanism. The formation of most slums and shanties in the global South is closely linked with migration. Due to the lack of affordable housing in the city, rural migrants move into slums and shanties, which are often located on expensive land in inner cities (Kottegoda, 2004; Perera, 2008). Some governments in the global South are particularly attentive to these prime lands as a way of attracting foreign investment. In order to acquire much-demanded lands in the city, some governments forcibly evict low-income residents from their homes.

As a consequence, evicted people lose their social networks through which they maintain close interactions with others. Through an investigation of the cosmopolitan imaginaries of slum residents in a relocated colony, Ramakrishnan (2014) found that people maintain close interaction with other ethnic, religious groups before the relocation. Ramakrishnan (2014, p. 79) states that ‘the foundation for their cosmopolitanism is connected to a sense of belonging to a specific environment, something which residents in the resettlement colony

feel they have lost.’ According to Ramakrishnan, openness and conviviality are predominantly spatial behaviours. Inner-city slums create a platform for people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to interact with others through everyday engagement.

This section reviewed research on cosmopolitanism among subalterns in low-income neighbourhoods. Everyday engagement of culturally diverse groups in these communities produces a unique cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, people do not recognise this valuable interaction among groups in these marginal places due to the dystopian perception that outsiders have of these places. Thus, exploring cosmopolitanism in low-income neighbourhoods is a challenge but one that is necessary to fully understand the living together of difference. Also, as noted earlier in this section, the cosmopolitanism of these marginalised groups could be disturbed because of external stakeholders’ influences. Most of the studies (Datta, 2012; Mayaram, 2013; Ramakrishnan, 2014), focus on subaltern cosmopolitanism in inwards/individual approach as categorised by Zeng (2014). While looking at subaltern cosmopolitanism in the low-income neighbourhood, this study examines the influence of diverse stakeholders engaging with slum governance at different levels.

2.4 Governing Slums and Shanties

Slum residents are vulnerable in terms of housing, living condition, livelihood, land ownership, the threat of eviction and physical environment, unsanitary conditions leading to the spread of disease and lack of security resulting from a concentration of criminal

activity. These conditions make slum residents rely on the government and other agencies to improve the situation of slums. New migrants' situation in cities is even more vulnerable since they struggle for citizenship and voting rights. The eradication of urban poverty is closely interconnected with improving the life of slum inhabitants.

Informal settlements are significant spaces supporting city development and sustainability. Although various interventions have been carried out to eradicate these informal settlements, slum improvement is challenging in many countries in the global South. Muzio (2008, p. 305) insists that 'slums have become an increasingly widespread form of human settlement, a complex nexus of multilevel governance initiatives has developed to combat the dismal life conditions manifest in slums.' In order to reduce urban poverty and upgrade informal settlements, it is essential to mobilise stakeholders from supranational organisations like the World Bank to local government and community-based organisations (CBOs). This range of organisations of different sizes involved in slum governance has varying impacts on slum inhabitants. These are not well understood.

Governance is a complex process between organisations and sets of groups that contains both normative and practical agendas and is defined differently in different contexts. Jonas and While (2007, p. 73) define governance as 'any social mode of co-ordination in which the aim is to control, guide, or facilitate economic and social activities distributed across the landscape, including activities involved in transforming nature.' According to Shirlow (2009, p. 41) governance is 'the relationship between the state, economy, and civil society and the regulation of economic regimes and social authority and practice.' These definitions

elaborate on how power operates through the relationships between different organisations in the name of governance. However, Stoker (1998) states that instead of a single statement, the term governance is used in various ways and has multiple meanings. Stoker (1998, p. 18) proposes five propositions for governance: (i) Governance refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government; (ii) Governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues; (iii) Governance identifies the power dependence involved in the relationships between institutions engaged in collective action; (iv) Governance is about an autonomous self-governing network of actors; (v) Governance recognises the capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority.

These ideas illustrate how various factors amalgamate in the process of governance. Since the 1980s, governance structures have changed due to neoliberal regulations and control, which create broader changes in welfare systems of governance, especially in the global South (Raco, 2009). During the 1990s, a new model of governance emerged characterised by 'heterarchy' (inclusion) rather than by 'hierarchy' (domination) (Shirlow, 2009, p. 43). These reduce the privileged and hegemonic position of the state that is a key element of governance. Governance involves more than government, integrating public, private, and voluntary sectors (Rhodes, 2007). However, Jonas and While (2009) argue that governance is still more integrated with state and territoriality. They emphasise that extending governance does not occur without steering by the state; it can incorporate spatially non-contiguous local, regional, and national territories (2009, p. 73).

Shirlow (2009) interlinks governance with two essential elements, power and territoriality. In governance, power is used at different levels and for multiple purposes, including establishing political and legal authority, creating ideological representations, maintaining regulations over domestic markets, and controlling means of violence. Territorially this power operates on two levels: macro and micro. On the macro scale, the power of discussion and policy formation takes place globally. In contrast, devolution of power to regions, other subnational units (assemblies, councils), Informal institutions (churches, community sector), and other non-state institutions (private companies, voluntary organisations) take place at the micro-level (Shirlow, 2009, pp. 41-42). Therefore, the terminology of governance includes formal (state), informal (market), and third sector (NGOs and civil society organisations). Since the modern governance process connects formal, informal and third sectors in international, national, regional and local scales, it is widely referred to as multilevel governance.

Multilevel governance is broadly applied to understand policy interventions and jurisdiction between different levels from local, national, regional and global levels (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Goodwin, 2009; Piattoni, 2009; Stephenson, 2013). Multilevel governance operates in 'both vertical and horizontal dimensions which increased interdependence of governments operating at different territorial levels' (Bache and Flinders, 2004, p. 3). Stephenson (2013, p. 817) refers to multilevel governance as an 'arrangement of policy-making activity performed within and across politico-administrative institutions located at different territorial levels.' According to Stephenson, multilevel governance connects different institutions at various administrative levels in the policy-making process. Goodwin

(2009) explains multilevel governance is about decision making and processes linking across multiple scales from local governance to regional, national, and international actors in the governing process.

All these explanations illustrate that the process of multilevel governance connects dynamic stakeholders from multiple spatial levels with a specific set of goals. It connects local and international institutions and society. Thus, multilevel governance is not merely a 'nesting' approach to scale; it also integrates different stakeholders such as government, non-government, public, and private sectors in pursuit of a common goal. Piattoni (2009, p. 163) divides the interaction of multilevel governance into three dimensions: (i) between the centre and the periphery, (ii) between state and society, and (iii) between the domestic and the international. Although multilevel governance does not promote a power hierarchy, Bache and Flinders (2004) argue that multilevel governance creates dependency among institutions.

Two key factors are often emphasised in multilevel governance in the definitions discussed. The first factor is territory through which multilevel governance integrates governing processes in different territorial levels from local to global in both vertical and horizontal dimensions to deliver integrated services, planning and projects. The second factor is stakeholders: governance is managed by dynamic individuals and institutions from formal and informal, state and non-state, public and private sectors. When looking at both concept and empirical context of multilevel governance, it is apparent that slums are closely

integrated with multilevel governance (Milbert, 2006). The next section turns to the ways in which governance operates in slums and shanties.

Slum improvement is among the most challenging governance tasks and is considered one of the more effective ways of tackling urban poverty (Minnery *et al.*, 2013). The importance of this connection between slum upgrade and urban poverty is illustrated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which stress the need ‘by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums’ (goal 11.1) (UN Habitat, 2016). Further, the SDGs emphasise that local and regional governments could achieve this target by providing leadership in mobilising a wide range of stakeholders, facilitating ‘bottom-up’ inclusive processes and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Many countries in the global South have implemented programmes to control slums since the 1970s with World Bank intervention. The Bank's involvement shifted the global South's housing policies by introducing ‘self-help housing’ instead of relocating slums. After the UN Habitat conference in 1976, *in situ* slum upgrade programmes were initiated to take out interventions and power dynamics of state and local government. Later, with NGOs' formation and interventions into informal settlements, international donor agencies increased opportunities to work directly with target groups. From time to time, state, NGOs and other international agencies implemented various interventions to eradicate the slum and shanties and improve inhabitants' lives.

Slum governance affects the living condition of informal settlements in many ways. Horizontal and vertical interconnections of government, non-government and multiple

stakeholders representing local, national and international levels work together to improve slums and shanties. Satterthwaite and Mitlin categorised the intervention of slum upgrades in the global South as follows: (i) Welfare assistance; (ii) urban management; (iii) participatory governance; (iv) rights-based approaches; (v) market-based approaches; (vi) social and urban movements; (vii) aided self-help; (viii) clientelism (2013, pp. 12-13). The same authors state these programmes were designed and implemented through multi-stakeholder partnerships. According to them, out of these approaches, more than one of these has been used in most nations.

Studies highlight that the space for marginalised groups to participate in the decision-making process in neoliberal urbanisation is challenging (Bayat, 2000:2012; Davis, 2007; Muzio, 2008). Davis (2007) argues that donor-driven interventions for slum upgrades through national government and NGOs do not succeed in many countries as expected. Instead, he argues that Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) stimulate low-income urban residents' informality in the global South. These people attempt to exit social and economic arrangements to seek alternative, more familiar or informal institutions and relations. Low-income groups tend to lose access to many services, such as health, education, and employment due to structural adjustment policies in the global South (Harvey, 1989; Davis, 2007). Insufficient and ineffective service provision stimulates people in low-income neighbourhoods to obtain basic amenities in alternative ways. They use different strategies to find ad hoc solutions to their needs, either individually or collectively.

Bayat (2000) and Roy (2011) explore how urban subalterns construct various strategies as individuals and groups to respond to top-down approaches. One such strategy is 'quiet encroachment' (Bayat, 2000, p. 536), defined as 'a non-collective but prolonged direct action by individuals and families to acquire the necessities of their lives (land for shelter, urban collective consumption, informal jobs, business opportunities, and public space) in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion.' According to Bayat, urban subalterns generally attempt to meet their needs as individuals.

Informality is one of the challenges that slum residents face when trying to access essential services through formal channels. For example, due to the absence of land ownership and voting rights in the city, they struggle to access electricity, water, education and employment. Since there is no space to obtain services formally, these people tend to do so informally. In this way, they fulfil their needs as individuals and families. However, if they face repression from authorities, they tend to associate as one group. In contrast, Roy argues that slum dwellers often establish survival strategies to overcome exclusion and marginality. Roy (2011, p. 223) considers the slum a place of collective action, 'a terrain of habitation, livelihood, self-organisation, and politics.' According to Roy, although slum dwellers accumulate some of their needs informally, they can do very little independently. Since it is difficult to achieve their needs individually and informally, they have to work collectively in many circumstances. The next section considers the way in which governance operates in slums and shanties.

2.4.1 Impact of multilevel governance in the life of slum inhabitants

Multilevel governance is not widely explored in relation to low-income neighbourhoods because low-income settlements are often considered to be recipients of – rather than participants in – governance. Low-income communities in many countries face significant challenges in the governance process due to their subaltern status. Although their voice counts less in decision making, Milbert (2006, p.315) notes that ‘slums become nodes of negotiations between three different levels, such as local, national and international.’ International funds, public policies with NGOs, and civil society organisations are integrated into the process of improving slums and shanties through upgrading, clearing or resettlement. Through these processes, slums and shanties combine as a node with different stakeholders and with different territorial levels. Existing studies of informal settlements in the global South focus predominantly on three groups closely involved in slum governance. Those are (i) political parties and politicians (Bayat, 2000; Milbert, 2006), (ii) NGOs and religious organisations (Chidambaram, 2012) and (iii) slum leaders and residential associations (Pearlman, 1976; Auerbach and Thachil, 2016). A range of interventions carried out to improve slums and shanties affect the lives of slum inhabitants in many ways. This section aims to examine how multiple stakeholders influence the lives of slum residents through governance.

People who live in slums and shanties are politically important as they represent major vote banks (Sharma and Sita, 2000). In cities, slum inhabitants include a significant number of voters through which they could elect a candidate for different level political institutions. Moreover, Sharma *et al.*, (2012) focused on Indian cities and found that while slum

inhabitants struggle to access basic amenities, many attempts to access those needs through different levels of political participation. Politicians and political parties use different strategies to grasp votes from slum residents, however in most cases political parties approach economically homogeneous and ethnically heterogeneous slum dwellers for their own benefit rather than for altruistic ends. Most slums in South Asia consist of people from diverse ethnic groups and ethnic votes play a significant role in electoral politics. Hence, political parties use ethnic differences as an opportunity for their electoral campaigns through delivering welfare provisions.

Habyarimana *et al.*, (2007) identifies that ethnic diversity is a significant cause of variation in public goods provisions in certain communities. Similarly, Devas (2001, p. 400) argues that 'in a number of cities, ethnicity-based networks provide important avenues for influence and access to opportunities, although ethnicity is more often the basis for exclusion and discrimination.' When political parties reach out to multiethnic low-income settlements to encourage voting and provide welfare provision and other support with the intention of mobilising ethnicity, the fragility of the relationship among diverse cultural groups in these settlements increases. For example, in a study of welfare provision in south Indian urban slums, Chidambaram (2012) found that ethnic-based political parties and religious organisations can disrupt coexistence in multiethnic slums.

Chidambaram (2012) explores how religious organisations use social services and welfare to increase their vote bank and spread religious ideologies. One of the organisations that Chidambaram considers is Seva Bharati, a sister organisation of Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh (RSS), which is the backbone for BJP. They provide education services for poor working-class Hindu people in Bangalore and Chennai. In addition to free classes, Seva Bharati organises community celebrations of major Hindu festivals, weekly and monthly religious rituals exclusively for Hindu women in the community. Chidambaram (2012, p. 302) concludes that 'these tutoring centers are a subtle mechanism for introducing the community to exclusionary Hindu ideology in small doses.' She identifies the involvement of a radical religious organisation in this multiethnic context as a threat to peaceful coexistence. It is easy to approach economically disadvantaged people through material support, particularly in the name of social welfare. When radical religious organisations enter slums and interact with multiethnic slum dwellers, it may lead a particular ethnic group to look at their neighbours as others. Chidambaram also suggests that if community-based networks such as Residents' Associations are strong enough and bargain for their needs and rights with formal institutions through their political representatives, it will reduce slum dwellers' dependence on other non-state actors.

Residents' Associations are formal institutions in low-income neighbourhoods usually formed by community members to improve residents' wellbeing and campaign for their needs and rights. In pioneering work, Pearlman (1976) identified the importance of Residents' Associations through her work on Latin American slums. In Brazilian favelas, Residents' Associations bargain for public amenities, such as roads, electricity, water, drainage, land and housing rights. Nagaraj (2016) illustrated how an affected youth group campaigned against a forcible eviction and formed up a union to demand land and housing rights by leveraging experience from a low-income Colombo neighbourhood. In several low-

income communities in Colombo, Community Development Councils (CDCs) were created as another type of Residential Association to assure public facilities. However, as a result of a number of problems, CDCs rapidly lost favor in these settlements, as explained in section 2.5.1 below (Horen 2002, D'Cruz, *et al.*, 2009; Abeyasekera *et al.*, 2019). The selection procedure demonstrates that the Residents' Association represents all slum dwellers, which provides privileges to deal with external organisations. At the same time, external institutions also use Residents' Associations as gatekeepers to approach slums. In the Latin American context, Pearlman highlights that Residents' Associations are the most important political organisations in favelas. Similarly, Coelho and Venkat (2009) highlight the role of political affiliations of residential associations in India's multiethnic slums. These associations follow various strategies to maintain the unity of the slum while they interact with different political parties. If they are unable to do so, it may create conflict among residents along ethnic and party lines. Coelho and Venkat stress that the impartial affiliations and approaches of the residential association are essential to the neighbourhood's unity.

Apart from Residents' Associations, slum leaders are prominent, influential personalities who play a significant role in slum governance. Koter (2013) emphasises that the significance of slum leaders is strengthened if there is a scarcity of public goods and difficulties in obtaining necessary services from the state. Thachil (2015, p. 12) points out that 'informal leaders are perhaps even more important for poor migrants who lack the documentation needed to participate in formal city politics.' Multitasking abilities and links to various networks promote an ordinary person to the role of slum leader. Many Indian

slum leaders handle multiple tasks; they 'mediate residents' access to essential state goods and services - ration cards, widow pensions, bank accounts and caste certificates' (Auerbach and Thachil, 2016, p. 1). These leaders' active role and networking ability stimulates them to become involved in political negotiations on certain occasions. On the one hand, slum dwellers see these leaders as their representatives who can be a source for access to external institutions. On the other, external institutions, especially politicians, often use slum leaders as electoral intermediaries to establish and strengthen their vote bank (Koter, 2013).

As gatekeepers, slum leaders could misuse their power for their own benefit. Chidambaram (2012) points out that, although slum leaders attempt to frame their actions as voluntarily social activist, they do not entirely refrain from public political interest and material benefits. It is also important to highlight that these slum leaders may gradually lose their powers and importance if slum dwellers get legal rights to their lands and fulfil their needs through formal channels. Therefore, the popularity and demand for slum leaders exists only while slum dwellers live in informal conditions. Once they overcome their informality, slum leaders may gradually lose popularity and slum dwellers may not approach them. To maintain their reputation, slum leaders use various strategies to retain their status in slums.

Slum governance is operated by two groups of stakeholders with individuals and institutions from different sectors and territorial levels (Pearlman, 1976; Milbert, 2006). While slum leaders, residential associations, religious leaders and local politicians operate as internal forces, political parties, politicians, NGOs and other faith-based institutions interfere in slum

governance as outsiders. Nevertheless, it is not easy to draw a clear division between these two groups as they closely mingle in the governance. For example, local leaders and local politicians work together with political parties and politicians during the election period. While religious leaders maintain a close relationship with external religious institutions, residential associations and CBOs rely on NGOs and international aid agencies to get funds and other benefits.

So far, this discussion has revealed that low-income neighbourhoods become a node of multilevel governance because many stakeholders are represented at different levels. Economic marginalisation of these subaltern groups makes them rely on external institutions to uplift their current status. Many individuals and institutions from different levels approach low-income communities through diverse programmes. Some of these are directly focusing on the upgrading of life stands of subalterns and their surroundings. As discussed in the previous section, some of these interventions create tensions among residents in culturally diverse low-income communities. However, some studies focus on the impact of multilevel governance on subaltern cosmopolitanism is still lacking. This study considers these issues in relation to the city of Colombo. The next section discusses the experience of governance dynamics and low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo.

2.5 Living together in low-income settlements in Colombo

As a port city, Colombo has long played a vital role in the maritime routes to China; its geographical location, connecting major international shipping routes from East to West in the Indian Ocean, is a key asset of the country's economy. Therefore, even before Western

colonists arrived, many countries engaged with Colombo through trade and mercantile networks. Today Colombo consists of people from all major ethnicities, religions and linguistic groups in the country. Many non-residents approach this city every day for diverse economic and administrative activities. As a result of a combination of different people, Colombo has been a culturally diverse city for a long time. Therefore, living together with differences – the essential element of cosmopolitanism – is not an entirely new experience for Colombo inhabitants; it has been enjoyed as a part of their everyday lives for centuries (Hulugalle, 1965; Brohier, 1984; Jayawardena, 1986). Emphasising the ethnic diversity of Colombo in pre-colonial times, Brohier (1984, p. 5) describes the city:

[in pre-colonial times], the population of the settlement was made up of as cosmopolitan a crowd as warrants and would always be found in an old-world trading centre. Apart from Sinhala-fisher families who lived in the environs, there were Arabs who had come from the great mart at Ormuz, Marwaris, Bengalis, Burmans, and others from the coasts of near and further Coromandel and Malabar. Baggy *chapkhana* and *pyjamas* were much in vogue, in every conceivable range of colour and dirtiness.

The ancient silk route is one of the important factors that connected Colombo with other parts of the world. Through archaeological evidence, Coningham *et al.*, (2017) state that people from many countries visited Sri Lanka in the ancient period for trade and pilgrimage. Trade, colonialism and migration directly link with the ethnic and religious composition, especially in the port city of Colombo. Until the Western colonists conquered the country, Colombo port was used by Chinese, Arab, and Persian traders. The description mentioned above of Brohier (1984) about the ethnic mixture of Colombo indicates that the city experienced living with different ethnic groups well before the colonisation. This diversity was further strengthened when the city was administered by the Portuguese, Dutch then

British from 1597 to 1948. Through these varied global connections, Colombo flourished as a multiethnic city for a long time with people from diverse cultures.

As in other cities in the global South, low-income settlements in Colombo are directly linked with colonialism. Colombo has a long history of different approaches to the governance of low-income neighbourhoods. At present, these neighbourhoods consist of people from diverse ethnic and religious groups. This section aims to investigate the relationship between the governance and low-income communities in Colombo. Taking evidence from archives and existing studies, I divide this section into two parts: the first part focuses on the experience of living together with difference in Colombo with particular attention to low-income communities; I also explore the ethnic mixture of the city during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The second part of this section focuses on the history of governance interventions in low-income neighbourhoods.

Colombo was transformed into a modern city during the colonial period. Early Muslim traders referred to the 'Old City' adjoining the harbour, including Bank shall Street, York Street, and surrounding areas in the Fort neighbourhood. This area was initially used for both trade and settlements by Muslim traders. Later, the Portuguese and Dutch turned this area into a fortified city and used it mostly for trade. The Portuguese laid the foundation of modern Colombo by converting Colombo into a new fortified town. They extended their activities on land, which is now the centre of the current Central Business District, called 'Fort' (*Pettah*). The Portuguese occupation of Colombo ended with the siege of 1656 when

the Dutch captured the city. The Dutch occupied the country's major coastal cities, including Colombo, until 1796.

The British conquered the Island after the conquest of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815 and converted Colombo to the capital city of Ceylon. The foundations of many of the existing political, economic, and administrative systems in Sri Lanka were laid during the British period. In this period, Colombo was transformed into a trading and administrative capital that included people from various nations. With residents of different ethnicities who were both locals and internationals, Colombo established a reputation as a cosmopolitan city. Describing the ethnic diversity of Colombo at this time, Hulugalle (1965, p. 31) notes:

[In Ceylon during the British period], there is no part of the world where so many different languages are spoken or which contains such a mixture of nations, manners, and religions. Besides Europeans, and Cingalese, the proper native of the Island, you meet, scattered over the town, almost every race of Asiatics; Moors of every class, Malabars, Travancorians, Malays, Hindoos, Gentoos, Chinese, Persians. Arabians, Turks, Maldivians, Javians, and natives of all the Asiatic isles; Parsees, or worshippers of fire.....there are also a number of Africans, Caffres, Buganese, a mixed-race of Africans and Asiatics; beside the half-castes, people of colour, and other races which proceed from a mixture of the original ones. Each of these different classes of people has its own manners, customs, and languages.

The diversity of Colombo was a significant element during the colonial period, and it was visible not only among elites but also in the fabric of society. During this period, identity politics emerged among elites representing all ethnic groups. Elites from all ethnic groups tended to highlight their ethnic identity in an effort to be included in the administration and obtain various privileges under British rule. This stimulated further divisions among communities. Nevertheless, a real ethnic mixture has emerged among working-class people representing different ethnic and religious groups. Repression of the ruling government

gathered these multiethnic working-class people under one umbrella against the colonial administration. Their unity, regardless of difference, was powerful and timely. While examining the diversity and unity of the working class in the colonial period, Jayawardena (1986, p. 17) highlighted the ethnic mixture of this group:

[During the colonial period], the working class of the Island, which had developed in the wake of plantation capitalism in the 19th century, was composed of all ethnic groups in the population (Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamils, Indian Tamils, Malayalis, Moors, Malays, Burghers, and Eurasians); workers also belonged to various religions (Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism); and in the case of Sinhalese, Tamils and Malayalis, caste differences also existed.

This unity flourished in workplaces as well as in neighbourhoods where they lived. Consequently, many low-income settlements turned into multiethnic, multireligious communities that blended with subaltern groups representing different geographical locations. However, working-class unity existed only for a short period because of identity politics motivated by elite leaders (Kuruppu, 1984; Jayawardena, 1986). According to Kuruppu (1984), Buddhist revivalism has severely impacted the class unity of the working-class people. Moreover, Jayawardena (1986) notes that poverty, unemployment and lack of opportunity in the colonial government produced widespread chauvinism among workers. Ethnic sentiments and economic hardships divided working-class groups along ethnic lines who organised against the colonial government in response to discrimination and differently privileged status; for the first time, they start to criticise and blame other ethnic groups. However, working-class people could not separate from each other on the basis of ethnicity, religion, and language because of their shared socio-economic

marginalisation. Therefore, they have continued to live in low-income settlements which are still characterised by ethnic diversity.

The absence of research focusing on living together in low-income communities is a significant gap that affects the understanding of subaltern cosmopolitanism in this type of neighbourhood. Except for a few studies, such as *The Watta-Dwellers: A Sociological Study of Selected Low-Income Communities in Sri Lanka* (Silva & Athukorala, 1991), *Women in the Informal Sector* (Kottegoda, 1991) and *Ethnicity, Multiculturalism and Violence Among Urban Poor in Sri Lanka* (Silva, 1994), both of which are more than 25 years old, there is no significant effort to explore coexistence in low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo. These studies highlight that high-density living, bilingual ability and inter-marriages are key factors that motivate low-income dwellers to interact across ethnic, religious, and cultural boundaries.

According to Silva & Athukorala (1994, p. 104) everyday interaction in these communities is a combination of coexistence and tension; nevertheless, these subaltern groups maintain their cohabitation through negotiation. The authors further illustrate the daily interaction of these marginalised people: '[I]n crisis situations like illness, death or even domestic disputes, neighbours readily intervene without paying regard to the caste or ethnic identity of the people concerned.' Likewise Silva (1994, p. 79) investigating the cohabitation of these multiethnic low-income communities in Colombo, finds that the 'peaceful coexistence of ethnically diverse groups is noticeable within the boundaries of slums and shanty communities.' According to Silva, different ethnic and religious groups live in defined

boundaries of low-income neighbourhoods, and in this limited space, maintain close physical contact with each other. The author (1994, p. 85) further states that the slum dwellers' relationships are 'not always smooth and egalitarian.' In many circumstances, disputes occur between neighbours. Nevertheless, these disputes do not follow ethnic or religious lines. Also, residents have internal mechanisms such as mediation of community leaders for resolving disputes, which can reduce conflicts that occur in everyday interactions, including ethnic tensions among fellow residents.

In contrast to this image of peaceful coexistence, however, there has been criticism of these working-class residents in Colombo over their active involvement in the July 1983 riot (Tambiah, 1997; Jeganathan, 1997). In Sri Lanka, ethnic violence and unrest between ethnic and religious groups is not a recent phenomenon. Since the early twentieth century, violence and tension have emerged from time to time between majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils and Muslims (Ali, 2015). The July 1983 riot is one of the defining events of modern Sri Lankan history and is typically associated with the origins of the recent civil war. Although various groups from other economic classes were involved in arson, the working-class's involvement attracted attention and criticism. Hence, it is worth a brief review of the 1983 riot to understand how low-income dwellers behaved within and outside their neighbourhoods.

The immediate cause for the 1983 riot was the massacre of 13 army soldiers in the North of the country, which led to ethnic violence in major towns throughout the country. Attacks on Tamil areas and Tamil businesses started in Colombo on 24th July 1983. Systematic, pre-

planned arson gradually spread to other major cities, but the worst damage was done in Colombo. According to Silva (1994, p. 91) external factors, such as 'propaganda of political parties, mass media, religious and ethno-nationalist movements, class differences and widely circulating rumours influenced urban poor to be actively involved in the riot.' Tambiah (1997) argues that residents from low-income neighbourhoods formed a small proportion of rioters; the most significant and influential members represented other social strata – Sinhala politicians, including ruling party members. These writings illustrate an essential finding that external factors triggered low-income dwellers to participate in the riot and used these marginalised inhabitants to fulfil their objectives. Thus, their participation in the uprising was not because of the community's internal tensions or prejudices. Immediate economic benefits from looting and robbing also appear to have encouraged some dwellers from low-income neighbourhoods to become involved in the riot.

While rioters attacked Tamil people and looted their assets in most Colombo areas, what was the situation in low-income neighbourhoods? Did rioters attack the Tamils in these neighbourhoods as well? The situation in these areas was entirely different. Even though some urban poor attacked Tamils and their properties throughout the city, they did not attack fellow Tamil residents in the same community. Instead, gang leaders provided security for their fellow Tamils by preventing outsiders from coming into low-income communities. Similarly, Tamil gang leaders and residents provided shelter for the small percentage of Sinhalese who lived in these neighbourhoods (Silva, 1994; Tambiah, 1997).

The existing literature discussed above suggests four factors that indicate coexistence in low-income neighbourhoods even during the major 1983 riot. These are: (1) the urban poor were motivated to take part in the rioting by external factors, not because of prejudice within the community; (2) the major intention of the rioters, especially low-income people, was looting and robbing; (3) gang leaders and rioters in certain neighbourhoods protected their Tamil co-residents; (4) during the riot low-income neighbourhoods became places of refuge for all ethnic groups. It appears that the sense of cosmopolitanism (living together with differences) among low-income dwellers exists within their community boundary. In their neighbourhood, people maintain an honest relationship with other irrespective of ethnic, religious and language differences. Their life is a mix of conviviality and tension; nevertheless, they have a strong sense of belonging even in an extreme situation like a riot. While this is going on, feminist academics have a different perspective on low-income neighbourhoods; generally, they look at the position and activities of women in these settings.

Sri Lankan feminist academics have developed significant attention towards gender and social and political affiliations in low-income neighbourhoods. Most of these studies concentrate on the close-knit social relationships that are facilitated by diverse social networks in low-income settlements, which are essential to their daily lives. Studies on women in low-income areas have provided significant evidence of how essential it is to retain domestic duties while also making a contribution to the household economy as part of their socio-culturally prescribed position (Kottegoda, 1991:2004; Ruwanpura, 2007:2008; Perera, 2015: 2016; Lakshman *et al.*, 2016; Abeyasekara *et al.*, 2019). Because households

are a part of wider social interactions and realities and because their structure is influenced by the social context, Ruwanpura (2007) notes that "households are not the same everywhere." Gender roles are thus influenced by a variety of social, cultural, political, and economic settings (2007, p. 525).

Women in low-income areas typically want to take up flexible jobs that allow them to manage household responsibilities. According to Kottegoda (1991), the domestic life cycle of the household and anticipated domestic role responsibilities and obligations influence women's choice of income-generating profession. As a result, people rely heavily on social networks to find good employment prospects. Additionally, studies show that the diverse social networks that women interact with on a daily basis in low-income settlements offer these women a variety of psychological and material assistance. Kottegoda (1991) highlighted three crucial areas where women receive support through these networks: (a), finding out information regarding work opportunities (b), sharing of childcare and other domestic responsibilities, (c), obtaining financial loans (Kottegoda, 1991. p. 29). Women maintain reciprocal exchanges with neighbours or others from their ethnic groups as a form of survival. Ruwanpura (2008) emphasizes how ethnic differences in low-income neighbourhoods coexist with strong similarities. These networks are crucial for the wellbeing and survival of women (2008, p. 414). According to Kottegoda (2004), networks of social ties function at several layers, such as those between neighbours, kin groups, and ethnic groups (Kottegoda, 2004, p. 123).

Although academic work in Sri Lanka exploring the cosmopolitanism of multiethnic subaltern groups is rare, existing evidence indicates that external influences can easily arouse low-income residents. Disturbance of working-class consensus during the colonial period and involvement of low-income residents in riots in modern Sri Lanka were closely connected to external influences. In addition to politicians and elites, many stakeholders representing the state, NGOs and civil society interact with slum governance in Colombo. Many interventions have been made in these neighbourhoods to improve these subaltern groups' living conditions by both the state and non-state stakeholders. The following section discusses selected interventions made with various stakeholders' support, which implies that low-income neighbourhoods link with multiple stakeholders in the governing process.

2.5.1 Governing low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo

Control over low-income neighbourhoods is one of the oldest unsolved issues in the country and can be traced to the British period. British colonial officers made Colombo a hub of economic and administrative functions which increased employment opportunities. The expansion of the port in 1883 and its associated industries was a primary instrument that stimulated the rise of a particular clustering of working-class tenements and small businesses. Since the establishment in 1865, the unhealthy and overcrowded living standards of the working-class in low-income settlements grabbed the attention of the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC). Since then, CMC has implemented various plans and projects for low-income neighbourhoods with the support of INGOs, donor agencies, national and local governments.

Most of the interventions to eradicate overcrowding and poor-quality housing in low-income neighbourhoods in both colonial and post-colonial periods did not provide sufficient opportunity for these underprivileged communities to participate in policy formation and implementation. City plans were drawn up by Sir Patrick Geddes (1921), Clifford Holiday (1940), Sir Patrick Abercrombie (1949), the Colombo Master Plan (1974-1978), and the World Bank-funded self-help housing programme of 1973. In all of these programmes, the active participation of low-income community members was absent. Thus, in this section, I focus on the experiences of Community Development Councils (CDCs) as this provides a reasonable opportunity for low-income dwellers to be actively involved in community upgrades. The primary purpose of these CDCs is to enhance the participation of low-income dwellers in their community developments. Through the focus on CDCs, I intend to highlight two elements of a low-income neighbourhood: first, these communities' links with various stakeholders, mainly through the governance networks of low-income neighbourhoods; second, governance networks also produce various stakeholders within these communities who gradually become leaders. These local leaders are most important to these communities as they maintain a good network with external institutions.

In the early 1980s, the government initiated CDCs in most low-income neighbourhoods. CDCs were initially established to improve people's participation in low-income areas, which were under-serviced (Horen, 2002). These councils are also expected to work within the community and participate and receive support from the government. In the beginning, CDCs actively worked in low-income neighbourhoods to improve necessary services through negotiations with government authorities (D'Cruz, McGranahan and Sumithre,

2009). CMC, National Housing Development Authority (NHDA), and other government officers approached low-income neighbourhoods through CDCs to discuss housing and health-related issues, inform their project plans and receive feedback. Another task of CDCs was to collect debt repayment of housing loans from residents and collect financial contributions for government water and sanitary projects (Russell & Vidler, 2000). Councils were registered in CMC and administrative committees were selected from the community. The formation of CDCs was a significant innovation from the perspective of the governance of low-income neighbourhoods.

However, CDCs gradually disappeared from neighbourhoods with the completion of water and sanitary projects. According to Mitlin (2001), over six hundred CDCs were registered in Colombo in the 1980s. Nevertheless, in 2003, only nine per cent of CDCs were properly functioning in these neighbourhoods (Sevanatha, 2003). Researchers have identified several reasons for the collapse of CDCs. Horen (2002) identified the lack of sense of ownership and weakness of leaders as some reasons for these organisations' failure. CDCs formed in response to the need from the government and as consequences, residents did not clearly understand the purpose of CDCs.

On the other hand, CDC leaders who act as a gatekeeper between government officers and the community could not retain control of the organisations because people gradually lose trust in them because of their misuse of power. According to Russell and Vidler (2002), CDC leaders used their position to get small bribes from residents to get services, such as obtaining letters, permits, or forms from government officials. They also indicate that

government officials and other leaders expect that CDCs have to function according to their interest. Furthermore, political patronage and local party politics also weakened these organisations' activities and longevity. Politicians did not want to strengthen CDCs because they felt that it would enhance the distance between them and slum dwellers. By controlling the low-income community and making them dependent, politicians could strengthen their vote bank.

As in other countries in the global South, residents of low-income communities in Colombo are also an essential segment in elections. They hold a significant proportion of voters in the city. A report by Sevanatha illustrates that 'politically slum dwellers are important because they could elect and select members of the city council as well as higher political authorities as they hold the majority of votes in the city (2003, p. 10).' Therefore, the importance of this marginalised community increases during the election period. Based on a 2001 survey, 77,612 families live in 1,614 low-income settlements in Colombo, which contain nearly half of Colombo's population (Sevanatha, 2003, p. 10). This figure shows that low-income neighbourhoods are an important vote bank for politicians who contest elections on the local and national levels. Therefore, politicians expect that low-income communities will depend on them to access services and other needs. This dependency encourages politicians to demand votes from them when they contest elections. They fear that they will lose political patronage if they become self-reliant and find other routes to services. It is also possible to disrupt the interethnic harmony if political parties reach these multiethnic communities with ethnic votes.

While looking at the governance relationship with low-income settlements in Colombo, we cannot forget the country's most urgent contemporary urban issue, post-war development. In 2009, the Sri Lankan government forces defeated the LTTE and brought 30 years of civil war to an end. Soon afterwards, the Rajapaksa government took various steps to develop the country with particular attention to Colombo. The government used urban development as a strategy to attract foreign investors to Colombo. To attain this goal, selected low-income settlements located on some of the most valuable land in the city were relocated so that vacant land could be used for economic purposes (Perera, 2015; Nagaraj, 2016; Abeyasekera et al., 2019). Some of these evictions were carried out forcibly with the support of military forces and people who lived in these areas scattered to various places (Amarasooriya and Spencer, 2015).

Although these evictions created a variety of problems for the victims, I focus on how these evictions impact low-income residents' unity after they were relocated to other places. Most of these people were relocated to high-rise condominiums, which shifted their social lives from horizontal to vertical. Little literature suggests that the significant consequences of this eviction and relocation can undermine unity, relationships, and networks that low-income residents have maintained for a long period. Relocated people in new settlements do not actively participate in community organisations due to the weak sense of belonging, which is the most significant challenge facing by relocated communities. The robust social network in their previous low-income settlements was mostly shattered due to the individualised lifestyle introduced by condominium living (Lakshman *et al.*, 2016; Collyer, Amirthalingam and Jayatilaka, 2017). Low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo have

become an important site for post-war urban development as they occupy some of the most valuable land in the country. With the support of international donor agencies and private investors, the government relocates low-income residents to condominium apartments. This top-down slum uplift approach has caused adverse social and economic implications due to the absence of victims in decision making. More importantly, this kind of project could harm the long-term peaceful coexistence experienced by low-income residents.

This review literature illustrates that the social life of the subaltern groups who live in low-income settlements in Colombo is strongly related to the dynamics of governance. Governance could either strengthen or weaken the coexistence of subaltern groups through interventions. Although this relationship has existed for a long time, it has not received sufficient attention to understand the impact of governance on the coexistence of different ethnic and religious groups in low-income neighbourhoods in Sri Lanka. The final section concludes and raises specific research questions.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted how subaltern cosmopolitanism clarifies how marginalised groups live together. This is a relatively recent subdivision of cosmopolitan studies due to the effort to find alternative concepts for non-elite groups. Cosmopolitanism emphasises living together with difference; nevertheless, one of the significant criticisms of the concept is its focus on elites' engagement. In contrast, subaltern cosmopolitanism draws attention to the life of various marginal groups in society. It argues the way of living together with

differences is not an exclusively elite phenomenon. Socially and economically marginalised groups, particularly at the micro level, also engage with diverse cultural groups in everyday life. Existing studies reveal that subaltern cosmopolitanism is an appropriate concept to understand how subaltern groups live together in multicultural low-income neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile, multilevel governance examines how multiple stakeholders, including state institutions, NGOs and community organisations, are represented and connected at different levels in governance. Studies highlight that low-income settlements become a multilevel governance node as they interlink with diverse stakeholders from different territorial levels. Through this governance process, the state and other stakeholders have been making diverse interventions to upgrade slums and shanties in the global South. However, the lack of space for the low-income residents in decision-making and the approach's top-down nature is considered a significant cause for unsuccessful results. After various attempts, now donor agencies and NGOs directly engage with low-income inhabitants. However, studies focusing on governance and multiethnic slums indicate that dynamic stakeholders' influence can affect unity in these neighbourhoods.

Hence, in this study, I blend subaltern cosmopolitanism and multilevel governance to understand how ethnically and religiously diverse groups live together in low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo and how governance dynamics impact these people's peaceful coexistence that they are experiencing for a long time. Colombo is a port city that has been popular among traders and other migrants for a long time. Consequently, it consists of

people from diverse ethnic groups and experienced cosmopolitan elements, even in the pre-colonial era. Colonisation, particularly under British administration, made Colombo the country's capital and established the city as an economic and administrative hub. Similarly, in many countries in the global South, low-income neighbourhoods are also a by-product of the colonial government. Working-class people tend to live in highly congested, unhealthy areas in the city centre because of affordability and convenient distance for workplaces. Since then, these settlements consist of multiethnic, multireligious groups who interact very closely with mutual understanding.

Since colonial times, various attempts have been made to upgrade low-income settlements in Colombo. These interventions linked informal settlers with both state and non-state stakeholders. Although governance plays a significant role in the life of low-income inhabitants, no systematic study has been done in Sri Lanka to explore the influence of external factors on the unity of these economically and socially marginalised subalterns. Further, compared with the majority of the country, low-income neighbourhoods are significant spaces where people of different ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds to live together. The everyday interactions of people in these congested multiethnic communities are a combination of conviviality and tension. While most of Sri Lankan society is separate in ethnicity and religion, living together has become a survival strategy because of their its informality. Although this underprivileged community has essential cosmopolitanism elements through engaging with different people in everyday life, these are not adequately studied in the cosmopolitanism context. This study attempts to fill this academic gap by exploring the life of a multiethnic, low-income community in Colombo.

The overarching research question of the study is, what is the relationship between subaltern cosmopolitanism and governance dynamics of low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo? This question will be addressed by answering the following three sub-questions.

(1) *Can cosmopolitanism operate in low-income neighbourhoods?* What sort of diversity appears in highly congested multiethnic neighbourhoods? How do people interact? What factors lead to conviviality as well as tension? How do people overcome issues that arise when they live together with people who are different from themselves?

(2) *How does multilevel governance function in low-income neighbourhoods?* What external factors interact with the low-income community? What are the internal mechanisms operating in the community? Who are key stakeholders in the internal governance of the community? How external stakeholders interlink with the internal mechanism?

(3) *How does multilevel governance impact the cosmopolitanism of people living in low-income neighbourhoods?* How do external stakeholders involve or interact with low-income neighbourhoods? What are the reasons for those stakeholders' engagement in internal matters of the community? How do internal mechanisms combine with external factors to affect the everyday life of low-income residents? How does tension arise in the community due to the involvement of external actors as well as internal factors?

To explore these questions, I selected a diverse, multi-ethnic, low-income neighbourhood in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for this study. In the following methodology chapter the following matters are discussed: the way the researcher enters the field and how mutual

understanding builds up with this marginalised community; methods used to gather data, and the constraints that the researcher encountered in the field.

CHAPTER THREE: STUDYING DIVERSITY IN COLOMBO

3.1 Introduction

The cultural landscape of the country reflects the geographic distribution of Sri Lankan ethnic groups; in most places, people tend to live within the same ethnic, religious and language groups. However, low-income neighbourhoods are unusual in this regard and have a mixture of people from diverse culture backgrounds. These settlements are specific geographic areas with distinct cultural patterns of living with difference. The vibrant cultural diversity of Wadulla Watta in Colombo provides an excellent platform for studying the cosmopolitanism of subaltern groups. The first section of this chapter provides a brief description of the origin and evaluation of low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo. In this section I also discuss the suitability of Wadulla Watta as a research area for this study.

The second section describes the ways in which I became familiar with the people and place by using different strategies. Previous research engagement, explained in this section, enabled me to finalize the research. An ethnographic approach was used to understand the culture of this subaltern group in their living environment, as discussed in the third section. This section also focuses on other techniques used in data collection and analysis. The final section of this chapter describes the positionality of the researcher.

3.2 The Research Location: Wadulla Watta, Colombo

Colombo is a vibrant capital city representing all major ethnic and religious groups in Sri Lanka. According to the latest census report, the total population of Colombo District is 2,324,349, comprised of Sinhalese 76.5 %, Sri Lankan Tamil 10.1 %, Indian Tamil 1.0 %, Sri Lankan Moor 10.7 %, Burgher 0.6 % and Malay 0.6 % (Department of Census and Statistics,

2012). Colombo also has more low-income settlements than anywhere else in the country. These settlements are not concentrated in any particular area but spread all around the city. A report by Sevanatha (2003) highlights that more than half of the people in Colombo live in low-income settlements that lack essential services. Although inhabitants face many socioeconomic difficulties, one of the most interesting and important elements of these settlements is that diverse cultural groups live together. Compared with other areas of the city, low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo typically consist of people from all ethnic groups mentioned above. Ethnically and religiously diverse people have lived together in these settlements for centuries; thus, multiculturalism is an identifying characteristic of these communities. Nevertheless, the diversity and the nature of coexistence of these economically and socially marginalised subaltern groups is not widely understood.

A quick overview of the origin and characteristics of low-income settlements in Colombo helps to understand the economic and social status of these subaltern groups and how certain areas in Colombo evolved as multi-ethnic communities. Their origins were working class, through work in the docks and factories for example. As that kind of labour market has declined, however, they have become marginalised. Like many places in the global South, a significant proportion of low-income settlements in Colombo emerged during the colonial period. The expansion of the port in 1883 and its associated industries was a primary instrument that stimulated the rise of a particular clustering of working-class tenements. The introduction of railways in the 1860s and the expansion of communication networks facilitated rural to urban migration, resulting in substantial numbers of rural youths migrating to Colombo to seek opportunities from new modes of the economy

(Perera, 2008). As the population demands increased, the city's supply of housing began to lag behind. Consequently, people began to encroach on marginal areas, such as canal banks, along railway lines, into marshy areas and paddy fields abandoned due to economic constraints. Such areas offered easy access to workplaces, stimulating growth of low-income settlements.

Low-income housing in Colombo falls into three categories: tenement gardens, slum gardens and shanty communities. Tenement gardens are long-established working-class neighbourhoods situated in inner-city areas. They are the remnants of compact row houses built by enterprising businessmen in colonial society between 1880 and 1930 as rental accommodation for local people to work in colonial enterprises. Slum gardens are old buildings constructed from permanent materials, overcrowded and poorly serviced. Most slum gardens are located in the inner city and were built in the 1930s for labour migrants. By contrast, shanty communities emerged after 1948 to accommodate the excess population from slum areas and new migrants to the city; shanties are collectives of small, single units built of impermanent materials. Since shanties are built on vacant land in the city, most do not have legal rights (Silva & Athukorala, 1991; D'Cruz, McGranahan and Sumithre, 2009). Although significant upgrades were made to these settlements over time, most of them are still congested and have a high density. Currently, migrant labourers and their families live in these areas, in addition to generations of original residents. Local commercial ventures had taken over colonial companies.

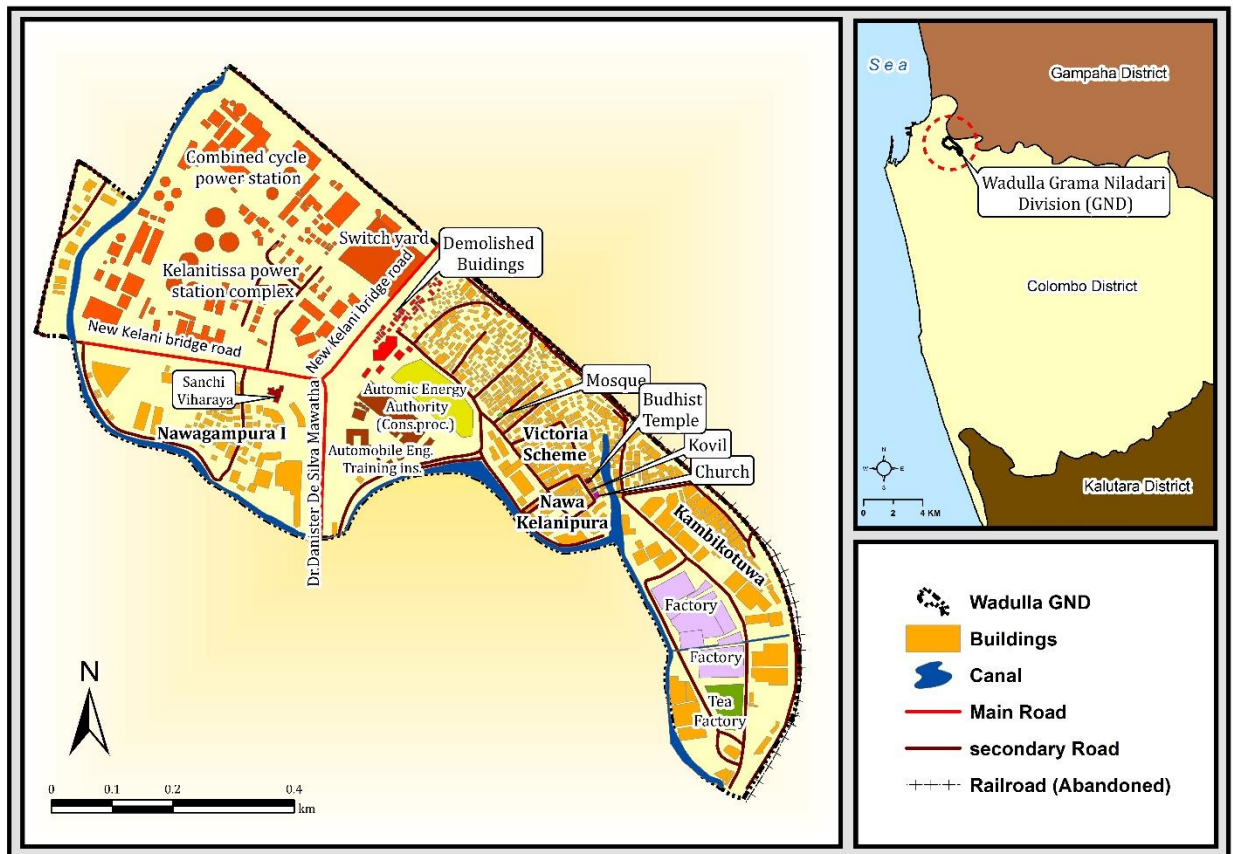
In the local context, low-income settlements are generally referred to by different names such as *Mudukku*, *Peli Gewal*, *Pelpath*, however the most common word is 'watta,' which means 'garden' (Silva & Athukorala, 1991; Kottegoda, 1991; Sevanatha, 2003). Many low-income settlements in Colombo were constructed by landlords in gardens to be rented by newly arrived migrant labourers. Hence, residents and outsiders refer to all these different types of settlements by the same familiar name. Since watta is commonly used to refer to all kinds of low-income settlements, I use the term to describe all low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo in this study.

3.2.1 Why Wadulla Watta?

Wadulla Watta was chosen for this study due to its significant characteristics compared with other low-income settlements in Colombo. It is a multi-ethnic low-income settlement located in Northern Colombo. The total population of this settlement is 7981; of those, 4,105 are women and 3,897 are men (Kolonnawa Divisional Secretariat, 2020). The rich cultural landscape of this neighbourhood makes this settlement an ideal place to investigate the cosmopolitanism of subaltern groups. In terms of ethnicity, Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, and Malays live next to each other in this highly congested neighbourhood. The religious landscape is just as varied: Buddhists, Hindus, Muslim, and Christian people live here. The majority of people in this community speak and understand both Sinhala and Tamil languages. Although some other low-income settlements in the city share similar multicultural characteristics, it is rare to see a place with such a rich combination of diverse groups without any being obviously numerically dominant.

The uncommon nature of Wadulla Watta is immediately clear from the way in which religious buildings are constructed in the neighbourhood, exceptional amongst low-income settlements in Colombo. As can be seen in the following map (Figure 3.1), all religious buildings – Buddhist temples, Hindu kovil, Christian church and Muslim mosque – are constructed in immediate proximity to each other, which is highly unusual compared to other parts of the city. There are several statues representing different religions in various places in the settlement. These religious buildings and statues indicate that although people practice different religions, they live in this densely populated place with mutual understanding.

Figure 3.1: Religious landscape of the research area



Source: Created based on Survey data

In addition to this, the Wadulla community has a rich experience with different types of migration, including interurban, intra-urban, rural-urban and estate sector-urban. According to archival documents, in 1972 this settlement had only a few houses along the main road and railway route in the northern part of the area. However, in a short period, the number of dwellings increased rapidly due to development-induced relocation and illegal encroachment. In 1981 people who lived along the main road and surrounding area were relocated to a part of this settlement that was then named 'Nawa Kelanipura.' The next relocation scheme was called 'Victoria Housing' (the original name was in English).

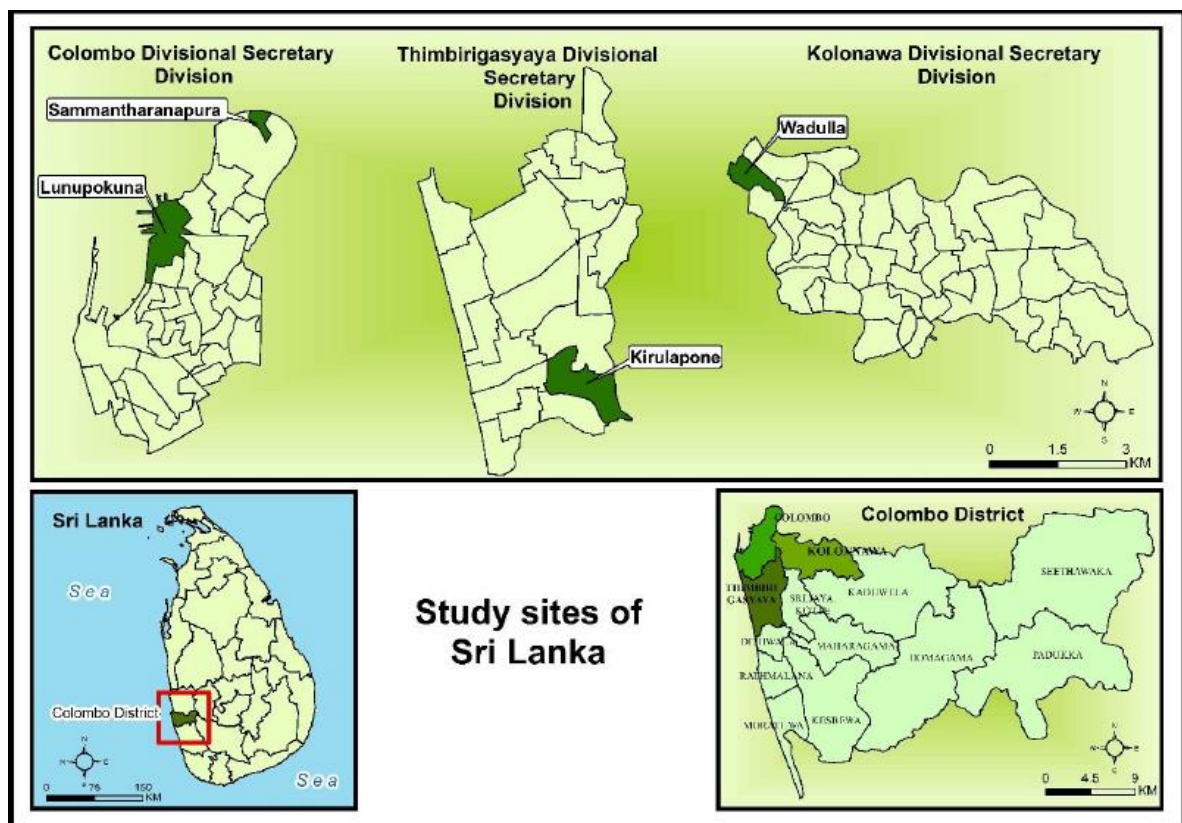
People who lived in this area were relocated in 1990 due to the expansion of Peliyagoda bridge over the nearby river Kelaniya. The aerial photograph (Figure 4) in the archival section highlights the evolution of the neighbourhood over different periods. The dynamism of this neighbourhood continues as a result of post-war developments in Colombo. A significant number of families from this neighbourhood were relocated to condominium apartments by the government because of ongoing road expansion adjoining the Watta. These characteristics of Wadulla Watta led to the selection of this community for the study.

This area was also a research site for the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) field research project *Migrants on the Margins*. The PhD position that I received was part of this project. This RGS project ran from 2015 to 2020 and involved researchers from UK universities and international research partners. It focused on migration and the vulnerability of migrants in some of the world's most pressured cities, including Colombo (Sri Lanka), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Harare (Zimbabwe) and Hargeisa (Somaliland). With the exception of Dhaka, these are all medium-sized cities with a population of between one and two million, experiencing substantial in-migration as well as different types of movements within each city due to natural hazards and construction projects.

In Colombo, the RGS study focused on a total of four underserved communities: Lunupokuna, Samantharanapura, Kirulapona and Wadulla, situated in Colombo, Thimbirigasyaya and Kolonnawa DS divisions. These neighbourhoods were selected based on residents' rich migration histories; the sites consist mainly of migrants from Sri Lanka's plantation-based hill country and former conflict zones in the north and east, as well as

those who had been evicted or relocated from other parts of Colombo. Along with high mobility, residents experienced issues related to income and housing, with social and environmental challenges, and were vulnerable to displacement. Housing conditions vary from permanent to semi-permanent dwellings with different types of ownership. There are further challenges regarding access to public services and facilities.

Figure 3.2: Migrants on the Margins' study sites in Colombo



Source: Created based on Survey data

Over three years (2016-19), data was collected through various techniques such as oral histories, household surveys, walks, photos, migration videos, community profiles, social, historical, resource and infrastructure mapping, and graphical accounts at individual, community and city level. I worked closely with the Colombo team to collect qualitative

data and support the team to initiate other methods. I also worked with the survey team to complete around 500 household questionnaires in four selected sites. Through working with the Colombo team, I understood Wadulla Watta is unique in terms of its ethnic and religious mix, in the location of its religious buildings, in its the geographical location as well as its past and present experiences of population movement. Through consideration of all these factors, I identified the advantages of Wadulla Watta to investigate cosmopolitanism. The familiarity I had gained of the area and its inhabitants through the RGS project also permitted my ease of entry into this Watta.

3.3 Entering the Watta

I was able to create and maintain a good relationship within Wadulla Watta based on my engagement with the Migrants on the Margins project. That experience alone was insufficient to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in this community, however. Using the ethnographic research method participant observation I closely observed and interacted with the Watta people. I utilised different strategies to approach the community and spent more time in the neighbourhood as an ethnographic researcher. Though Wadulla Watta has a good mixture of diversity – an essential element of this study – it is still subject to dystopian elements like many other low-income communities in Colombo.

When I mentioned that I was to conduct research in Wadulla Watta to friends and colleagues in Colombo, the most frequent advice I got was ‘do not to go to that place.’ They had the impression that Wadulla Watta is dangerous for outsiders because of gangsters and drugs. In the 1980s, well known thugs and gangsters were associated with it. Because of

this connection outsiders still have a negative impression of this settlement and are scared to visit. The continued consumption and sale of drugs is another reason that people consider this place dangerous; buyers from outside the watta visit selected locations in the neighbourhood to purchase drugs. During the Migrants on the Margins project, however, I personally did not come across this, nor did others working on the household survey. In the end I chose Wadulla Watta as my research location after consulting a few well-known people in the Watta.

Nevertheless, I knew I would have to be careful around the Watta because of the drug dealings described above. Marijuana (cannabis), ice (crystal methamphetamine) and heroin are commonly sold and consumed. I learned that the police keep an eye on the locations and people who are involved with drugs. Thus it was possible that people who engage with drugs might suspect I was a police detective or spy; on the other hand, police officers might think I had a connection with drug dealers when I moved around the area. Thus, I understood that conducting research in Wadulla Watta would be a challenging task. I therefore decided to familiarise myself with relevant officials and key people in the neighbourhood through whom I was able to successfully spread a message to the community that I am a student and my purpose of visit to the Watta is exclusively for research.

As a first step, I introduced myself and the objective of the study to the police. Wadulla Watta comes under Grandpass police division, which is located nearly three kilometres from the neighbourhood. One morning I visited the police station and introduced myself and the

study to the officer in charge. The officer did not indicate that the Watta is dangerous for outsiders; instead, when I explained that I was interested in understanding the unity (*samagiya*) of these people, he expressed his view that this neighbourhood would be suitable for the study. Since it is difficult to explain what cosmopolitanism is, I used the two most popular words in post-war Sri Lanka to describe my study: *samagiya* (unity) and *sahajeewanaya* (coexistence), Sinhala words used to indicate living together in different ethnic groups. Since these words have similar meanings to cosmopolitanism in Sinhala and they are commonly used and are easy for most people to understand, I used both terms to explain the study among ordinary people as well as officials. During interviews, I observed that people were happy to hear these words and to share their experiences of living together through *samagiya* and *sahajeewanaya*.

After listening to my research with interest and having confirmed my status as a student through the student identity card offered by the university, the police officer introduced the community police officer in charge of Wadulla Watta. 'Community Police' is a branch of the Sri Lanka police to control various offences through linking the police and the public. In addition to a police officer, the 'community police' group has members from the community and other government officials who work in the Watta. The community police officer was helpful and gave me his mobile number in case I had any problems while doing research. So from the beginning I received full support from the police to work in this neighbourhood, which encouraged me to meet the next government officer, the Divisional Secretary of Kolonnawa Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD).

Sri Lanka is divided into 332 sub-administrative units known as Divisional Secretariats. These Divisional Secretariats are further divided into 14022 small units refer as Grama Niladhari Divisions (GND), the lowest level administrative divisions in the country (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020). The Grama Niladhari or village officer is considered to be a person in a position of some power because people have to obtain approval from them to access services, such as electricity, water, voter registration and all government welfare. The Grama Niladhari (GN) is like a gatekeeper between the Watta people and the government. In Sri Lanka, there is no formal institution to obtain permission to conduct fieldwork in a selected place. However, it is challenging to move around the neighbourhood and meet people without the consent of the Grama Niladhari. Although getting permission from the GN is not required, their (unofficial) approval helps for entering the field smoothly and moving around freely. When inhabitants see outsiders wandering around this type of communities they immediately complain to the GN or the police. Thus, keeping the GN informed in advance helped to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding and suspicion among Watta inhabitants and other government officials who engage with the neighbourhood.

The Divisional Secretary offered his verbal consent to conduct the study in the Wadulla Watta. In addition to fieldwork approval, the officer gave some time for an interview. He said he admired the multiculturalism of the Watta; nevertheless, their peaceful coexistence was not recognised by outsiders. The DS appreciated my aims to look at the unity of these people. He said 'It is unusual that a person explores the positive side of this marginalised group. Generally, outsiders view the neighbourhood from a negative perspective.' At the end of the interview, he gave me his number and asked me to contact him for further

assistance if I needed it. Since the DS had already granted permission for the fieldwork, I had a smooth introduction to the GN and obtained his verbal approval for fieldwork without much effort. He also introduced me to his assistant Selvam (all names of residents used in this study are pseudonyms) to help me become familiar with the Watta.

Selvam works for the Grama Niladhari as his informal assistant. Therefore, almost everyone in the neighbourhood knows Selvam and maintains a good relationship with him because they know his help is essential to get assistance from the GN, especially when they are unable to approach him formally. As Selvam got to know me he became my primary informant. We met at his house and had a long chat about people and the neighbourhood. My relationship with him helped me to approach people and persuade them to be interviewed. He was very keen to keep me safe when I visited the Watta. Thus, he sometimes accompanied me when I observed religious festivals at night. While moving around with Selvam, I met religious leaders in the Watta and explained the purpose of my presence.

The Buddhist monk, Rev. Badhdhiya, is a chief incumbent of the main Buddhist temple in the Watta and has a significant influence on Watta matters. His support was essential and I would have had to leave the Watta if he refused to help, given his influence among Sinhalese residents, local leaders and government officials. His authority in Watta matters shows that religious leaders have substantial power in the Watta. After explaining the research at the first meeting in his temple, the monk raised several questions. He asked where I was from, in which country I was studying and who was funding the study. After my

response, he began to criticise foreign governments, NGOs and academics who do research with the support of foreign grants. He claimed that "you all work for foreign countries and provide them all information about our country." He became angry and refused further discussion.

I knew if I could not convince him, I could not continue fieldwork easily in this location because the monk could convey a negative perception about me and the research to the residents. He could also stop me researching the Watta because the Buddhist clergy are politically influential. I requested another meeting and he reluctantly he asked me to come on the following day but he was not there when I visited. I finally met him on a third visit. Before explaining the study, we had a casual chat about the country and realized that he had done his religious studies in Anuradhapura, where I was born. Anuradhapura is the ancient capital where Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka and is still a holy city for Sinhala Buddhists. The ancient monuments and temples in the city reflect the flourishing of Buddhism several thousand years ago. The monk's perception of me changed once he understood my familiarity with Sinhala culture and I recalled some memories from my childhood including my enjoyment of the Poson Buddhist festival at Anuradhapura. We finished much more happily and met a few more times not only for interviews but also for casual chats. It is interesting how such a fundamental encounter for the research turned on complete chance.

Although I obtained consent from the relevant officers and local leaders to conduct research in Wadulla Watta, approaching people was not as easy as I had assumed. The most common

challenge that I faced during the fieldwork was explaining my study and its outcome. On many occasions, people expected instant material benefits, particularly when they described economic hardships. In many interviews, before I explained the objective of the study, people started to recount their economic difficulties. Therefore, I had to spend substantial time with most of the interviewees listening to their financial problems and convincing them by stating my status as a student that I could not bring any direct economic benefits through this study. After nearly a month of roaming around the neighbourhood, people began to become familiar with me and the study. They gradually stopped talking about their financial hardships with any expectation; instead, they started to chat about their daily lives and the specific characteristics of the neighbourhood.

In this way I began to gain the confidence of many people in the Watta. I approached Muslims and Tamils without much difficulty due to similarities that we share, such as religion, ethnicity and language. Apart from these, I did not face any significant challenges in approaching people. Most respondents accepted my request for interviews without hesitation. After three or four months, people grew friendly enough to chat about the Watta in public places, for example, in the three-wheeler park, without considering my presence as an outsider. Gradually they started to invite me to events, especially religious festivals.

However, the situation of the Watta significantly changed after the Easter Sunday bomb blast in Sri Lanka on 21st April 2019. I had been visiting the UK and returned within a month of the explosion. Soon after I arrived, I called my key informants Selvam and Raja, to check they were safe. From them, I came to know that my identity (religion and ethnicity) was

being questioned; some people were suspicious of me and had asked them why I had not appeared for a long time. So I thought it was my responsibility to visit the Watta and meet religious and local leaders, so people would understand that I had not disappeared. When I visited, some people, including the Buddhist clergy, laughed and said, 'the ISIS person is coming', pointing at me. I knew some of them well enough to realise it was a joke and I understood that most were upset and frustrated.

I eventually met them to formally inform them I had completed my research in the neighbourhood and I was not likely to come again regularly. I had to explain this is formally so that they would not wonder about my absence and query my informants. During the conversation, Rev. Badhdhiya said, 'I do not trust even you because you are gathering information and dealing with foreign people' by pointing out the situation of the country. He continued, 'You also do not trust me as the country's situation is like that.' The Watta is a dynamic place, and people are compassionate. As a result of the bomb blast, the Sinhalese majority began looking at all Muslims suspiciously. Ethnographic research in this neighbourhood for a person of my religious and ethnic background will be more of challenge in the immediate future, at least until people recover from this incident.

3.4 Ethnographic approach to understanding cultural diversity

Ethnography is the primary method used to understand cultural differences and how residents successfully live together with these differences in the Wadulla Watta. Although the ethnographic approach is a key method in anthropology, it is also used by academics and researchers from other disciplines. In geography, ethnographic research is used to

understand how ‘people create and experience their worlds through processes, such as placemaking, inhabiting social spaces, forging local and transnational networks, and representing and decolonising spatial imaginaries’ (Watson and Till, 2010, p. 2). The main challenge of this study is to understand the culture of Watta residents and how it creates dynamic social interactions in these places. Ethnography provides unreplaceable insight into the processes and meanings that sustain and motivate social groups (Herbert, 2000). Using an ethnographic approach, such as participatory observation and in-depth interviews, helps to investigate cultural complexities of Watta residents in their everyday environment. In addition to ethnography, archival work was used as another method to collect historical documents on the evolution of the Watta from different sources. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were applied in the Watta to understand the everyday life of subaltern groups in this marginalised community. Archival research helped to understand the history of the Watta and ethnoreligious identity and conflict in the country.

3.4.1 Participant observation

Participant observation provides an opportunity to understand the overt and covert phenomena of this culturally diverse group. It is a well-established method in ethnographic research that provides space to take part and observe everyday activities and the social life of people in their natural context (McKechnie, 2008; Herbert, 2000; Watson and Till, 2010), and is ideal for understanding the practical knowledge of individuals (Zahle, 2012), or informal groups in small communities (Platt, 2004). It provides more space for researchers

to understand certain phenomena by looking at the situation, not by asking respondents directly. This thesis is based on nearly twelve months of direct observation with this culturally diverse group. This has provided a rich descriptive source to understand everyday life, which helps to understand the connections between people and their social life in context. During this period, I spent time observing everyday life and interaction among different groups. The ethnographic approach also provided an opportunity to attend special events, such as residential association meetings, political meetings, welfare and social activities, and to follow everyday life during difficult times such as the period of widespread flooding in the Watta. I also attended religious festivals in Hindu, Buddhist and Christian religious institutions, providing an in-depth understanding of the way in which people belonging to different groups interact through these religious events. The only religious ceremony that Muslims celebrated publicly was 'Milad un Nabi', but as explained in Chapter five, the practice does not appear in the Watta anymore.

In order to adhere to ethical standards, I approached residents with caution when conducting interviews and observations in both public and private settings. Most often, the observation was conducted in a public space with a natural setting. Some events, such as the religious festival, also draw visitors from outside the community. As a result, the locals are not bothered by strangers. However, as previously stated, I deliberately made a few approaches to enter the Watta so that the locals would be aware of my presence there. They have therefore did not limited their behaviour and did not perceive me as a stranger. On certain occasions, such as on religious festivals, the organizations informed me in advance of the program and encouraged me to attend.

Apart from religious institutions, three-wheeler stands – where drivers wait to be hired – are a place in the Watta where people commonly interact. Three-wheelers (known as ‘auto-rickshaws’ in India and ‘tuk-tuks’ in South East Asia) are one of the standard methods of transport used by the majority of residents in Colombo and elsewhere in the country for convenience in terms of availability and cost. Among interviewees in the Watta, the majority of men drive three-wheelers as their primary means of livelihood. Anyone with a driving license and three-wheeler can hire it as a taxi service without formal permission from any authorities; it only requires mutual understanding from fellow drivers at the stand. However, people who drive them often do not own them. Three-wheelers can be rented daily for a fee which varies between US\$ 1.5 to 2 a day.

Since three-wheeler drivers have time between hires, this is one of the sites where most of the informal chats from country politics to Watta gossip take place. Wadulla Watta has two three-wheeler stands: the one at the main junction, for 20 three-wheelers, has drivers who are all from the neighbourhood. The other stand is on the right-side road in front of the mosque near the Victoria housing scheme. Around seven three wheelers provide service from this stand. After a few visits, the three-wheeler driver Raja from this stand became a friend and informant of mine. I sat for many evenings in his vehicle having a casual chat. Although some of the drivers did not talk about Watta matters due to my presence at the beginning, over time they forgot to consider me an outsider. Their conversation helped to identify many aspects of the neighbourhood and often provided a good entry point to approach the people.

Figure 3.3: The three-wheeler stand near the Victoria housing scheme



Source: Researcher

At the junction, on the right hand side of the road, is a tea stall run by Velan, who subsequently became one of my closest informants. I stopped at his shop for tea and a chat most days. This tea stall and Raja's three-wheel stand are two main places that I frequently used to interact with people and observe the routine life of Watta people. Both places allowed me to become more familiar with people as well as understand Watta culture. I also met a community police officer and the Grama Niladhari a few times while I walked around the neighbourhood. Since these conversations occurred in public places, it helped

people to gain confidence in me. I came to know that after I left the tea stall and three-wheeler park, people would ask Velan and Raja about me and why I had come to the neighbourhood. I made all these approaches gradually, building confidence among Watta people. Even before I met them for interviews, people were aware of me and my purpose in visiting the Watta, which helped to approach people more easily. Most of them fully understood that neither I nor my research were a threat to them, which helped to construct a comfort zone between us and facilitated working in the field for nearly twelve months without any trouble. Nevertheless, not all meetings took place smoothly, and I faced some difficulties during my research, for example, the first meeting with Rev. Baddhiya that I elaborated earlier in this chapter.

However, participant observation itself alone cannot produce a sufficient understanding of the ongoing phenomenon in complex social settings unless other ethnographic data collection methods interlink with it (Cohen, 2000; Kawulich, 2005). Close observation of everyday activities and symbolic interaction help to understand people's interactions, however other data collection methods such as interviews are also necessary.

3.4.2 In-depth interviews

In-person, in-depth interviews were another method I used in a semi-structured format to collect information from community residents as well as key informants. According to Elliott (2005, p. 19) 'semi-structured, in-depth interviews provide the ideal method for discovering more about individuals' lives and intimate experiences.' Compared with other methods, the interview gives space to ordinary people, especially marginalised people, to freely present

their life situations in their own words (Kvale, 2006; Cook, 2008). Through interviews, people explain their personal experience of interacting with others, including how they negotiate when tensions arise. It was also valuable to observe first-hand the symbolic reactions and significant attitudes of the respondent, which is essential to understand their social context.

Age, gender, ethnicity, religion and history of mobility are the key elements that were considered in the selection of respondents from the community. These interviews were structured in three parts: past life, present situation and how the respondent feels living with difference (what makes for conviviality and/or tension). To capture the diverse dimensions of the neighbourhood according to research questions, some respondents (older people who were born there) were asked to share their life narratives. At the same time, some respondents (migrants) were asked to share their life experience since moving there and compare it with their life in the previous place. Another group of identified residents was asked to share their life history from selected events in the Watta. Although all interviews started with structured questions, unexpected themes and knowledge emerged through the follow up questions.

Respondent selection was carried out in two ways. First, as planned respondent selection made through snowball sampling technique to capture respondents with varied experiences of life in this diverse community. To reduce community/network bias – a common bias with the snowball technique – I initiated interviews through different entry points. For example, I started with four entries within each ethnic group. However, I soon

understood interviewees' recommendations for further interviewees did not work as I had assumed they would. This was mainly because they introduced the respondents most convenient to them. With a few exceptions, some of them did not meet my requirements and their recommendations felt biased to me. Through further fieldwork I came to know that people faced prejudice and challenges in everyday life not only because of their identity but for various other reasons, for example, economic, social and political status. This field experience taught me not to rely only on interviewees to suggest suitable candidates for interview and I therefore changed my initial plan to snowball sample. Though approximately thirty per cent of all interviews were carried out through snowball sampling, I selected the remainder.

The main reason to use a more deliberate sampling strategy was familiarity with the field and its inhabitants which I gained through the participant observation. In qualitative studies, selection procedure made deliberately can capture the most appropriate respondents for the study (Morse, 2004). When I started the interviews, I had significant knowledge of the place and people and the ways in which they mingled in public places. I was familiar with the residents and I came to know most of them personally. I identified potential respondents for interviews through informal contacts in public places. Most of the respondents were familiar with me and my background through casual conversations. If I thought any person might be a potential respondent, I approached them directly and requested an appointment for an interview. So they were already comfortable with me when we started interviews. Fluency in both Tamil and Sinhala languages allowed me to conduct all interviews in the language preferred by the respondents. The way that language

fluency enabled me to engage with people and in the ethnographic study is discussed in the positionality section.

Generally, when I started interviews, I spent approximately ten minutes for informal chatting about Watta matters and the political situation of the country, which helped to make respondents more comfortable. Some women respondents were not interested in political issues; they wished to talk about the education of their children and common problems in the neighbourhood. Most resident interviews were conducted in private, at a place they had selected. Most interviews took place at the respondents' homes, which they preferred because they thought it was more convenient and secure there. The respondents were given the flexibility to reschedule or relocate the interviews as it suited them. Women responders volunteer their time for interviews when other family members are present in the home. Even when there are family members present at the time of the interview, they did not intervene because most of them are familiar with my research. The average duration of the interview was nearly one hour but this varied between respondents. Repeat interviews were conducted with a few respondents to get clarification of particularly points of the discussion. Most interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents, transcribed and translated into English. However, before beginning each interview, I verbally briefed them about the study's purpose, data protection policies, confidentiality, and informed consent. Before recording the interview, be sure to secure each respondent's verbal consent. Also clearly explained that their participation is voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time from the interview. Office holders of residential associations, religious leaders, local leaders, politicians and government officials were interviewed under the key

informant category. The following table shows the list of interviewees using pseudonyms showing age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and occupation.

Table 3.1: List of interviewees

Name (pseudonyms)	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	Occupation/Position/Workplace
Residents					
Anoma	56	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	Self-employee (Grocery shop)
Aron	51	Male	Burgher	Christian	Labourer
Asha	25	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	Schoolteacher
Asma	42	Female	Muslim	Islam	Homemaker
Chaminda	62	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Self-employee (Business)
Chithra	27	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Homemaker
Ganesh	63	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Retired labourer
Devi	51	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Homemaker
Dinushan	35	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Self-employed (Business)
Gautham	28	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Self-employed (three-wheel driver)
Hasan	28	Male	Muslim	Islam	Labourer
Jeewa	20	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Student (higher studies)
Jenny	26	Female	Burgher	Christian	Garment worker
Karuna/Sangeetha	47/42	Couple	Tamil	Hindu	Labourer/self-employed (vegetable vendor)
Kumari	47	Female	Tamil	Hindu	School teacher
Kamatchi	62	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Homemaker
Laxmi	74	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Homemaker
Maryam	28	Female	Muslim	Islam	Homemaker
Milek	42	Male	Burger	Christian	Self-employed (three-wheel driver)
Murugan	53	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Self-employed (three-wheel driver)
Ponkalan	27	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Labourer
Priya	48	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Homemaker
Priyantha/Aruni	48/40	Couple	Sinhala	Buddhist	Labourer/self-employed (Paper bags)
Raja	42	Male	Burger	Christian	Self-employee (three-wheel driver)
Rajan	77	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Retired labourer
Ramesh	42	Male	Burgher	Christian	Self-employed (Business)

Majid	43	Male	Muslim	Islam	Self-employed (three-wheel driver)
Selvam	58	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Electrician
Sepali	53	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	Home maker
Shanthanam	53	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Self-employed (three-wheel driver)
Sumedha	42	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	Homemaker
Uma	37	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Home Maker
Velan	55	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Self-employed (Food stall)
Religious Leaders					
Rev. Badhdiya	40	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Chief incumbent (Buddhist temple)
Rev. Rahula	48	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Chief incumbent (Buddhist temple)
Rev. Fernando	54	Male	Burgher	Christian	Chief Priest (Church)
Rev. Mendis	60	Male	Burgher	Christian	Pastor (Church)
Rev.Vigneshwaran	56	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Chief priest (Hindu temple)
Zulfi	48	Male	Muslim	Islam	President (Masjid Committee)
Local Leaders					
Abdul	60	Male	Muslim	Islam	Political activist/Party supporter
Ahmad	35	Male	Muslim	Islam	President (B Block)
Bandula	68	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Political activist/Party organiser
Harsha	40	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Secretary (Community Development Association)
Lalitha	52	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	President (Funeral Society)/Social activist
Priyangika	35	Female	Burgher	Christian	Admin officer (Church)
Ram	47	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Political Activist/Social worker
Seetha	38	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Secretary (Hindu Women Association)
Wasana	56	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	Former leader (CDC)
Politicians					
Amila	30	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Municipal council member
Chathura	50	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Municipal council candidate
Ganesan	48	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Municipal council member
Government Officers					
Chamal	52	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Divisional Secretariat Division
Madhuri	32	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	Urban Development Authority
Namal	48	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Metro Colombo Urban Development Project
Ajith	50	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Police officer

Navarathna	38	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Police officer
Piumi	41	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	Divisional Secretariat Division
Prasanna	55	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Urban Development Authority
Ratnayake	48	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Divisional Secretariat Division
Sajith	62	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	National Housing Development Authority

As shown in Table 3.1, sixty interviews were conducted with people from different backgrounds, both residents and key informants. A mix of Watta residents was selected based on their different experiences of residence in this diverse community. With the exception of the resident category, others were considered key informants as they play a vital role in and have influence on the Watta. However, apart from government officers and religious leaders, the majority of these key informants were born and grew up in Wadulla Watta. For example, all local leaders had lived in the neighbourhood since they were born or for a long time; nevertheless, compared with other residents in the Watta, these local leaders hold critical positions in residential associations through which they have established secure social networks. Some of them use this popularity to advance their careers by building relationships with outsiders including politicians, religious leaders and donors. Similarly, except for one politician, others were born in the neighbourhood and became politicians through involvement in various social activities.

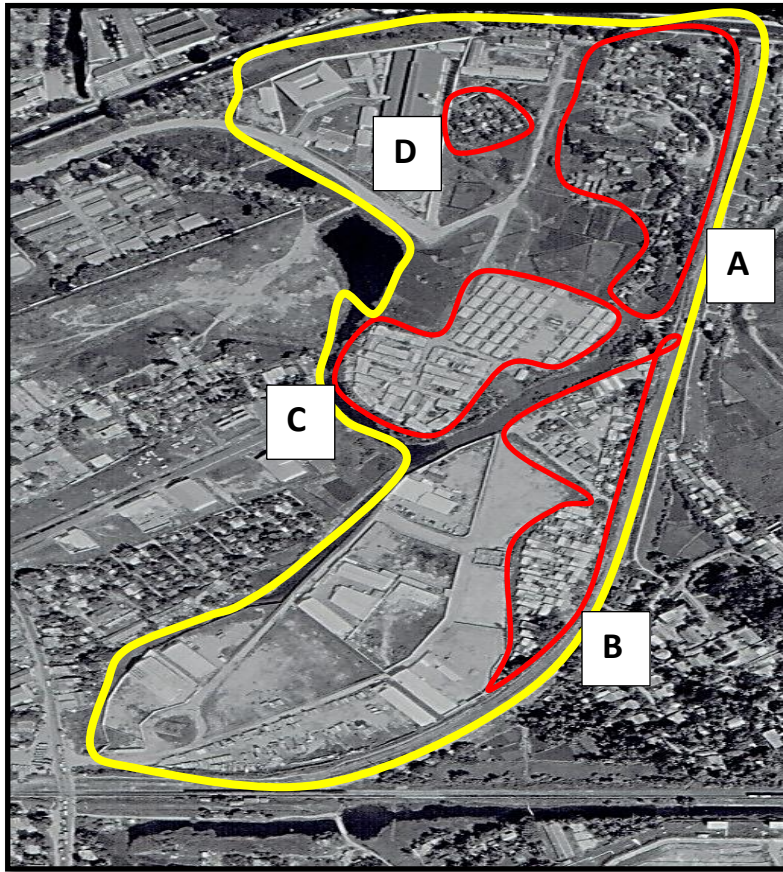
In contrast, all religious leaders came from outside; none were born in the Watta. While three of them live in the neighbourhood, two religious leaders live outside and visit very regularly, engaging in the religious and social lives of residents, particularly within their own ethnic group. Although all religious leaders come from outside, they are much more influential than other types of stakeholders. All government officials come from outside by

representing various levels from local to national government, like a bridge between the Watta and the government. Hence they have significant influence on the inhabitants of the Watta through various administrative matters, development projects, aid and welfare provision.

3.4.3 Archival work

Archival work was carried out in parallel with ethnographic research to document and analyse historical information about the neighbourhood and to understand the contemporary ethnic structure and variation in the country as a whole. Many questions in current society can be understood from the historical record, which might have an entirely different story to tell from memories of places, people, things, institutions or social formations (Rajivlochan and Rajivlochan 2017, p. 248). Research papers, books, journals, Reports, Acts of Parliament, policy papers, government statistics, previous research and newspapers were identified in the National Archives, National Library, Colombo Museum Library, University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya, J.R. Jayawardana Centre, Marga Institute, International Centre for Ethnic Studies and Survey Department of Sri Lanka. Archives were essential in providing valuable background to investigate the progress and past situation of the community. For example, an oral explanation of some senior members in the community demonstrated that the Watta is not a static community, but they did not have any documents to indicate the extent of change in the neighbourhood. However aerial photographs captured in 1972, 1981, 1991 and 2000 helped to analyse and understand how this neighbourhood evolved over the period explained by the respondents.

Figure 3.4: Aerial photographs of Wadulla Watta



Source: Survey Department of Sri Lanka

The aerial photograph indicates four key stages of evolution of Wadulla Watta, which are outlined in red. The area marked letter 'A' is visible in a 1972 aerial photograph as the original place where the earliest settlers lived. In this period there were not many settlements in Wadulla except a few houses along the main road and railway route in the northern part of the area. Area 'B' was documented in a 1981 photograph and shows another cluster of the settlements emerged in the southeast part of the neighbourhood. During this period, the southern part of the area was cleared to construct warehouses and packaging factories. Area 'C' was identified in a 1991 photograph and highlights another portion of land in the southwest which was cleared for a new settlement scheme to resettle

people affected by a bridge expansion project. Area' D' emerged as an illegal encroachment in the neighbourhood. This type of illegal encroachment was observed in areas A, B and C during fieldwork as a result of family extension and migration.

Archival documents are the primary source for tracing the historical evolution of ethnic categorisation and identity politics in Sri Lanka. One of the main arguments I discuss in this study is that ethnicity is constructed: ethnic categorisation initiated by the British colonial administration led to ethnic identity politics by elites in colonial and post-colonial Sri Lanka. Chapter four develops this argument through historical documents such as census records, government acts and various publications published during the colonial period.

3.4.4 Data Analysis

Narrative analysis was employed in this study to analyse the data collected through semi-structured interviews and observation. According to Elliott (2005, p. 4), 'A narrative can be understood to organise a sequence of events into a whole.' Jackson and Russell (2010, pp. 172-173) note that '[L]ife narrative is of interest to geographers because of what they reveal about the past and the role of history, memory and tradition in the social construction of place.' The significance of narrative is further highlighted by Atkinson (2004, p. 567): 'A life story narrative can be a valuable text for learning about the human endeavour, or how the self evolves over time and becomes a meaning maker with a place in society, the culture, and history.' Life narratives highlight individual experiences and life events to build an attachment to place. They provide sufficient space for a person to elaborate their

understanding of how residents interact with each other and how to negotiate common ground to solve issues and tensions when they arise.

This study examines the experience of living together in a culturally diverse community with others from different ethnic, religious, and language settings. The respondents were asked to share their experiences in a narrative format to understand the challenges people face in everyday life. During interviews, people shared their memories of both conviviality and tension when living with people from different cultural backgrounds. Individuals interpreted their everyday lived experiences in the form of a story; this was compared with data collected through ethnographic observation. Residents' experiences are presented as stories starting from their personal circumstances and gradually moving to the successes and challenges that they faced. Since some respondents migrated from other parts of the country, living in a culturally diverse community is an entirely new experience. Thus, while they share their stories, they compare the way in which they mingled with others before and after their migration.

Observation and Interviews indicated significant moments in residents' daily lives. During the observation, the following key themes were identified and interview narrations were categorised based on it. What does conviviality mean? What situations lead to tension? How are negotiations carried out and who takes them forward? Who are the key stakeholders in the Watta and how do they control Watta matters? How do external forces influence the neighbourhood? Narratives of lived experiences highlight what makes people

convivial and what creates tension when interacting with differences. Based on these themes, the life experiences of participants were analysed to understand the wider context.

To avoid superficial explanation I use 'thick description' for interpretation of the detailed account of field experience gathered through the ethnographic method (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography is more than observation; it needs accurate interpretation of social actions and the particular contexts in which social actions take place. Clifford Geertz's 'thick description' is an important tool, widely used to understand culture through observing and interpreting social meanings in ethnographic and qualitative studies. I used this tool to provide a detailed description in narrative format to understand the significant and complex cultural meaning that underpins social interaction in everyday life. It allowed interpretation and analysis of the context of social action.

Ethnographic research is strongly influenced by the positionality of the researcher. My Sri Lankan identity, long experience of living in Colombo, local understanding, language fluency, sense of dress and presentation and ability to mingle with people helped me to enter the field without many difficulties. A non-Sri Lankan researcher may have had to spend a significant amount of time approaching Watta residents and building confidence to undertake an ethnographic study. Nevertheless, I also encountered several challenges at the early stage of fieldwork. For example, I had to spend more time convincing and establish confidence among Sinhalese people than other groups in the Watta due to my ethnic identity. The following section describes the positionality and challenges that I faced in twelve months of fieldwork in Wadulla Watta.

3.5 Negotiating Positionality: Insider/outsider or inbetweener?

Positionality is a fundamental consideration in any ethnographic research, particularly during the time of data collection. In this study, my positionality combined insider and outsider perspectives without being completely one or the other; I was an 'inbetweener'. Carling, Erdal and Ezzati (2014, p. 37) explain positionality in qualitative research as 'the fact that a researcher's characteristics affect both substantive and practical aspects of the research process—from the nature of questions that are asked, through data collection, analysis and writing, to how findings are received.' The same authors have identified a set of elements which influence the positionality of a researcher in migration studies: name, occupation and title, gender, age, physical appearance, clothing style, parenthood, visible pregnancy, language skills and language used, cultural competence, sustained commitment, religion and migration experiences (Carling, Erdal and Ezzati, 2014, p. 45). Most of these elements apply to ethnographic studies to describe the insider and outsider perception of a researcher. Considering the local context, I grouped the above influential elements into (a) identity (b) gender (c) cultural competence and (d) language fluency.

Identity consists of physical appearance, clothing style, name, religion and class. My physical appearance and clothing style clearly reveal that I am Sri Lankan. I always made sure that my clothing style did not deviate far from the typical dressing pattern in the field. Both my physical appearance and clothing helped me to move around the Watta without too much attention from residents. Name is an initial indication of identity that helps build a bond in the first meeting with any residents in the field. When I introduced myself, people easily recognised my ethnicity and religion. Although my ethnicity and religion allowed me to

approach to minority groups fairly easily, I had to spend substantial time establishing confidence among some Sinhalese respondents. I started fieldwork at a peak time of conflict of Sinhalese against Muslims, exacerbated by some radical Buddhist organisations that have emerged in post-war Sri Lanka. My identity and my study of the cosmopolitanism of the Watta people made some Sinhalese, particularly religious leaders, suspicious of me at the beginning.

Initially some people were reluctant to participate in interviews. Although they spoke about general topics, I felt that some of them did not want to continue further discussion when I expressed my research interest. I understood that, without their confidence, it would be challenging to conduct research in the Watta. Rather than meet everyone and explain, I identified the most influential religious leader in the neighbourhood to explain the purpose of my visit to the Watta. The incident that I described in above in this chapter with the Buddhist priest was caused by my identity – he did not trust me due to the country's situation. Nevertheless, after a few attempts, he changed his perception. Currently, I live not far from the Watta. Thus, people do not feel that I am a stranger when I mentioned my place of residence. In term of identity, I felt that I am an insider; nevertheless, some Sinhalese in the Watta did not consider me an insider due to ethnicity and religion.

Gender did not negatively impact the fieldwork at any stage. I did not encounter any specific challenges due to my gender; nevertheless, as a male researcher, I moved around the neighbourhood without restrictions even though it is considered unsafe for outsiders. On certain occasions, I spent long nights watching Hindu, Buddhist and Christian religious

festivals. I did not observe any restrictions to women's movement around the neighbourhood. Women play a significant role in the Watta supporting peaceful coexistence through everyday interaction. Compared with male residents, women spend more time in the neighbourhood and they interact closely with other women in the community. In the Watta, a significant proportion of household and community tasks are shared by female residents. Thus, while I observed the daily routine and interactions of women in a public place, I also approached them for interview.

Among interviewees thirty-three per cent are female and I met all of them at their residence with prior appointments. I did not encounter any significant challenges to select and meet female respondents for interviews. Although the Watta is not an extremely conservative community, rumours and gossips are common in this neighbourhood. Thus I always made sure to interview a woman only when someone else was around the house. Some female respondents refused to participate in an interview at the initial stage, not because of gender concerns but because this type of research was an entirely new experience for them. Therefore, they had a perception that sharing their understanding of the Watta might be risky. Nevertheless, the majority of them agreed to take part in the study after I explained accountability and confidentiality.

In terms of cultural competence, the Watta culture was not entirely new for me as I have lived in Colombo for nearly two decades. Since I was already familiar with the culture, lifestyle, and behaviour of Watta residents from previous research and the proximity of my residence, I was able to fit in quite well. I therefore considered myself to be an insider when

I first entered the Watta and I easily understood their way of life and verbal and non-verbal communication. However, when I started the participant observation I understood that Watta culture was different. Language, behaviour, attitude and the way of mingling with people turns the Watta into a specific cultural place. Their cultural significance is territorial. As a consequence, Watta dwellers consider people who live in the neighbourhood as “Ape Eka” (one of us). They are very friendly and flexible within their comfort zone.

Since the Watta people consider those who live with them in the neighbourhood as insiders, I was often viewed by them as an outsider. Although they shared their life stories, sometimes personal matters and, in certain instances, invited me to special occasions, I understood how the Watta people viewed my positionality. When people described problems in the neighbourhood such as economic hardship, drug issues and flooding they would say, "You cannot understand our feeling..." or "You can understand our issues only if you live here...". Watta residents often displayed these perceptions during informal discussion. Culturally I was not so different from most of Watta residents, but they were aware that I was a researcher and my presence in the Watta was temporary. Since I do not live in with them in the same neighbourhood, they did not consider me “Ape Eka”.

Ethnographic study also depends on the language ability of the researcher. Fluency in the two major national languages, Tamil and Sinhala, is an added advantage to ethnographic research in this multicultural community. Tamil and Sinhala come from two different language groups, namely Dravidian and Indo-Aryan. Different ethnic groups are familiar with different languages, and this is an influential factor differentiating the population of

Sri Lanka into groups. Cultural territories can be divided based on the dominant language that people speak. The majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils (including Muslims) are concentrated in particular territorial areas, which has also helped to concretise feelings of communal separateness (Kuruppu, 1984). Generally, Sinhala is the first language of Sinhalese in most parts of the country. Similarly, Tamil people use Tamil as the first language predominantly in the North and Eastern Provinces. Although the majority of Muslims in the country use Tamil as their first language, they can generally speak and understand Sinhala as well except Muslims in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Thus ethnicity, along with geographical location, determines language fluency in Sri Lanka.

However, low-income communities in Colombo are exceptional cases where the majority of Sinhala, Tamils and Muslims can speak and understand both languages. The bi-lingualism of Watta residents is a significant element which helps them to interact with other ethnic groups without difficulty. Fluency in both Tamil and Sinhala provided an excellent platform to engage with Wadulla inhabitants and to conduct an ethnographic study in this Watta. It helped to develop informal conversations with residents when I met them in public places. I initiated all interviews in both Tamil and Sinhala as preferred by respondents. Although most interviewees answered in their mother tongue when they started conversations, some of them gradually combined both languages when they recounted their experiences. They did not mix slangs intentionally; that is how they naturally speak in everyday life regardless of ethnicity. Language fluency further helped me to transcribe and translate all interviews without recruiting an assistant. Thus, in terms of language, I consider my positionality as an

insider. Although I am confident in national languages, I have struggled in every stage of my study when writing in English because it is my third language.

Overall, I would position myself as an 'inbetweener'. In the elements mentioned above, I am very similar to the Watta inhabitants. Nevertheless, since I do not live in the same neighbourhood, they did not consider me as one of them. This perception led them to look at me as an outsider, although I have shared characteristics with them. This hybrid positionality of inbetweener as an insider and outsider helped to approach the field smoothly, build rapport quickly and understand the context deeply. Nevertheless, the spatial context of being a resident in the same place has a significant influence on positionality when doing ethnographic research in a low-income neighbourhood like Wadulla Watta.

3.5 Conclusion

The origin of low-income communities in Colombo can be traced to the British administration and most settlements continue to experience similar social, economic and cultural characteristics. Amongst these, Wadulla Watta is an ideal location to understand the cosmopolitanism of subaltern groups as it contains a particular cultural landscape compared with other typical low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo. The cultural complexities and interactions between different cultural groups were investigated using an ethnographic approach.

Participant observation, in-depth interviews and archival records were used to investigate and understand the present and past life of Watta inhabitants. I spent several months conducting initial participant observation. I had planned to select participants for in-depth interviews by snowball sampling but had to change the sampling technique to a more directed sampling. Narrative analysis and thick description were employed to analyse collected data. My positionality in this research is inbetween; a combination of an insider and an outsider. At some points I felt like an insider through the elements discussed in the positionality section. However, Watta residents often considered me an outsider. As I highlighted above, the spatial context played an important role in my conduct of ethnographic research in this low-income neighbourhood. It is unusual for Watta residents to consider a person an insider unless they live in the same community. Nevertheless, my positionality was in other ways a tremendous help in carrying out ethnographic research successfully and understanding the wider context.

The next chapter is about the history of ethnic identity in Sri Lanka. This chapter is constructed mainly from archival sources to evaluate the way in which people of Sri Lanka were divided in terms of ethnicity by the colonial administration and the impact of such division on Sri Lankan society.

CHAPTER FOUR: HISTORY OF ETHNIC IDENTITY OF SRI LANKA

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I confine my attention to understanding how ethnic categorizations in Sri Lanka have changed over time. In the first section, drawing on analysis from the census, I focus on ethnic categorization in the colonial and post-colonial periods. The second section explores class formation and identity construction among the elite and working-class society in the colonial period. The last part focuses on the contemporary everyday experiences of living together with different ethnic groups in the Watta and how it leads to subaltern cosmopolitanism. In Sri Lanka, the ancient past is inextricably linked to current ethnic divisions. Politicians and extremists invoke the past's legacy both directly and symbolically, to highlight a particular interpretation of Sinhalese history. This inevitably involves reading the pre-colonial past through forms of categorisation that developed during colonial and post-colonial periods.

The current political significance and interpretation of ancient history is clearly illustrated by the current president of Sri Lanka's choice to take his oath of office outside Colombo. On November 18th 2019, Gotabaya Rajapaksa was sworn in as the seventh executive president of Sri Lanka at the Ruwanwelisaya stupa in the ancient city of Anuradhapura. The history of this ancient temple goes back to the time of King Dutugemunu (Dutthagāmini) who reigned from 161 BC to 137 BC. Dutugemunu defeated Chola prince Elara and became king of Anuradhapura by bringing the entire country under his rule and building this temple to commemorate his victory. Compared with other battles in the history of Sri Lanka, this war is still remembered as a significant one as it resulted in triumph by a Sinhala Buddhist king

against a Tamil king. De Silva (1981, p. 15), states that the Mahāvamsa¹ highlights this war as a ‘holy war fought in the interests of Buddhism.’ Therefore, the majority of Sinhalese still believe Dutugamunu was a saviour of the nation, ethnicity, and religion because of his defeat of a Tamil ruler and unification of the entire island under the Sinhalese regime; most Sinhalese celebrate Dutugamunu as a hero of the country because of this historic victory (Seneviratne, 2004). It is significant that Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the controversial defence secretary during the civil war, chose to take his oaths of office as president of the country at this historic place, publicly recalling the triumphalism of Dutugemunu's victory against Elara.

The population of Sri Lanka consists of several differentiated groups, each of which possesses a distinctive ethnic consciousness that has developed based on differences in religion, language and social and historical background. Although ethnic differentiations appeared in pre-colonial society, the colonial administration constructed a clear set of ethnic classifications. As Seneviratne (2004, p. 9) has argued, even though there was ethnoreligious consciousness in pre-colonial Sri Lanka, there was no ‘perfect Sinhala Buddhist state covering the whole island.’ The account of the Dutugamunu-Elara war comes from ancient Buddhist Pali chronicles, which also highlighted a degree of ethnic differentiation.

Present-day identities among groups and existing ethnoreligious consciousness are rooted in the colonial period (Kuruppu, 1984; Jayawardena, 1986; Ismail, 1995; Seneviratne, 2004;

¹ The chronicle has long been considered as a work of the sixth century AD.

Wickramasinge, 2006; DeVotta, 2007). Existing research on this topic has explained how categorizations and definitions of ethnic groups are continually shifting. As a result, current ethnic classifications are also not stable. Through exploring the causes for political Buddhism and violence, DeVotta (2007) pointed out that the colonial government's divide-and-rule policy exaggerated ethnic, social and religious distinctions among the people of Ceylon. As a result, Sinhalese Buddhists felt that they were economically and politically marginalized. Contemporary Sinhala Buddhist consciousness emerged during colonial times because of the low socioeconomic status of the Sinhala population and the marginalisation of the Buddhist religion. The constitutional policy of the colonial government was also a critical factor that obliged communities to divide on ethnic lines and establish ethnoreligious identities. The population census was introduced by the colonial administration and provided an allegedly 'scientific' way of categorising native ethnic groups. Post-colonial rulers also followed similar categorization systems that changed over time.

Although native people have always had an ethnic identity, there is no evidence that it divided people as it does in contemporary society because of cultural hybridity that characterised pre-colonial society. Senanayake (2001) has demonstrated that both Sinhala and Tamil people shared a range of cultural and religious practices as well as intermarrying, but pseudo-scientific race classification by the colonial government disconnected native people who had been linked for centuries. In fact, as Anderson (2006) has shown, census categorizations of the colonial administration paid much more attention to race than religion. He elaborates that 'the colonial census categories became more visibly and

exclusively racial. On the other hand, religious identity gradually disappeared as a primary census classification (Anderson, 2006. pp. 164-165).’ Through the census records I trace the roots of ethnic identity construction and how native people were classified by colonial and post-colonial rulers. There is also an important class dimension. While the upper class elites attempted to establish separate ethnic identities, the working-class population, in contrast, opposed colonial rule regardless of ethnic divisions. Furthermore, solidarity among working-class people in colonial society was significant. Nevertheless, they failed to maintain unity for an extended period because of the influence of political elites who took leadership of working-class society (Kuruppu, 1984; Jayawardena, 1986).

4.2. Ethnic categorization in the colonial period

The Portuguese, Dutch and British ruled Sri Lanka for nearly four and half centuries from 1658 to 1948. During this period the country's social, economic, and political systems were transformed according to the designs of the colonial administrators. Those changes have significantly influenced post-colonial society. Existing ethnic groups and religions in the country have a close connection with the history of migration, invasions, trading and missionary activities, mainly from India, Arabia and the Western world. Merchants, sailors, and pilgrims left records of their visits in diverse languages. Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils are the only groups in the country to claim descent from the oldest civilizations on the island. Although remaining groups do not claim descent from this ancient civilization, all communities have their own narratives of how they settled and established separate identities on the Island. The 21st century typology of ethnic identities is inadequate to describe these historical changes, so some discussion of the evolution of ethnic groups is

necessary. One of the most reliable sources to explore the formation and transformation of ethnic groups in the country is data from the decennial demographic census.

Information from census data is one of substantiation that shows the proliferation of ethnic groups in different periods and the changing ways in which those groups were classified by the ruling class. Indicating the way in which the Colonial administration categorized society, Wickramasinge (2006, p. 44) states, 'British colonialism brought about a new way of looking at the identities through a variety of technologies of rule. The most important among these was the imperative of enumerating groups in society through the census.' The first census of Sri Lanka was taken on the night of 26-27th March 1871 under the census ordinance, No. 5 of 1868. Since then, fourteen rounds of the census have been completed on the Island, including the latest census of 2012. Ethnicity is one of the essential elements on which information has been collected in all censuses. However, it is important to note that different terminologies have been adopted at various counts on the subject of ethnicity. There is no term common to all census counters that has been used to denote this form of group differentiation. Censuses taken from 1871 to 1911 used the word 'nationality' to refer to ethnic groups of the Island. This was replaced with the term 'race' from the 1911 census onwards. Denham (1912, p. 194), superintendent of the 1911 census operation, explained the reason for changing the term from 'nationality' to 'race' as follows:

In spite of the former use of the word nationality, it cannot be regarded as an appropriate description of the various peoples in Ceylon. The races in Ceylon are clearly differentiated – inter-marriages between; they have each their own particular religion to which the large majority belongs, and they speak different languages.

In the first census of Ceylon (1871), inhabitants of the Island were classified into seventy-four sub nationalities from Asians, Africans, Americans, Europeans and native people. These sub-sects were further categorized into twenty-four primary races. However, out of these sub-sects, only six racial groups were accounted for in the 1881 counting. The following table (table 4.1) illustrates how ethnic groups classified in census records from 1871 to 2012.

Table 4.1: Ethnic classification in census from 1871 to 2012

1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1946	1953	1963	1971	1981	2001	2012
Twenty-Four racial groups	Europeans	Europeans	European	European	European	European	European	European	Shifted to the 'Other' category				
	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers and Eurasians	Burghers	Burghers	Burghers
	Sinhalese	Sinhalese	Low-country Sinhalese	Low-country Sinhalese	Low-country Sinhalese	Low-country Sinhalese	Low-country Sinhalese	Low-country Sinhalese	Low-country Sinhalese	Low-country Sinhalese	Sinhalese	Sinhalese	Sinhalese
			Kandyan Sinhalese	Kandyan Sinhalese	Kandyan Sinhalese	Kandyan Sinhalese	Kandyan Sinhalese	Kandyan Sinhalese	Kandyan Sinhalese	Kandyan Sinhalese			
	Tamils	Tamils	Tamils	Ceylon Tamils	Ceylon Tamils	Ceylon Tamils	Ceylon Tamils	Ceylon Tamils	Ceylon Tamils	Ceylon Tamils	Sri Lanka Tamil	Sri Lanka Tamil	Sri Lanka Tamil
				Indian Tamils	Indian Tamils	Indian Tamils	Indian Tamils	Indian Tamils	Indian Tamils	Indian Tamils	Indian Tamil	Indian Tamil	Indian Tamil
	Moors	Moors	Moors	Ceylon Moors	Ceylon Moors	Ceylon Moors	Ceylon Moors	Ceylon Moors	Ceylon Moors	Ceylon Moors	Sri Lankan Moor	Sri Lankan Moor	Sri Lankan Moor
				Indian Moors	Indian Moors	Indian Moors	Indian Moors	Indian Moors	Indian Moors	Indian Moors			
	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays	Malays
	Veddahs	Veddahs	Veddahs	Veddahs	Veddahs	Veddahs	Veddahs	Veddahs	Veddahs	Shifted to the 'Other' category			
	Others	Others	Others	Others	Others	Others	Others	Others	Others	Others	Other	Other	Other
												Baratha	Baratha
												Chetty	Chetty

Source: Census Data (1871 – 2012)

The table illustrates how the classification of ethnic groups is continually changing. Twenty-four groups used in the 1871 census were: Arab, Bangalee, Brahmin, Burgher, Caffre, Carnatic, Ceylonese, Chetty, Dutch, Dutch descendants, English, Eurasian, European, European descendants, French, German, Irish, Malay, Moor, Pattany, Portuguese, Scotch, Sinhalese and Tamil. In the 1881 census, the number of primary races decreases from twenty-four into eight groups. While Europeans, Burgher, Sinhalese, Tamil, Moor and Malay groups continue from the 1871 census, the 1881 census introduced three new categories. Although in the 1871 census Burghers and Eurasians were categorized as two different groups, in the 1881 census these two groups were merged as one group and accounted as 'Eurasians and Burghers'. The other two new groups introduced in this census were '*Veddahs*' and 'Other' categories. *Veddahs* are the indigenous people of the Island, and they were categorized as a separate group from 1881 to 1963. From 1971 this group is shifted into the 'Other' category. Similarly, European was also classified as a different race from 1871 to 1953; in the 1963 census this group was also included in the 'Other' category due to their reduced numerical significance as a separate ethnic group. It is worth noting the introduction of the 'Other' category. When an ethnic group significantly decreases in numbers, that particular group shifts to the 'Other' category. Hence, this group includes many races that were classified separately in various periods.

Substantial changes took place in categorisations of the main ethnic groups of the country in the 1901 and 1911 censuses. Sinhalese, the dominant ethnic group on the island, have been accounted as 'Sinhalese' from 1871 to 1891. In contrast, the censuses taken from 1901 to 1971 categorize the Sinhalese into two groups: low-country

Sinhalese and Kandyan Sinhalese. The Kandyan Sinhalese are also referred to as 'up Country Sinhalese' in certain places. According to Goonetilleke (1886, p. 93, cited in Denham, 1912, p. 99), 'the Kandyan and low-country Sinhalese are as distinct from each other in their dress, habits, manners and customs and their very ideas and manners of thinking as if they formed two different races rather than two sections of one nation.' Likewise, Denham (1912, p. 213) elaborates the difference between these two groups by taking an example from outside of Sri Lanka:

The distinction between Kandyan and Low-country Sinhalese is every year lessened; in fact, one of the most conspicuous features of the decade has been the amalgamation which is steadily taking place of Low-country and Kandyan Sinhalese..... The changes that are taking place are very similar to those which have made Englishmen and Scotchmen both British, each preserving certain national traits, prejudices, and peculiarities, but recognizing a common unity, and associating on such terms as that it is difficult for a foreigner to recognize any difference in the type.

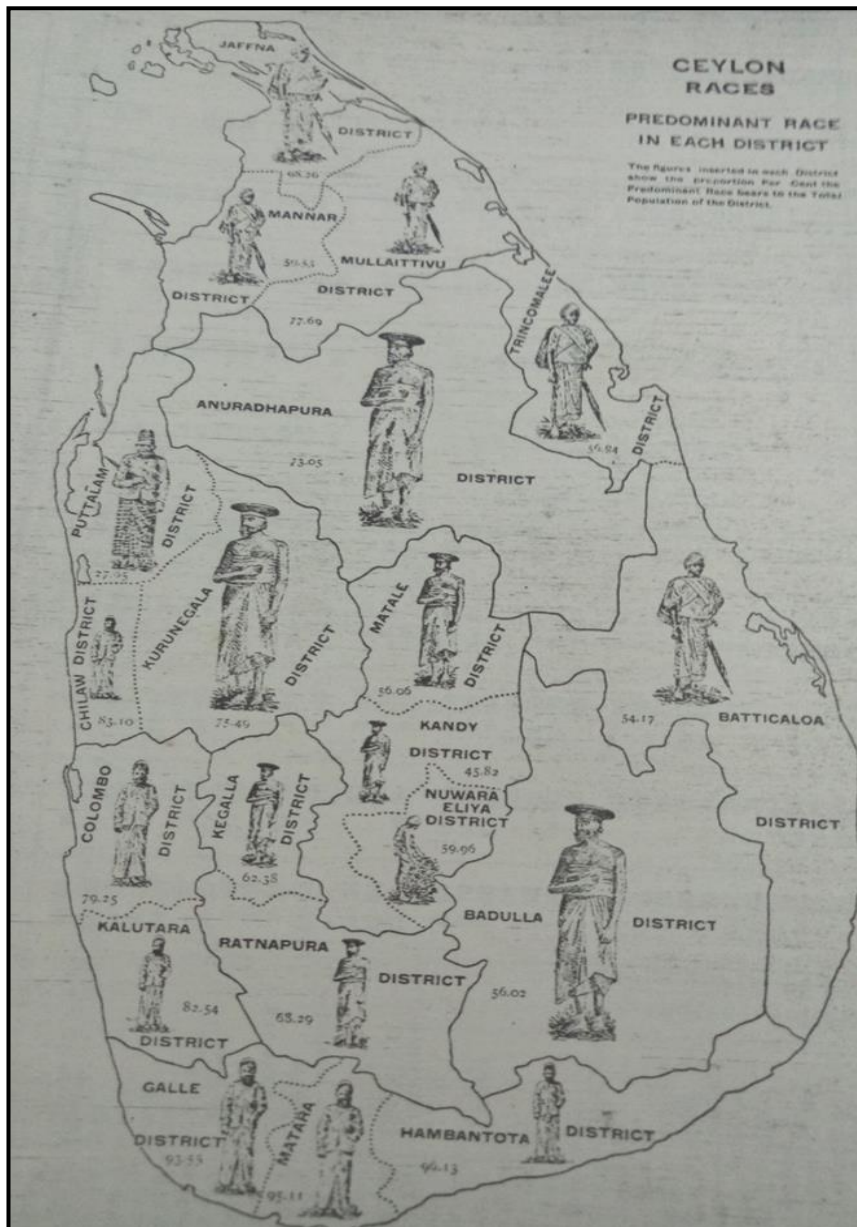
According to Denham (1912, p. 194), the reason for divide the Sinhalese race into two categories in the 1901 census was because they were 'inhabitants of different districts of the island.' Although categorization as Low-country and Kandyan Sinhalese was made on geographical distribution, it also indicates caste differentiation in society during that period. The low-country Sinhalese (Low-Landers, or *Patarata* people), occupying the Southern and Western Provinces, and the Kandyan Sinhalese (*Udarata* or high Landers), dwelling amongst the hills of the Central, North-Western and North-Central Provinces (Lee, 1882). Internal conflict between Sinhalese caused the creation of these two sub-sects. Senanayake (2001, p. 2) highlights that '[C]aste identity was more salient than ethnicity, which was in any case not coded in racial terms.' Dividing Sinhalese into two groups emphasises the greater importance of caste than ethnic sentiment in colonial society. Also, it shows how the colonial government changed racial classification without

considering the future impact on society. As a consequence of this categorization, the newly emerged elites in the low-country Sinhalese group attempted to raise their social status by playing an essential role in colonial society in term of religious revivals and rejuvenating ethnic consciousness among Sinhalese, which from time to time resulted in violence against minority groups that is discussed later in this chapter. However, these two subgroups merged under the collective identity of 'Sinhalese' from the 1981 census onwards.

The Tamil population of the country was categorized as 'Tamil' in the first four censuses from 1871 to 1901. But from 1911 onwards, this group was also divided into two: 'Sri Lankan Tamil' and 'Indian Tamil'. A similar pattern of classification was introduced for the Muslim population of Sri Lanka. 'Moors' was the term used to distinguish the country's Muslim community from the 1871 to 1901 census. This group was divided into 'Sri Lankan Moors' and 'Indian Moors' from 1911 to 1971, but the 1983 census enumerated only 'Sri Lankan Moors' as a separate ethnic group since 'Indian Moors' had become a numerically tiny group. Like Europeans and *Veddah*, Indian Moors also shifted to the 'Other' category in the census classification. 'Malay' is the only racial category that has remained the same since the first census counted only seven ethnic groups (including 'Other'; 'Eurasian and Burghers' was replaced by 'Burgher'). From the 2001 census, two new races were named: 'Bharatha' and 'Chetty'; this remains in the 2012 census. Both these groups descended from Tamil speaking peoples who migrated from India. However, no rationale was offered for enumerating these groups as separate races in the census.

It is not only the racial categorization that is problematic, but also the way the census results were illustrated by the colonial authorities. The following picture was created based on the 1911 census to indicate the predominant racial group in each district. The people highlighted in stereotypical 'ethnic' dress are respectively Low-country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamil, Indian Tamil, and Moors. In the same way, the colonial administration used stereotypical dress to indicate predominant races in each district, as shown in figure 4.1. In this colonial mapping, they show only the main group in each region, with no indication of the presence of other ethnic groups in these areas.

Figure 4.1: Population of Ceylon by district – 1911



Source: Denham (1912)

The picture of people on the map in typical dress is shown proportionately in each district. Colombo district is one prominent illustration for this manipulation, which presents a straight forward mosaic of racial groups in the country. The following table (table 4.2) shows the 1911 census statistic of Colombo district, including the Colombo Municipal Council, which is the core area of the city.

Table 4.2: Races in Colombo district - 1911

Europeans	Eurasians and Burghers	Low-country Sinhalese	Kandyan Sinhalese	Ceylon Tamils	Indian Tamils	Ceylon Moors	Indian Moors	Malays
3111	16259	655293	7832	27785	54830	33314	15891	6104

Source: Denham (1912, p. 198)

Although Low-country Sinhalese were the predominant racial group in the Colombo district in 1911, this region also included significant numbers of other races. The map does not illustrate this complexity, however. Given this type of colonial map, ordinary people may have been encouraged to think along similar lines. This certainly illustrates the emphasis placed on ethnic divisions. Post-colonial society has also developed a similar majority-minority mentality through which the majority of people dominate minorities in various ways.

4.2.1. Complexity and differentiation of religious and ethnic groups

It is important to emphasize that, before census classification, pre-colonial society shared various religious and cultural practices indicative of the original hybridity of Sri Lankan society. Coexistence practiced in pre-colonial society is evidence that cosmopolitanism is not a new concept for Sri Lankan society (De Silva, 1981). Although war was frequent in pre-colonial society and life was extremely hierarchical, it is widely accepted that groups were not divided in relation to religion or modern understandings of ethnicity. According to De Silva (1981, p. 13) 'ethnicity was not an important point of division in the society in Sri Lanka and it would seem that neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils remained racially pure. And Sri Lanka in the first few centuries after the Aryan settlement was a multi-ethnic society.' Different religious and cultural groups lived together relatively peacefully and even fought on the same sides for centuries. The

original hybridity of these groups is demonstrated by the ways that people shared religious practices and beliefs. To show the hybridity of pre-colonial society, I trace traditions and beliefs adhered to by people who lived together peacefully.

According to a chronicle written in Pali over many centuries by Buddhist monks, Buddhism was introduced to the island in the regime of King Devānampiya Tissa (250 – 210 BC) (De Silva, 2017). Since then, Buddhism has been the most widely professed faith in the country. Hinduism is also widely practiced, with varieties of beliefs that have grown up based on the old Brāhmanic scriptures. Buddhism and Hinduism have considerably intermingled in Sri Lanka, such that large sections of the population do not appreciate the differences even of the essential features of the religion to which they profess adherence. Between the arrival of Prince Vijaya on the island in fifth century BC and the introduction of Buddhism by the first century BC, it is thought that Brāhmanism was the most influential religious belief and was followed by the majority of the people (De Silva, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, it is a myth that the Sinhalese were Hindus before they converted to Buddhism. Emphasizing the influence of Brāhmanism in the society, De Silva (1981, p. 41) writes:

Brāhmanism was the religion of the ruling elite groups before the conversion of Devānampiya Tissa to Buddhism changed the situation. Despite the rapidity with which the new religion spread in the island in the next few centuries, and despite its status as the official religion, the tolerant atmosphere of a Buddhist society ensured the survival of Hinduism which only suffered a marginal loss of influence. Brāhmanism retained much of their traditional importance in society both on account of learning and their near monopoly over domestic religious practices.

Consequently, Hindu gods and goddesses became objects of worship by Sinhalese Buddhists and Hindu Kovils were constructed close to most ancient Buddhist temples. The observance of caste in the Sinhalese community had never been too rigid under the

influence of the teachings of the Buddha but became stricter in accordance with Brāhmanical precepts (Neil, 1892). As a result of this influence, the great majority of Sinhalese people lapsed quickly into Hindu practices. Worshippers of Vishnu (*Vaishnavites*) are a sub-sect of Hindus, who believed Vishnu to have been incarnate in ten avatars, of whom *Rama* and *Krishna* are the best known. At the same time, some Hindus worshiped the Buddha as an incarnation of *Vishnu*. Because of this, the 1881 census enumerated 12,813 'Tamil Buddhists' who probably belonged to this religious sect. Categorization by colonial census ignored significant hybridity when classifying native people. These historical narratives and census records show that although rulers categorized people into ethnic groups, they possibly erased sub-groups in the process.

The 1871 census labelled Muslims of the island as 'Moors'. This group was later divided into 'Sri Lankan Moor' and 'Indian Moor'. However, the colonial administration did not determine the natural divisions of this group. In Sri Lanka, Muslims are traditionally divided into five different subgroups: Ceylon or Sri Lanka Moors, Coast or Indian Moors, Malays, Memons and Borahs. The last two groups are numerically low and consist of less than 0.5 per cent of the total Muslim population (Nuhman, 2004). Further, Nuhman (2004, p. 5) describes the complexity of Sri Lankan Muslims:

It is widely believed that Sri Lankan Muslims are a homogeneous community. Although we can see a visible homogenizing tendency among Sri Lankan Muslims due to the development of ethnic consciousness and religious fundamentalism, in reality, the Muslims too are a heterogeneous community as the Sri Lanka Sinhalese and Tamils in this country.

Sri Lankan Moors are the descendants of the Arabs who settled in the country during the eleventh century A.D., while Indian Moors immigrated from South India as traders or labourers. Arab explorers settled on Ceylon coasts, intermarried with the natives and

acquired considerable political influence over the Sinhalese kings. They soon obtained a firm footing on the island and spread throughout the country. Despite adoption of the Tamil language and the freedom with which they intermarried, the unifying influence of their religion has helped descendants of these early Arab settlers to preserve a distinctive race-consciousness and to regard themselves as a separate group.

However, all these sub-groups of Muslims follow Islam as their faith. In terms of religion, Sri Lankan Muslims can also be divided into Sunnite and Shiite, like the global Muslim community. Most Muslims in Sri Lanka are Sunnite; nevertheless, a small minority are Shiite. Also, another group that follows the Islamic faith is the 'Malays.' The origin of this group is traced from Java and the Malay Peninsula. They were brought as soldiers or as political exiles by the Dutch in the seventeenth century. Throughout the period, Malays intermingled with other ethnic groups but exclusively within the Muslim population. Although few Malays were counted in the first census, they were distinguished as a separate ethnic group.

This complexity of different religions and ethnic groups has coexisted on the island for many centuries yet there was little attempt to establish ethnoreligious consciousness and claim separate identities until colonial census categorization. The following section focuses on how these ethnic categorizations stimulated class mobilization in colonial society.

4.3. Transforming ethnic divisions into class mobilization

Contemporary Sri Lankan society is frequently affected by tension between ethnic groups; nevertheless, in the early twentieth century, various divisions appeared within

ethnic groups that were to have long lasting consequences. The changing construction of Sinhalese identity plays an important role in any explanation for these divisions. In this section, I trace different divisions that emerged within understandings of the meaning of Sinhalese, how they were overcome and the much longer lasting implications for class politics. Sinhalese revivalist leaders attempted to define and unite their own ethnic group and these efforts shifted boundaries with other racially defined groups on certain occasions. A similar kind of antagonism has been apparent in the activities of religious leaders in post-colonial society. These changes have implications for class mobilisation, which informs the wider story of Watta communities that I examine in this thesis.

When the Sinhalese were divided into two ethnic groups under British colonial rule in the late 19th century, the Sinhalese already had various divisions among them. Categorization as either Kandyan or Low-country Sinhalese related to caste-based divisions appeared during that period. Kandyan Sinhalese were mostly *Radala* and *Govigama*, the upper castes. Low-country Sinhalese were mostly lower caste groups: *Karava*, *Salagama*, *Durava*, *Bathgama* (De Silva, 2017, pp. 432-433). In addition to caste differentiation, there were three religious divisions in the Buddhist monastic community in Sri Lanka. Today there are three *Nikāya* or Sects: *Siam Nikāya*, *Amarapura Nikāya*, and *Ramanna Nikāya*. *Siam Nikāya* is the oldest, founded in 1753 by upper caste Kandyan Sinhalese. This group were officially recognised by the British colonial government and compared with the other two *Nikāya*, *Siam Nikāya* have historically been most favoured by government.

As a result of upper caste domination in *Siam Nikāya*, Low-country Sinhalese were denied access to a valid ordination system. To rectify this discrimination, wealthy elites amongst the Low-country Sinhalese financed the founding of a new monastic order, establishing *Amarapura Nikāya* in 1800. This lineage was independent of both government and influence from royal power, and it maintained a close relationship with the growing middle class, particularly among Low-country Sinhalese. *Ramanna Nikāya* was the latest and smallest monastic fraternity in Sri Lanka. It was founded in 1863 with the support of the wealthiest elites from the *Karava* lower caste (Gonsalkorale, 2019). Unlike previous sects, the *Ramanna Nikāya* prioritized religious reforms and aimed to 'cleanse the Sangha and return to a purer form of Buddhism free from the influence of Hinduism' (De Silva, 2017, p. 429).

To overcome these divisions and unite all Sinhalese in a single religious community, revivalist movements were established with the financial support of newly emerged elites class and the aim of strengthening ethnoreligious consciousness. The new capitalist mode of production, the plantation economy introduced by the British rulers, created a new class division in Sri Lankan society. This new class group were referred to by various terms including 'brown capitalists' (Wriggins, 1960) and 'colonial bourgeoisie' (Jayawardena, 2015). They began to challenge the old caste-based division, traditionally practised in Sri Lankan society. Jayawardena (1984) demonstrates that this new class emerged exclusively from maritime zones among Low-country Sinhalese, and became social and political leaders in colonial and post-colonial society. Further, Jayawardena (1984, pp. 6-7) illustrates the religious and political influence of this new class:

The economic, political, and social advantages held by Christians were especially resented by the newly emerged Sinhala-Buddhist bourgeoisie, who financed the

movement of Buddhist revival. These groups spearheaded the revivalist movement to promote Buddhist education, challenge missionary influence, and arouse national-patriotic feeling among Sinhala Buddhists.

Although Low-country Sinhalese dominated the economic and political sector through their newly accumulated wealth, people who belonged to this predominantly low caste group faced various barriers to holding positions in religious institutions traditionally dominated by Kandyan Sinhalese. Therefore, the revival first targeted differences and discrimination faced by this group of Sinhalese. Low-country Sinhalese attempted to hold key positions in religious institutions and challenge the traditional, caste-based hierarchy. However, revivalist movements did not have much impact until campaigns led by Anagarika Dharmapala, a prominent Buddhist revivalist, in the early twentieth century. His charisma fueled those movements with militant action and agitation against non-Buddhists on the island. To establish ethnoreligious consciousness among Sinhalese and to unite disparate Sinhalese groups, these reformists employed a strategy of criticising other ethnic groups and casting them as the principal threat to Buddhism and the Sinhalese race. To strengthen his argument, Dharmapala referred to all other racial groups, which were exclusively Muslim or Christian, as 'aliens'.

In his writings and public speeches, Dharmapala argued that the subordinate position of the Sinhalese was a result of the influence of these aliens. The Sinhalese people's low socioeconomic and political status during the colonial period encouraged revivalist leaders to agitate against other minority groups. Furthermore, religious conversion had become a challenge for reformists because of the significant number of Buddhists who were converting to Christianity. Considering the situation of the Sinhalese and the religious renaissance during the colonial period, Qadri Ismail (1995, p. 66) notes:

Three centuries of colonial rule by Christian imperialist powers had weakened organized Buddhism (and Hinduism); a significant number of upper class/caste Sinhalese and Tamils had converted to Christianity in this period. For these and other reasons, emergent nationalist forces in these two social formations initially mobilized around religion.

However, the religious antagonism of Buddhist elites gradually shifted towards minority ethnic groups based on trade or industry groupings. During the colonial period, the key areas of the plantation sector and allied semi-processing industries – export-import and wholesale trade and banking and credit – were mainly controlled by European or Indian interests, while local Muslims dominated internal trade. Some Sinhala Buddhists argued the colonial government and other ethnic groups were becoming wealthy through trade and business while the Sinhalese suffered economic and social marginalization. The subordinate status of the Sinhalese was widely proclaimed throughout the island by Dharmapala and his supporters, who set out to inflame existing resentment. Further, he urged the Sinhalese to boycott trade with other communities and insisted that they deal exclusively with Sinhala Buddhists. Compared with efforts to build religious consciousness, the propaganda against other ethnic and religious groups in terms of trade was much more attractive to socially and economically marginalized Sinhalese. As Kuruppu (1984) has shown, the resistance against alien traders transformed into antagonism against minority groups with chauvinist ideologies to rejuvenate national-patriotic feeling. On the other side, religious movements also supported revivalist antagonism against minority trades as they were heavily dependent on funds from the elite class for their activities. By examining the link between religious revivalism and trade, Wickremeratne (1969, cited in Jayawardena, 2015, p. 263) observes that:

...[a] striking feature of the Buddhist revival was the prominence of the trade elements.....The leadership of the Buddhist movement was largely in their hands.....The movement was ...in part the religious expression of the improved

economic and social status of the major non-*govigama* caste in the maritime districts....The alliance between trade and religion was strong.

Thus, the history of Sri Lanka demonstrates that ethnicity is not something real as it is frequently presented in contemporary society; ethnicity was constructed by the colonial census categorization and weaponized by Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. The census categories disabled the religious and cultural hybridity that Sri Lankan society had enjoyed for centuries (Senanayake, 2001), while new categories created divisions in society that separated the Sinhalese into various subgroups some of whom urged the newly emerged elites to unite as one community. Although Buddhist reformists initiated a religious renaissance, that soon transformed into antagonism against minority groups that lead to violence and ethnic tensions. While ethnic resentment was fueled by reformist elites, the 'working class' united themselves regardless of ethnic or religious divisions. Their unity was a key feature of colonial society, in contrast to the various tensions promoted by elites. Through their unity, the working class challenged the colonial administration and launched a successful trade union strike to achieve their demands. However, their solidarity did not succeed for long because of the influence of religious reformists and trade union leaders. The next section discusses how the unity of the working class was influenced by ethnoreligious consciousness in the late colonial period, a narrative that has important implications for the life of marginalized communities today.

4.3.1. The brief solidarity of the Sri Lankan working class

The working-class population of the Island was also a sub-product of plantation capitalism in the early 19th century. They were composed of all ethnic groups, namely Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils, Moors, Malays, Burghers and Eurasians, and

Malayalis. They also belonged to the four major religions on the island: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. In the case of Sinhalese, Tamils and Malayalis, caste differences also existed (Jayawardena, 1986). Yet low wages, long working hours and the socioeconomic status of working-class people provided a powerful class consciousness regardless of ethnic, religious and cultural differences.

It is worth highlighting that all working-class groups were mobilised against colonial rulers by A.E. Goonesingha, a prominent labour union activist and left-wing politician in the first half of the 20th century. Working-class people were mobilised under the leadership of the elite. However, his initiative was an important milestone during this period when elites were distinguishing groups according to identity and clear divisions were emerging based on ethnicity, religion and caste. After the creation of several labour organizations, Goonesingha announced that 'these labour organizations were open to all irrespective of caste, race and creed (cited in Kuruppu, 1984, p. 96).' During this period, a popular motto of the working-class population was 'unity is strength' (Jayawardena, 1986, p. 18).

Goonesingha was later influenced by the ideologies of Dharmapala, however, and as a consequence his vision of unity among all working-class people was transformed into an ethnoreligious consciousness in favour of Sinhala Buddhism, and his labour activities and speeches criticised other ethnic groups in favour of the Sinhalese. In 1930, he wrote in '*Veeraya*,' a paper he edited, that 'the decline of the Sinhalese was due to the 'white man, the coast Moors, Borahs and Malayalis' (cited in Kuruppu, 1984, p. 97).' Therefore, in a short period, the working class consciousness began to change into an ethnoreligious consciousness that appeared in the majority society. During this period,

ethnoreligious consciousness often weakened the class consciousness of working people and labour movements divided along ethnic and religious lines. However, the creation of divisions among communities did not end with the colonial period. Even after independence, the gap between ethnic groups widened. The Sinhala ruling elites introduced policies that deepened these divisions, such as the 'Sinhala Only Act' of 1956 which had a fundamentally divisive impact on the country (Jayaweera, 1990; De Silva, 2017).

Propaganda was carried out to highlight the benefit of the new language policy for Sinhalese by politicians and religious leaders. These campaigns contributed to the significant revolution in the 1956 election, and Bandaranaike captured the power with vast differentiation. Eksath Bhikku Peramuna (United monks' front, a political party) also organized propaganda to support Bandaranaike's election campaign, publishing the following cartoon to highlight the threat to Buddhism by aliens. However, they indicated the United National Party (UNP), the ruling party during that time, was also a threat to religion as they maintained a close relationship with western countries and minority groups. Through these types of campaigns, revivalist movements attempt to divert the ethnoreligious consciousness of the majority against minority groups.

Figure 4.2: Threat to Buddhism

Source: Wriggins, 1960

While this language policy caused direct violence between communities in post-colonial Sri Lanka, another crucial effect was to segregate communities on linguistic lines. The spatial isolation that already existed the island was exacerbated by language difference.

Gamage (1997, p. 363) comments on this separateness:

Social and spatial segregation of the young was resulting from language, and regional barriers kept the disgruntled youths belonging to different ethnic communities cut off from each other with little or no communication. But the elitist, Western educated, political leaders who come from different ethnic groups, propertied and professional backgrounds, experienced little difficulty in communicating with each other across ethnic boundaries because they spoke a common language.

The above quotation supports the argument that I mentioned earlier in this chapter that new class elites also followed several strategies to retain their power and to strengthen their identity. As Brass (1976, cited in Peebles, 1990, p. 31) explained, this process confirmed that 'ethnic communities are created and transformed by particular elites.'

By overviewing the socioeconomic and political situation of post-colonial Sri Lanka, Gamage (1997, p. 361) also highlighted 'the ruling upper strata have successfully used socioeconomic slogans and strategies based on those slogans to divide and rule the lower layers of the Sri Lankan society.' Although the 13th Amendment to the country's constitution, which passed in 1987, provided for the recognition of Sinhala and Tamil as the country's official languages and the introduction of English as the link language, this policy could not bring two groups together. Consequently, of 'Sinhala Only' Act created a different environment in which Sinhala and Tamil people grew up. These two groups can hardly talk with each other as English is unable to fulfil the gap as a common language for those who lack the education. Although the major societal divide in terms of religion, ethnicity, and language, we can still see people live together peaceably without considering these differences. Low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo are such places which I turn to in the next section.

4.4. Living together in the Watta

Socially and economically marginalized, Watta residents have lived together with differences for centuries though the majority society has been segregated by ethnicity, religion and language. The ability to engage with different cultures turned Watta neighbourhoods into an exclusive place for subaltern cosmopolitanism. If an outsider visited this marginalized area, it would be difficult for them to identify people's ethnicity except by dress and religious symbols. Most people in the Watta identify with their neighbours regardless of ethnic and language differences and although their lives inevitably provoke tensions, these have not historically arisen from ethnic or religious differences. Instead, for many of them, conviviality has become a focus of daily life. In

this section, I focus on the co-existence of different ethnic groups and how Watta residents establish mutual understanding and respect for each other.

Understanding and respecting differences is one of the essential elements of subaltern cosmopolitanism in this neighbourhood. Although Watta residents belong to various socioeconomic groups, they have a relationship of mutual respect despite their differing beliefs which facilitates their living together. This mutual understanding is not a recent phenomenon for Watta dwellers as they share various elements of their everyday lives. Most respondents who were old enough to remember, recalled memories of the 1983 July riots with some pride, highlighting the unity among different ethnic groups in the neighbourhood. During these disturbances, most Tamils and their properties in Colombo were attacked by Sinhalese mobs. However, respondents highlighted that no outsiders came into the Watta to attack Tamil people due to the unity between ethnic groups. A respondent who were born and grew up in the Watta expressed their experience of the riots in these terms:

In 1983, there were only seven Sinhalese families, and the rest of the majority were Muslims, and Tamil families lived in this neighbourhood when the pogroms took place. There were many issues about the possibility of an attack on the settlement and torture of Tamils by Sinhalese. The residents, Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims, got together. Everyone united and did not allow anyone to come to this area from outside. No one was allowed to commit harm to anyone. Even those Tamils in the Watta did not come to attack the Sinhalese, although we are small in numbers. The Sinhalese did not go to harm the Muslims or Tamils. Everyone united as one (Bandula, male, 68 years, Buddhist).

One of the key reasons for this mutual understanding is that they grew up in the same or similar neighbourhoods since they were born. A pre-school teacher in the Watta who teaches children belonging to different ethnic groups said:

I do not consider these ethnically mixed children or their parents as aliens because I also grew up in this environment. Like me, many people do not think of other ethnic group people as 'others' because they also grew up together since they were born. They mingle from pre-school; thus, they do not categorize people as Sinhala, Tamil, or Muslim. In the same way, they continue the same unity when they become adults (Asha, female, 25 years, Buddhist).

Another Buddhist respondent who studied in a Catholic school and spent most of his life with friends of other ethnicities made the following observation:

I studied at St. Lucia school in Kotahena. I spent most of my time at the Church. More than at the temple, I spent time at the Church. I played in the western [music] band of the Church. There were many people who were Tamils, who speak Tamil at home, but studied with Sinhalese. They had no issues when they studied with Sinhalese in the Sinhala medium. We, too, did not question why the Tamils were coming to study in Sinhala School. I feel that [diversity] is not a big thing for ordinary people. Nowadays, also I stop and talk for about 15 minutes at the three-wheeler stand opposite the mosque. Those boys are good. Many of them are Christians, Hindus, and Tamils; they are very friendly (Harsha, male, 40 years, Buddhist).

To express his mutual understanding of and respect for other groups, this respondent further explained:

I cannot be solely in the Sinhalese-Buddhist mindset. I have at least drunk a drop of water from the homes of people [from other ethnicities]. I cannot contribute to something that is against and harmful to those people. Many people have a similar experience as me. That is why people in this Watta have a strong bond with each other regardless of ethnicity in the name of friendliness, kinship, humanity (Harsha, male, 40 years, Buddhist).

Although it is important not to romanticize these connections, the everyday experience of Watta residents indicates how they mingle with other people despite differences. Since they were born and grown up in this diverse environment, they do not consider ethnicity or religion when interacting with people. Language is an essential factor that links different groups. Most people in this neighbourhood are fluent in both Sinhala and Tamil languages, which they learn from peer groups from childhood. Fluency in multiple languages, mutual understanding and respect for each other, along with shared

socioeconomic status, has led to subaltern cosmopolitanism in this space. As this chapter has shown, this attitude and experience is lacking in broader Sri Lankan society.

4.5. Conclusion

The central argument of this chapter is that ethnic classification in Sri Lanka is inextricably tied to the colonial administrators' census. Through an examination of Sri Lanka's national census, I focused on how ethnic categorisations evolve over time. Pre-colonial society was marked by diverse interrelationships among ethnic groups and religions; nevertheless, colonial classifications made the ethnic categorization more complex and split the nation along ethnic lines, destroying working-class unity. This chapter also looks at how identity politics arose in Sri Lanka, why elites want to keep it alive, and how this encouraged the growth of identity politics among the working class. This division had a significant impact on interethnic coexistence, and it persisted in post-colonial society.

I concentrated on everyday experiences of living together with diverse ethnic groups in the Watta and the construction of a subaltern cosmopolitanism in the concluding half of this chapter. However, Watta is no longer a prominent example of cosmopolitanism because of the changing ability to engage with different people. Religion has an important role in bringing people together; yet, religious conflicts in the wider community are beginning to intrude on life in the Watta, causing more tension among residents.

**CHAPTER FIVE: RELIGIOUS
COSMOPOLITANISM: (IM)POSSIBILITIES OF
LIVING TOGETHER IN MULTI-RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITY**

5.1 Setting

In this chapter, I focus on the role of religion as a central part of the lives of residents of the Watta through which different people interact with each other. The religious landscape of the Watta offers the opportunity to analyse how religious institutions in close proximity to each other and people from different religious backgrounds interact with each other. I pay attention to the events and moments recalled by individuals belonging to different religious groups and examine which of these memories are memories of a pleasant experience and which of tension. Similar to the wider society, now religion has become a factor of division between groups. This tension is a new thing for Watta residents who are increasingly likely to view each other suspiciously. Most of these thoughts were created in the post-war era by politicians and religious revivalist movements from outside the Watta and religious and local leaders in the Watta.

These relationships are examined in the following five sections. The religious landscape of the Watta is described in the first section of this chapter. The importance of religion in Watta is discussed in the second part. The following section delves into the history of Watta religious institutions and festivals. The next section examines the way in which diverse religious groups engage through religious festivals. The final section of this chapter focuses on how tensions are rising among Watta residents in the line of religion.

I note which events and moments are recalled by individuals belonging to different religious groups and whether they are pleasant memories or if they evoke tension.

I have friends from all religions, but there is no religious prejudice among us. We do not know how others see us, yet we play together as it is so fun. We usually

play in front of kovil² and church, so, the ball often goes inside the kovil, church and sometime pansala³ too (Jeewa, male, 20 years, Hindu).

The above explanation of a young resident highlights how religious institutions are located along side each other. Wadulla Watta residents are usually proud of religious diversity in their neighbourhood and the way in which religious institutions have become established is seen as a symbol of coexistence. A Hindu respondent admiringly stated:

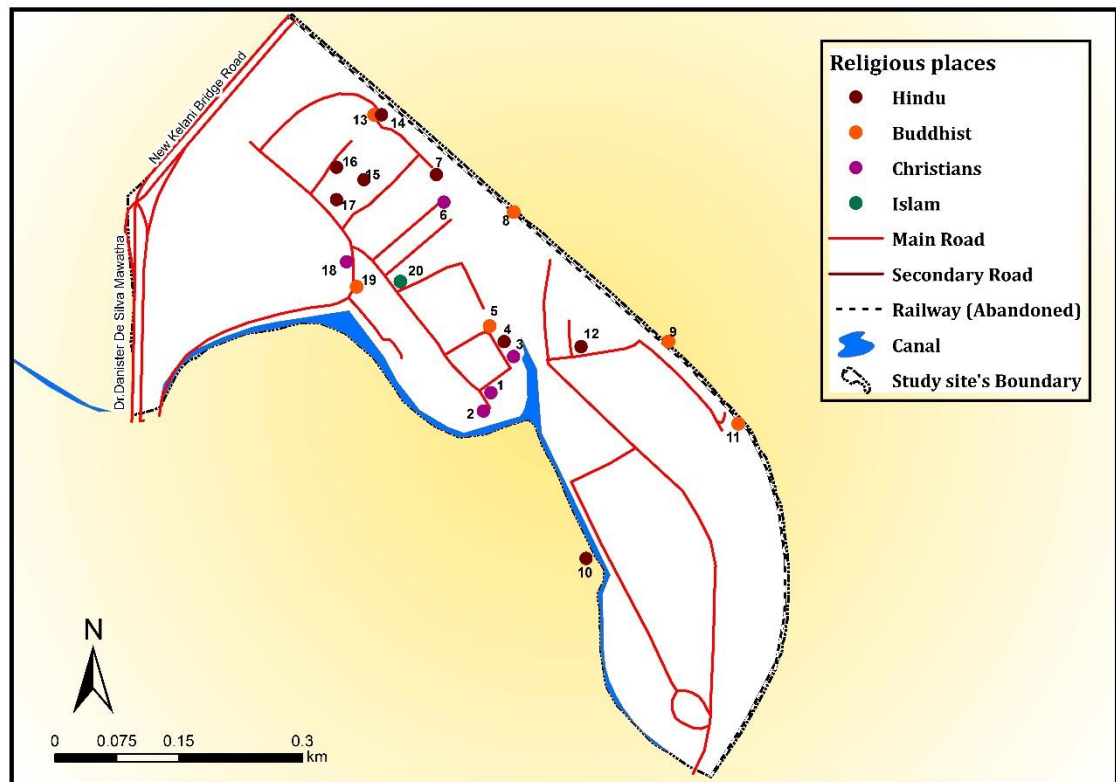
Here you can see Christians, Muslims, Buddhists as well as Hindus. There is a church at the corner of the road, next is a kovil, and by following it is a pansala. On the other side of the road is a mosque—all religious institutions placed in closely (Ram, male, 47 years).

As a consequence of this diversity, twenty different types of religious building and statue can be found in this small neighbourhood, indicating the strength of affiliation Watta residents have with religion (see figure 5.1). This affiliation is not only in public places – people often display images or statues on the door of the house or in the entrance, indicating the religion that the family belongs to. These include Hindu gods and goddesses, statues of Buddha, Jesus and saints, and in the case of Islam, Arabic calligraphy with the phrase ‘Assalamu Alaikum’ (peace be upon you) or ‘Masha Allah’ (as God wills). There is no single deity worshiped by Hindus, nevertheless Ganesh (Pillayar), Kali and Shiva are popular among them. Likewise, St. Mary or St. Antony are popular among Christians, and some Buddhists display images of Hindu gods and goddesses, such as Ganesh, Sarasvati and Parvati with the Buddha. Figure 5.1 shows the density of religious buildings and statues in the neighbourhood.

² The Tamil word kovil refers to a Hindu temple.

³ The Sinhala word pansala refers to a Buddhist temple. In this thesis, I used the terms kovil and pansala to refer to Hindu and Buddhist temples, respectively. Pansal is the plural form of pansala.

Figure 5.1: Location of religious buildings and statues



- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. St. Mary statue | 11. Buddha statue - Orugodapura |
| 2. St. Anthony statue | 12. Sivan statue |
| 3. Evangelical Church | 13. Buddha statue - Janapadhaya |
| 4. Pillayar Kovi | 14. Kovil statue |
| 5. Sri Sudharmarama Pansala | 15. Kali Kovil |
| 6. St. Mary statue | 16. Kali and Muniyandi statue |
| 7. Muniyandi statue | 17. Muniyandi statue |
| 8. Buddha statue - Janapadhaya | 18. St. Anthony statue |
| 9. Sri Sumanarama Pansala | 19. Sri Sunanda Vihara Pansala |
| 10. Kali statue | 20. Mosque |

There is only one road to enter and exit the Watta. It comes off Baseline road, one of the busiest roads in the city, with four lanes of traffic in each direction, just before it crosses the Kelani Bridge. This bridge is the largest of only four crossings of the hundred metre wide Kelani river and is being expanded; twelve semi-structured houses have been identified for relocation. Having left Baseline Road just before the bridge, the track to the Watta follows a canal alongside an Automobile Engineering Training institute. In two hundred metres Sri Sunanda Vihara, a Buddhist temple, appears. Next to this temple is the community centre. Kolonnawa Urban council maintains this community centre and rents it out for functions and special occasions to local residents for a nominal rate. This centre is an excellent asset for the neighbourhood as most of the weddings and family gatherings of Watta residents are held here. Since his office is also located in this centre, it is used as a meeting hall by the Grama Niladhari and other officials. The centre is also used as a distribution centre of food and dry rations during periods of flooding; people affected by flooding are sometimes accommodated here temporarily.

A statue of St. Antony has been placed recently at the junction in front of the newly constructed Sri Lanka Atomic Energy Board building. Christians in the Watta had a small building to place statues for regular worship. However, they had to give this up on the request of the Road Development Authority (RDA) for the new road expansion project with the promise of alternative places. However, residents reported that the RDA only provided financial compensation but has not offered land as promised. After difficulties and debates with some Watta residents who lived in the previously proposed location and officials from the Sri Lanka Atomic Energy Board, the affected people finally placed a statue at the entry point.

The junction where the statue is located is at the centre of the Watta and the main Watta road has houses on both sides. From the junction, the track goes up to the Nawa Kelanipura scheme through the Victoria housing scheme. Walking into the neighbourhood, a statue of St. Mary is placed at the edge of the Victoria housing scheme; a hundred metres further, at the corner of Nawa Kelanipura, there is a second statue of St. Antony. Sri Sudharmarama pansala is a hundred metres from St. Mary's monument, on the other side of a sub road. Pillayar kovil (a Lord Ganesha shrine) and an evangelical church are located along this road near the pansala. The mosque is located on the next road, adjacent to the Victoria housing scheme. These religious institutions are situated close to one another, which is uncommon in other parts of Colombo. On the left, the road goes up to Janapadaya settlement, the original part of the Watta.

5.2 Religion as a central part of the urban landscape

The religious landscape of Wadulla Watta indicates that religion plays an important role in the everyday life of this subaltern group; in turn, everyday life involves interacting with people who belong to different religious groups. Religion plays a vital role in Sri Lankan society and heavily influences the culture of the people. While elaborating on how people from different faiths interact and support each other in the Watta, a Buddhist respondent, Harsha highlights the following:

I was serving as a president of the Thorana society [the organisation for constructing elaborate temporary decorations or *pandal* for Buddhist celebrations] for fifteen years, and the treasurer of this society is a Muslim. A significant financial contribution to *pandal* comes from Muslims. It brings them great joy to be part of that *pandal* for Vesak Poya [the most significant religious festival in the Buddhist calendar]. It is not our Buddhist people that scold us if building the *pandal* gets delayed; it is the Muslims [who are concerned]. When it

gets delayed, [the Muslims] ask why is there a delay? Is there an issue? That is how those people help us (Harsha, male, 40 years, Buddhist).

Having a pandal for Vesak Poya day is the happiest celebration for organisers as well as residents of that area. However, since the construction cost is high, the organisers seek donations from various sources. According to the above respondent, although Vesak is a festival celebrated by Buddhists, Muslims also contribute financially. This is an unusual practice which is rarely highlighted as a symbol of unity. In Harsha's view, there are no significant clashes between Buddhists and Muslims, although they appear regularly in the wider society. For religious festivals and other occasions, people come forward and help regardless of beliefs, which is an essential element of life in the neighbourhood.

The majority of people, regardless of wider religious division, proudly highlighted the context of religious institutions and the way in which people participate in the festivals of other religions as a symbol of coexistence in the Watta. According to these respondents, people did not have issues between them in the name of religion. A Hindu respondent highlighted the multi-religious unity of Watta residents:

People belong to four religions – Muslims, Sinhalese, Christian, and Hindu are here. When it comes to an event in kovil, feast in the church and pansala, people of all four religions work together for the success of the event unitedly. We also participate in the festivals in the pansala without any qualms (Devi, female, 51 years, Hindu).

This respondent was emphasizing the most optimistic viewpoint on religious coexistence. Many respondents, like Devi, said that attending religious festivals is the most enjoyable thing they can do. During fieldwork, I watched how individuals participated in religious festivals and interacted with one another. Participation in the religious festivals of other religions is uncommon in other parts of the country. Against this backdrop, the Watta is an unusual example where religion unites people instead of

dividing them. However, religion has since become a significant factor that stimulates tension among ordinary people as well as religious leaders in the Watta. Nowadays, people in all religious groups are motivated by their religion and various programmes to enhance religious awareness have been introduced in the community. This recent shift makes the Watta an appropriate place to analyze how people interact in terms of religion and how religion has recently become more significant as a dividing factor. This statement by a Buddhist monk highlights how external matters influence coexistence in the Watta:

In Sri Lanka the reason for the religious issue is not because the main religions are coming and spreading their faith in the country. In all those religions, there are extremist groups. Letting those people operate in Sri Lanka is the reason for the loss of our religious harmony. We did not have such an issue in this country earlier. Even when you take the Muslim community, since those days, they followed their faith freely. Recently, extremist groups have formed in the world. By letting those people come and expand, our historical coexistence was lost (Rev. Badhhiya, 40 years).

In Sri Lanka, Buddhism is the predominant religion, followed by Hinduism, Islam, Roman Catholicism and other forms of Christianity. According to the 2011 census, 70.1 percent of Sri Lankans are Buddhists, spread throughout the island, with the lowest proportion in the North and East. Hindus make up 12.6 percent of the population and are highly concentrated in the North, East and Central Provinces. The rise of the plantation economy resulted in the concentration of Hindus in the Central Province. Islam is followed by 9.7 percent of the population; the highest concentration of Muslims is in the central highlands and along the East and West coasts. Christians are highly concentrated in coastal areas, particularly in the Northwest. Among them, Roman Catholics are 6.2 percent of the total population, and other Christians are 1.4 percent of the total population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012).

Compared with other districts, Colombo has had a vibrant multi-religious composition since the colonial period. It has the highest population density in the country, with 11.4 percent of the total population. In the district surrounding Colombo, Buddhists are the dominant group (70.2 percent) followed by Islam (11.8 percent), Hindu (8.0 percent), Roman Catholic (7.0 percent) and other Christians (3.3 percent). In the district surrounding Colombo religious groups are spatially segregated, but in the city itself this is not so much the case. The religious breakdown of the population of Colombo city is very different from the country as a whole and very different from any other area as all religious groups are present in significant numbers (Amarasooriya and Spencer, 2015). Colombo city is the administrative boundary of the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC). In CMC-administered area, 31.4 percent are Muslim, followed by Buddhists (31.2 percent), Hindus (22.6 percent), Roman Catholic (10.8 percent) and other Christian denominations (3.7 percent). The city is divided into fifteen wards for administrative purposes. The central and northern parts of the city are highly congested with the greatest concentration of low-income residents.

In Wadulla Watta, Hindus are highly concentrated, with 47.9 percent of the population, followed by Buddhist 17.4 percent, Muslim 16.7 percent, Roman Catholics and other Christians 12.4 and 5.6 percent, respectively (GN – Wadulla Watta, 2017). People belonging to all religious groups live in very close proximity in this densely populated neighbourhood. For an outsider, religious segregation is not obvious, particularly as the houses are located very close to one another. Because of this, people know each other very well and they are well aware of the religious practices of their neighbours, particularly as they have often grown up together. Religious festivals celebrated by the

Watta residents as well as Sri Lankan society provide key moments of community interaction. The next section describes festivals of each religion that are celebrated in the Watta and explores how religious buildings of all faiths arose in this neighbourhood.

5.3 History of religions institutions and festivals in the Watta

Deepawali and Thai Pongal are the main festivals that are celebrated by Hindu devotees in Sri Lanka, along with annual festivals for each kovil (temple). These kovil festivals are usually the most significant in terms of the number of people taking part and the amount of work involved. 'Mahotsavam' is celebrated especially grandly; usually, in Sri Lanka, this kind of annual festival commemorates when a kovil was consecrated (Kumar, 2014), meaning that the date differs between kovils. This festival usually continues for more than a week and ends with a chariot procession which is the most significant event. Since there is a competition between kovils to have the grandest celebration, some trustees invest tremendous effort in terms of money and work.

Hindu devotees in the Watta celebrate all these festivals, yet their priority is for kovil festivals: Mahotsavam, Aadi Poornam, and Maha Shivaratri are the three main religious festivals celebrated by Hindu devotees in the Watta. Mahotsavam is celebrated in Pillayar kovil (the temple dedicated to Ganesha), usually in August. Pillayar Kovil was constructed in 1982 at Nawa Kelanipura by newly settled Hindus. It is common for a kovil to be constructed in stages. At first people place a statue in a public place, later they construct a building for it and gradually extend. In this case, Hindu devotees placed a small statue of Pillayar on open land and formed a committee for further development. The committee had six members from the area, and they gradually initiated the works by collecting funds from residents of the Watta and external sources. People who were

actively involved in the construction of Pillayar Kovil reported that their aim was to have a place of worship for all Hindus that could not be claimed as owned by an individual. According to them, the first Kovil in the neighbourhood (Kali Kovil, see below) was built by an individual and was maintained by his family members, so it was effectively the property of that family.

Aadi Pooranam, the second grand festival is held in Kali Kovil (the temple dedicated to Kali), which was the first religious building established in the Watta. Kali Kovil was built by a Hindu businessman in the late 1960s and is currently maintained by his grandson with the support of some other residents. Aadi Pooranam festival is dedicated to the Goddess Andal and is celebrated during the month of 'Aadi' in the Tamil calendar that corresponds to the months of July-August. On the day of this festival, the devotees worship in order to seek a happy and prosperous life. The 'Paal Kuda Pavani' (a procession where participants carry a milk pot on their heads) is the main event on the day of this festival. Men, women and children dress nicely and gather in front of Kali Kovil in the morning. After certain rituals, the procession starts with drummers and goes through the Watta, ending at the Pillayar Kovil. While men conduct 'angapradhakshinam' (rolling on the road throughout the parade), women and children hold milk pots on their heads.

Figure 5.2: Angapradhakshinam at Aadi Poornam festival



Source:
Researcher
(2018)

The third celebration, Maha Shivaratri (the great night of Shiva), honours Shiva on the new moon day in the Hindu calendar month of Maagha as per South Indian Hindu Calendar, which is usually in February or March in the Western calendar. For the entire night, devotees pay their respects to Shiva, considered the supreme God by Hindus. Hindu temples across the country are decorated with lights and colorful decorations, and people offer night-long prayers. In the Watta, with rituals in Pillayar Kovil, a cultural event for children and teens is the main event that is held parallel to this festival. A stage to perform music, dance and drama is set up on the corner of a minor road, in front of Sri Sudharmarama pansala with colourful decorations. At this point, it is essential to highlight the role of Pujari, the Hindu priest, who conducts religious services in both kovils. He lives in Wattala, a suburb ten kilometres away, yet he visits the neighbourhood

every day. In addition to this religious obligation, he also looks after the administration of the Pillayar Kovil and plays a key role in organising festivals of both kovils.

The Watta has three pansal, which were constructed in different periods. 'Sri Sudharmarama' was the first pansala, built by a monk who is from Kurunegala, 110 kilometres from Colombo. In the early 1990s, the monk came to this area and resided in a temporary shelter. After some time, he placed a Buddha statue in it and gradually constructed a building, a pansala for worship. The pansala is a well-established institution with a building that has accommodation for monk and a hall for a sermon with Buddha statue. The monk who initiated the pansala is considered the chief incumbent (Maha Nayaka) and all activities of the pansala are guided and monitored by him. Further extension of the pansala was carried out by Rev. Badhdhiya, the new monk who became the chief incumbent after dismissing the founder. The chief incumbent has considerable power to control the area and influence the lives of people where the pansala operates.

In 1994, land was donated to construct a second pansala called 'Sri Sumanarama'. There are no theological distinctions between the three pansala, and all three serve a similar function. However, a few reasons provoked the construction of the second pansala in this small neighbourhood. Devotees of all faiths have a perception that when they physically and financially help religious activities, including support to build the religious building for worship, they get a reward from God in this world as well as after death. Donating land for the second pansala was motivated by a similar perception.

The lack of interaction between the previous monk of the first pansala and some devotees in the area provided a further reason to establish a new pansala in this neighbourhood. Rev. Badhdhiya and some other respondents claimed that people were frustrated with poor religious practices during the time of the previous monk. No sermons were preached and religious activities were considered inadequate. So the local people were fed up with the pansala as well as the monk. At the same time, a monk who was looking for a position used this situation to remove the incumbent and create a position for himself. He constructed the pansala with the help of local people and became its chief incumbent.

However, a few years later, the founding monk of Sri Sumanarama left the area for personal reasons. He was replaced by another monk, Rev. Rahula, from Ratnapura, nearly one hundred kilometres away from Colombo. Rev. Rahula organised the construction of new buildings. During the fieldwork period he initiated a 'Chaithya' (Buddhist stupa), an essential element of a pansala. A pre-school was also attached to this pansala, that had 15 children registered: seven Sinhala, seven Tamil, and one Muslim (in March 2018).

People approach religious institutions with many expectations, including spiritual reward. However, some individuals build pansal and donate generously to religious activities, particularly for the procession, in the hope of direct material benefits. Approaching religious institutions is the easiest and fastest way to reach ordinary people. The establishment of the third pansala in the Watta resulted from similar personal dynamics. 'Sri Sunanda Vihara' was constructed in 2005 by a group of residents led by a local politician in the neighbourhood. The third pansala was established due to

a disagreement between a local politician and the previous monk of Sri Sudharmarama.

Rev. Badhdhiya, elaborating the reason for the formation of Sri Sunanda Vihara, states;

Some people feel that they should get leadership for political activities, and some wanted to get a central position in associations. When the monk did not entertain those people, they got angry and left. They build pansal elsewhere for themselves. The construction of the pansala opposite [Sri Sunanda Vihara] is a result of that (Rev. Badhdhiya, 40 years).

In the name of religion, individuals attempt to fulfill a more secular agenda. Support for religious institutions is an established route to publicity in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, using religion for this purpose, and establishing new institutions to gain influence, can lead to divisions among people belonging to a particular religion. Although all monks claimed that there are no differences between them, the devotees divide themselves into three pansal and practice most of their religious activities based on their particular pansala.

Vesak, Esala and Poson are the most important festivals for Buddhists in Sri Lanka. They are full moon, or Poya, days which are the most auspicious among Buddhists, who usually visit pansal for religious observances then. Sinhala and Tamil New Year is celebrated all over the country, but celebration of other festivals varies across the country. For example, Vesak Poya begins on the May full moon and continues for up to a week in houses, streets and shops with colorful lanterns called Vesak koodu, symbolising the light of the Buddha. Although this festival is celebrated around the country, it is especially significant in Colombo. Esala Poya day, the August full moon, is particularly celebrated in Kandy, with a spectacular procession of traditional dancers, drummers and elephants dressed up in lavish costumes. Similarly, for Poson Poya festival, Buddhists celebrate with lanterns, pandals and alms-stalls across the country,

but the biggest festival is held in Mihintale Rock, near the ancient city of Anuradhapura where Mahinda, Buddha's follower first preached Buddhist doctrines to King Devanampiyatissa.

The Watta Buddhists celebrate these three Poya days, but the Katina cheewara pujawa (Katina procession) is an important festival in the Watta as it brings most Buddhists from the three pansal together. Katina refers to the offering of a special robe (Katina cheewara) presented to monks to mark the end of the rainy season. During the rainy season tiny insects come out and may be inadvertently squashed by the walking monks. As this led to criticism of the monks (for taking life, which they are forbidden to do), they remain in one place during this season. The Katina robe can only be offered at the end of the rains, between the full-moon day of October and the full-moon day of November. A procession, the Katina Perahera, is organised according to the financial resources available to each pansala. Like the Hindu festival Mahotsavam, there is a competition between pansal to have the biggest procession. Some of these festivals are very famous, and pansal with strong financial support hold outstanding parades.

Wadulla Watta has one mosque constructed in the early 1990s. The mosque board is the body responsible for all administrative and religious affairs of the mosque. A mosque board consists of at least three regular positions, usually president, secretary and treasurer, appointed for three years. Members of the mosque board select neighbourhood residents who have a good reputation in terms of religious obligations. Like other committees, the president is always a person of authority who is respected by all the parties concerned (Jazeel, 2013). This board is in charge of religious programming and development, administration and finance. In the Watta, the mosque

board has eleven members who are selected for a three year period. All members except the president are from the Watta neighbourhood.

In terms of festivals, Muslims in the Watta mainly celebrate 'Eid al Fitr' (Ramadan festival) and 'Eid al Adha' (Hajj festival). According to the Islamic lunar calendar, Eid al Fitr falls on the first day of the month of Shawwal, which marks the end of Ramadan. Eid al Adha is the second festival that Muslims celebrate on the 10th day of 'Dhu al-Hijjah.' Like other parts of the world, Muslim devotees in the Watta start the celebration with morning prayers at the mosque. Various food preparations, exchanges and family visits are common events on this day.

In contrast to other religions, Watta Muslims do not associate religious festivals with cultural events such as processions, parades, or any public events where other people could participate in their festival. Usually, celebrations will be held within the mosque or household. Another festival for Watta Muslims is 'Milad un Nabi,' which marks the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. The Milad un Nabi, is celebrated in different ways in different parts of the country. In some places, this involves public gatherings of Muslims where religious leaders make speeches about the life of the Prophet. However, some Muslims do not celebrate this as a festival because they claim that there is no historical evidence that the Prophet Muhammad ever did this. At the same time, in some areas in Colombo, this day is celebrated with Islamic songs praising Prophet Muhammad and the decoration of streets and mosques at night. A few years ago in the Watta, Milad un Nabi was celebrated more extravagantly with children's stage performances of speech, poems and Islamic songs. Nowadays, the Mosque board does not hold any events except limited religious rituals in the mosque.

In terms of Christianity, Roman Catholics are the most numerous groups in the Watta, followed by Evangelical Christians. The latter is comparatively new and their presence emerged only in the late 1980s, yet they have a strong network across the island. Roman Catholic devotees placed several statues of St. Antony and St. Mary in the Watta. These are two saints widely venerated across Sri Lanka. As in other parts in the country, Roman Catholics in the Watta also celebrate the festival of St. Antony. The feast is usually held in August and is coordinated by a twelve-member Catholic committee.

Although evangelical missions are relatively new to the Watta, they play a significant role in the life of Watta residents. The Pastor, Rev. Mendis, founder and resident preacher of the evangelical church, came to this area in 1988. He was from Kirulapone, ten kilometres away from this neighbourhood. When I asked his reasons for selecting Wadulla Watta for his service, he replied:

I do not know whether you believe me or not, but what happened was this; one day, while I worshiped at my home at Kirulapone, I heard a voice from God, and he urged me to go to Orugodawatta and serve those people (Rev. Mendis, 60 years).

The Pastor initially came to Orugodawatta, the nearest junction in the main road, and five hundred metres away from the Watta. He recounted that later, he chose Wadulla Watta with the ambition of changing the lifestyle of residents. However, according to some people, the Pastor selected this place because he identified land to build a 'house church.' When he visited, there were no evangelical Christians in the Watta. While he was at Orugodawatta, he preached in the Watta community centre which he rented for 250 rupees monthly. However, within a short period, Rev. Mendis established a strong network among the residents. According to him, the evangelical mission in this Watta was initiated with 40-50 people, nowadays it consists of around 7500 members, and

they are from this Watta and surrounding areas. According to Mahadev (2014:2018), Christian evangelism is under review in Sri Lanka primarily because the behaviours it involves are regarded to be threatening to Buddhism. Mahadev emphasizes that, many people in modern Sri Lankan society find these aspects of Christianity—as well as others—to be extremely alluring (2014 p. 217-219). Every Sunday, between 200 and 300 people attend gospel meetings. Christmas, New Year and Easter Sunday are the main festivals they celebrate in the Watta. So far, this paper has focused on the religious landscape of the Watta. The following section discusses the ways in which Watta residents interact through these festivals.

5.4 Participation in religious festivals

Religious festivals appear to be convivial moments for the majority of people in this neighbourhood; moments of celebration and joy for them. In the Watta context, participation in religious festivals is one of the most significant opportunities for people to interact with others belonging to different religions. These festivals were emphasized by the majority of respondents as a symbol of unity. Rev. Rahula expressed his experience thus:

I remember at once, we went to collect donations for the Katina Procession. All people support us. In this area, people support all religious festivals. If there is a function at kovil, Sinhala people may give something. Similarly, if there is a function at mosque, Sinhala people support them. If there is a function in the pansala, other religious people support us. So, here people help beyond their religion (Rev. Rahula, 48 years).

However, participation in religious festivals does not mean that everyone in this area associates across religions without any barriers. The level of interaction in religious festivals and with religious institutions varies and can be categorised in four ways: (i) organisation (ii) active participation (iii) observation and (iv) financial support.

Sinhala and Tamil New Year (Aluth Avurudu) is one of the major festivals in the Watta as it is celebrated by both Buddhists and Hindus. The events of this festival are based more on Hindu astrological tradition than on Sinhala Buddhist ritual, so some people consider this more of a cultural celebration than a religious one. However, it provides an opportunity for different people to mingle and is celebrated enthusiastically by Watta residents. Folk sports and games, which are the main event of this festival, provide a platform for people from other religions to be involved without restrictions. On the day of the festival, people decorate their homes, preparing traditional sweets, enjoying meals with the family and showing off their new clothes. Apart from rituals in religious institutions, people interact through the organisation of folk sports, competitions and musical shows. One of the key members of the organising committee that started the Aluth Avurudhu festival in the late 1980s at the Watta said:

In 1988, there was a Sinhalese New Year event. The national flag was flown by Jamal Naana, the reverend monk of the temple, and Sellayya. To be a symbol of unity. I was the main organiser of the event. It just cost 800 rupees at the time. Glasses sets were offered as gifts. The games were enjoyed by all. This was something we did every year (Bandula, male, 68 years, Buddhist)

Gautham, a 28-year-old respondent, expressed his experience of the festival:

I look forward to celebrating the New Year every year because it is one of the most joyous occasions in the Watta. My friends and I start shopping for new clothes a month or two before the festival. Watta youngsters organise Aluth Avurudu games on the festival day or the day after. I have friends that are Muslim and Sinhala. We have an opportunity to get together and play some team games when our family, relatives and residents are surrounding us (Gautham, male, 28 years, Tamil).

This festival is a joyful occasion for the majority in the Watta as organisers arrange various games for men and women of all age groups. The women beat the Rabana (drum) to announce Aluth Avurudu. The significance of the games is that everyone, regardless of age, gender, and religion, can be involved in the competitions. These types

of events in the Watta bring people of different religions together in a convivial moment. Despite the fact that some inhabitants do not actively participate in the games, a significant number of residents, regardless of age, gender and ethnicity, enjoy the festivities. However, the participation of youths and children is higher than that of older people from other ethnic groups.

Similarly, regardless of religion, people participate in the Hindu kovil Mahotsavam and Buddhist Katina processions for two reasons. Some people expect religious merit through participation in these religious festivals. For others, it is a joyful moment when they can engage with others in the community. On the last day of Mahotsavam, a chariot procession starts in the evening inside the kovil. Festival statues are taken out of the kovil and placed in the chariot. Some people pull the chariot with ropes and another group follow behind. Music is an integral part of the Mahotsavam, and it provides the core element of the sacred to the procession rituals. Accompanied by Kavadi dancers, songs, and drummers, the chariot procession advances through the neighbourhood to neighbouring areas then returns to the place where it started.

The Katina procession is the grand festival for Buddhists in the Watta. Since all three pansal lack financial resources, the parade is held at a small scale with a bicycle procession of Watta kids, drummers and dancers with devotees. Usually, this procession is held separately in all three pansal. Due to the absence of a resident monk, the Katina Procession was not organised in Sri Sunanda Vihara, the third pansala, until recently. In 2018, the Katina procession was held jointly with Sri Sudharmarama. Rev. Badhdhiya reported that this was symbolic of an emerging unity among the three pansal and that

he hopes to continue organising this type of joint event in the future so worshippers at different pansal will not be divided.

Committees are established to organise festivals, such as Mahotsavam and the Katina procession, and they generally dissolve afterwards. There are no particular criteria in selection for these committee members. However, people who have a good reputation and close links with religious institutions are often nominated for the committee as they handle financial matters. Apart from this, committee members should live in the Watta; outsiders cannot be members. With the exception of the Mosque, religious leaders have significant control over the committees. Generally, the Mosque committee organises events related to Muslims, the neighbourhood and the mosque. However, since the Moulavi is appointed by the mosque committee, he cannot influence committee decisions. Religious festivals in the kovil and pansal are generally organised by committees made up of members of the same religious group.

The second form of religious interaction is through active participation, through which people get involved in religious celebrations of other religions. This often involves decorating the surrounding areas and even participating in religious rituals during festivals. Usually, youths are involved in the decoration of religious buildings and the surrounding area. While this is the particular focus of young people from the celebrating religious group, young members from other religions also join them. They participate in this work without expectation of merit or reward, but because of friendship. For example, when a boy is involved in decorating his religious building, his friends support him. Jeewa was one of the active organisers of the festival in Pillayar Kovil. He remarked

while detailing how the festival was organised and the support he receives from his friends of other religious backgrounds:

To organise a successful festival, we must put in a lot of effort. Aside from financial assistance, we frequently have human resource challenges. We do not have sufficient funds to hire external help. As a result, we seek assistance from our friends. I have friends of many religions who are always willing to assist me when I need them. Thanks to their assistance, I took on some responsibility in the kovil festival for the last three years. Similarly, when they plan a feast or procession at pansala, I support them. When we engage, we do not take religious or ethnic barriers into account (Jeewa, male, 20 years, Hindu).

As for most youths, these are joyful moments in which young men and women get dressed up in their best clothes and try to catch the eye of other young people. Although girls are accompanied by their family members, in certain circumstances they are able to get into groups and whisper between themselves while boys whisper jokes and mess around. This type of joyful, unsupervised engagement is also a reason for some young men to participate in these festivals. The typical youth group in the Watta consists of members of every religion and their faith cannot easily be identified through clothes or their behaviors.

Figure 5.3: Young people meeting in a watta festival



Source: Researcher (2018)

The third form of participation in these festivals is through observation. Most of the Watta residents regardless of religious background observe celebrations of other religions, particularly processions, as an entertainment. Parents gather their children in doorways to watch as the procession passes, or they go to the place where it starts off. Many respondents interpreted participation through observation to mean that 'everyone participates in religious festivals.' Participating in religious festivals other than their own is a long-standing custom in the neighbourhood.

Figure 5.4: A Muslim family observe the chariot procession near the Pillayar Kovil



Source: Researcher (2018)

However, some respondents complain about Muslims due to their lack of interaction and participation with other religions. Although they contribute financially, they often maintain a distance when they deal with others, particularly in the context of religious matters. According to Rev. Rahula;

Sinhala and Tamil people help me to organise the Katina procession, but I have to say that the minimum support I get from Muslims compares with others. I have no issue with Muslims, but what I am trying to say that, compared with others, Muslims have a very minimal link with the pansala. However, some Muslims financially support us (Rev. Rahula, 48 years).

As highlighted by the monk, the interaction of Muslims with other religions is rare; many limit their participation to observation or financial support. Similarly, there is no space for people from other religions to participate in celebrations held in the mosque. Many

people feel that they cannot go to the mosque in the same way that they go to the kovil, pansala or church. They do not even know what happens in the mosque in terms of religious practices, which leads to misunderstanding among other religious people.

I discussed these issues with all members of the mosque committee on many occasions. Zulfi, president of the mosque committee, observed “[A]nyone can come into the mosque, but there is no common function to invite everyone to here.” Although Milad un nabi is celebrated by the Watta Muslims, the way in which they do so has changed. In the past, the Watta Muslims celebrated this function somewhat grandly and openly and most residents of the Watta, regardless of religion, became observers as they do for other celebrations. Now, however, celebrating Milad un Nabi with speeches, poems and Islamic songs is unnecessary and religiously unacceptable, according to some members of the mosque committee. Hence, they limit the celebration to ritual functions in the mosque in which other religious people cannot engage. The way of celebrating ‘Milad un Nabi’ relates to debate among Sri Lankan Muslims within the last decade or so due to the influence of newly emerged local? sub-groups in the religion.

According to the mosque committee, donors from outside the neighbourhood help the mosque in various ways; because of that, the mosque committee does not need to go to other religious people in the neighbourhood to gather donations. According to the president of the committee and some members, they cannot use the money of other religious people for religious activities. They further elaborate that since other religions do not have such restrictions, they collect money from any person to organise their functions. “We are not like others; we have to maintain Haram (forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law) and Halal (religiously acceptable according to Islamic law),” they said.

This means that they maintain a distance when dealing with other religions. The president of the mosque committee says that Muslims can interact and offer help to other religious events, but he emphasized that this should happen within the religious boundary. He further elaborated:

I know many people, including Muslims, get together and support each other's festivals as one. They have that type of unity among them. I do not think that is bad. For me, that is necessary to help and interact with other religions within our limitations. Our activities should not hurt our beliefs. For example, if anyone goes and helps electrical work in a kovil function, that is fine. It does not harm the religious faith of the person who engages with it. But we should not do anything that harms our trust (Zulfi, male, 48 years, Muslim).

However, there are occasions through which other religious people interact with the mosque: Iftar (the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset) is one such event. To foster social cohesion and develop awareness of Muslim culture, the mosque committee invites other religious leaders for the Iftar programme. Rev. Rahula states: "If there are any special events in the mosque, they invite me. Recently, I got an invitation from the mosque for Iftar function." According to the monk, after participating in this event, he understood better what Muslims do during Ramadan. He linked this event with the cohesiveness of the Watta:

Since people do not have any issues among them (religiously), we as religious leaders also cannot have any problems. We cannot do anything against them because they also come and help us when we offer an invitation (Rev. Rahula, 48 years).

During Ramadan, people of all religions are also invited to get porridge provided by the mosque:

I have seen that Tamil people go with buckets during the Ramadan to take the porridge from the mosque. Without separating the people religiously, the mosque also offers porridge to everyone (Kamatchi, female, 62 years, Hindu).

Providing porridge is a common practice among most mosques in the country during Ramadan. The mosque committee arranges this almsgiving programme through donations collected from donors outside the community, especially from the Muslim business community in Colombo. For some low-income families, this is the main meal for Iftar. In the Watta, not only Muslims, but people from other religions also go to the mosque in the evening to get this.

Financial contributions are the final way in which most of the people in the Watta interact across religions. Because of these financial contributions, the majority of people and religious leaders have developed a view that everyone supports every belief. This practice was especially highlighted by respondents as an illustration of coexistence in the neighbourhood. The organising committee members or their representatives visit households for financial collection in the Watta. People can contribute whatever change they have to hand, and in some festivals, people also provide material in-kind support.

Sometimes I support those festivals by providing 10 kilograms of rice. In the same way, when I go to collect donations for our kovil, they help me with 300 or 500 rupees or whatever the amount they have (Priya, female, 48 years, Hindu).

The majority of people have a similar experience of support for other religious festivals. This is not because of devotion, but because of the people who come for collection. For this reason, although people do not actively participate in other religious events, their contribution even with a small amount is admired by the majority of respondents.

We do not know whether it is right to support festivals of other religions, yet we cannot refuse to give something when we see the face of the people who come to collect who are well-known to us. So how can we refuse? We are doing this for a long time (Asma, female, 42 years, Muslim).

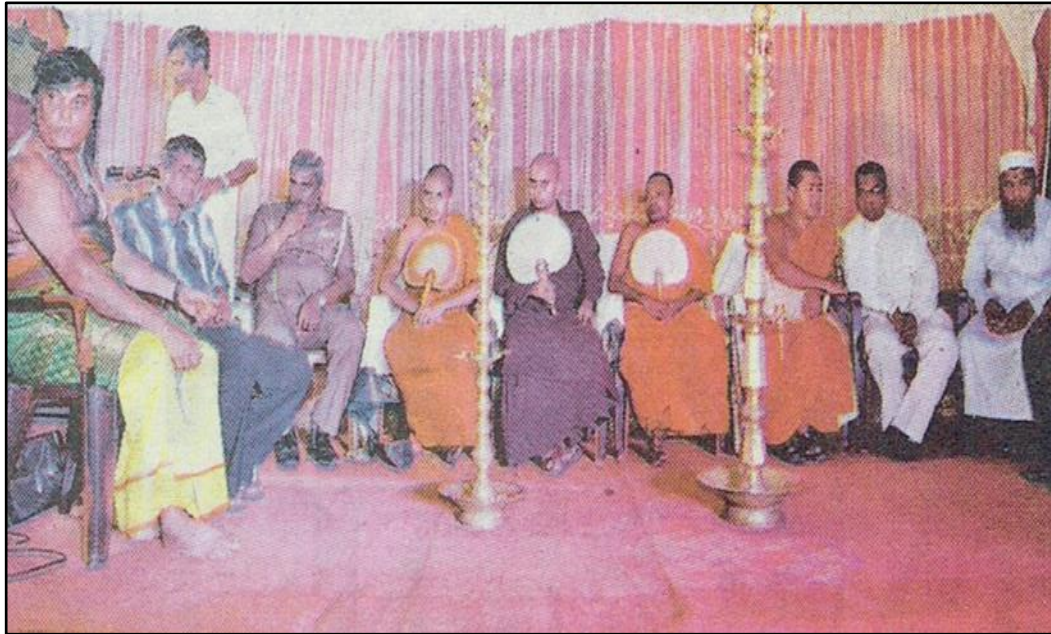
Another group of people believes that giving support to any religion is noble, and it brings spiritual rewards to them. Some Buddhists and Hindus have a perception that all

gods are the same in the context of worship. Some Buddhists in the Watta also worship Hindu gods and goddesses, and some Hindus worship images of Buddha that are placed in public places. I observed in some houses Buddhists display pictures of statues of Hindu gods alongside Buddha and some Hindus also follow a similar practice with Buddha. This tradition has long been practiced in Sri Lanka by members of both communities (Obeyesekara, 1970; 1986). Vishnu, Skanda and the goddess Pattini are considered guardian gods of Ceylon, according to Obeyesekara (1970, p. 58).

In terms of worship, people do not consider a clear separation: this is your God; and this is ours. Therefore, you cannot see this kind of separation in this Watta. That is why when we go to collect donations, they give us at least 20 rupees even those who do so with difficulty (Gautham, male, 28 years, Hindu).

In addition to the interaction of ordinary people, it is common before cultural events for religious leaders to gather on the stage to light oil lamps as a symbol of the coexistence of the neighbourhood. Sometimes politicians, high-ranking government officials and donors also gather on this occasion. These are rare occasions where leaders of all religions appear on the same stage. The photo below (figure 5.5) shows religious leaders in the Watta gathered with government officials to light oil lamps at the beginning of ceremonies for the Hindu Navaratri festival. It was published in a national Tamil newspaper, *Virakesari*, to report on the festival and highlight the coexistence of the Watta. Organisers follow this tradition to highlight the unity of the Watta, and religious leaders accept the invitation to show there is no differences between them.

Figure 5.5: Religious leaders from four major faiths in addition to politicians and a local police officer at the Navaratri festival



Source: Virakesari weekly (February 18, 2018)

Nevertheless, some religious leaders have different opinions about this type of public display of unity. Rev. Badhdhiya is critical of the activities of other religious leaders:

Although they have gathered on an open stage, some religious leaders have different thoughts in their minds. They try to show that we all are unified without differences among us, but at their place, while conducting sermons, they condemn our religion as 'devil worship.'

He continues his criticism by focusing on a particular religious leader:

When I stood in front of the pansala, people go to the church, but no one looks at me. It is because they (Church members) say that other religions are false and devils. So, how can we build coexistence? He [the pastor] converts people to his faith. Our people (Buddhists) do not have a sense of religion or ethnicity. They always expect short term benefits. So, they are behind whoever gives material support (Rev. Badhdhiya, 40 years).

So far this chapter has focused on the role of religion as an important tool for cosmopolitanism in the Watta. Some people use religious festivals for their material benefits, while some expect spiritual merit from God. Despite different religious

backgrounds, most people participate in religious celebrations as they bring joy. However, I turn now to the transformation of religious perception, uncommon among the older generation, which now leads to new tensions among Watta residents. The next section discusses how Watta residents have started to look at religion as a threat and how intergroup tension has occurred as a result of religion.

5.5 Growing tension along religious lines

As discussed, religion plays a significant role in the life of the Watta residents and religious events provide opportunities for people of different religions to mingle. However, spiritual practices do not produce only friendly engagement; some of these practices lead to tension and misunderstanding on certain occasions. Religion has become a significant factor causing tension in the Watta. This relationship is discussed further in the next section of this chapter. It examines the primary grounds of controversy one by one, including religious conversion, intermarriages, public broadcasting of religious messages and outside financial support.

5.5.1 Religious conversion

Religious conversion has been a hot topic in national politics for Buddhist revivalists since the colonial period, as mentioned in chapter four (Johnson, 2016; Mahadev, 2014:2018). Although conversions were controversial at times in history, established churches, particularly the Catholic and Anglican churches, have existed in the country for centuries. They have reached a careful understanding with other religions. The current concerns are mostly focused on evangelical forms of Christianity that have only begun to arrive in the last decade or so. Compared with other religions in the Watta, the evangelical church is well organised, and its members often visit individual houses to

discuss their faith. They used various methods to attract people. They often focus on the poor, unemployed, sick and people with depression or those who have experienced family breakdown. A respondent who is involved in various social affairs in the Watta complained about approaches from members of church and described how she rejects them:

On Sundays, evangelical Christian boys and girls accompanying older people come and ask for a minute to talk. Sometimes I have chased them away by saying, 'You can see the religion we follow. Please go away; we have no desire to talk to you' (Lalitha, female, 48 years, Buddhist).

Church members often approach people who suffer from long term illness. Uma, a 37 year old Hindu woman, described how members of an evangelical church came to her house when her father was ill. She said that when her father was at home after heart surgery, a group of people visited him and strongly encouraged him to convert. She reported that they had said, "If you had come to our religion earlier, we could have prayed for you, and it would have helped you to recover from your heart disease; all your blocks would be cured without surgery." By indicating this incident, she said, "I feel those things are not good. I mean to come to people's home and insist on their converting religion by highlighting their situation."

Priyantha and Aruni live in a wooden house with their two girls aged fifteen and seventeen. Priyantha is a labourer at the Manning market, a wholesale vegetable distribution centre in Colombo, and Aruni is a homemaker. Due to insufficient income from her husband, Aruni started to make paper bags with support from her two daughters, which brings an additional income for their family. Most people in the Watta recognise their economic hardship and the condition of their house. While interviewing them, Aruni pointed out that members of the evangelical church – which residents call

Bible, or the Bible – visited them and insisted on conversion as a way of getting help to construct the house. By explaining ongoing religious conversion in the Watta, Aruni shares her experience:

Yes, many have converted. [Members of] the Bible also visit us and tell us from time to time. He [husband] has an aunt who has joined the Bible. She, too, tells us to join that religion instead of being a Buddhist and that we would be able to build our homes (Aruni, female, 40 years, Buddhist).

The evangelical church conducts events for all age groups to attract people. These include classes for school children to encourage them to get involved through various competitions and gifts. In December they provide rewards for both children and older people along with Christmas events. They make gifts of things, such as school equipment, dresses, household utilities and food items to those who maintain a relationship with the church. The benevolent gift and the charismatic gift are two types of Christian gifts that are thought to significantly attract converts (Mahadev, 2014. p. 218). Economic factors are the driving cause behind the modern conversion from Buddhism to Christianity, according to Mahadev (2018). A 20 year old Hindu respondent explained that the main reason for conversion is poverty. He described how conversion happens:

Most of the people in Wadulla Watta face difficulties in providing education for their children. The church conducts classes and encourages students through gifts by doing various competitions. Also, in December, they give school items such as bags, shoes and dresses to those who participate in Sunday schools. But such welfare support does not happen among Hindus (Jeewa, male, 20 years, Hindu).

While discussing this matter, some Hindus and Buddhists severely criticized their own religious institutions as these kinds of support are very rare. Referring to the situation in the pansal and the kovil, a notable social worker of the Watta, said:

We are the ones who have to give them [religious institutions] whatever we have in our hand. They never organise any support like that which is happening in the church. That is why people are converting to Bible in this area (Lalitha, female, 52 years, Buddhist).

Although some people and religious leaders are well aware that the significant number of people convert due to the lack of support from their own religions, they are not able to retain their people. Rev. Badhdhiya said this about all three pansal:

In Wadulla, we have this pansala and that pansala. These were created recently. We do not have a high income or high donations; only a few people are here. There are no counselling programs; no sermons happen, no material help, only blessings and pujas (an act of worship) and the kovil is also in a similar situation to us.

According to him and some other respondents, poor people attempt to overcome their existing problems in whatever way possible but without considering the outcome. “No one can criticise them since there is no one else to help them,” he said.

However, according to some other respondents, the reason for the conversion of Hindus is not exclusively due to poverty. Conversion of Hindus is explained by residents as partly due to other issues, such as caste, improper guidance and lack of awareness of their faith. Although some people claim that there is no caste-based discrimination among Hindus in Colombo, some respondents indirectly highlighted that caste divisions are still practiced in certain ways. Nevertheless, a 48 year old Priya, a Hindu female devotee stated that “[N]o good Hindu from a good family background changes their religion.” Some respondents stressed that religion is an important aspect of life and that those who reject religious conversions have strong feelings. As one respondent put it:

You know, although we have many hardships in life, we do not refer to someone else as parents. Our parents are parents for all our life even if we face many sorrows and difficulties. Religion is also the same. If a person is born in one faith, it should last forever, for their lifetime (Murugan, male, 53 years, Hindu).

A monk who severely condemned this as unethical conversion argued that “It is not conversion rather they are converted.” He further elaborated:

This conversion happens to ordinary people because, for a long time, the Tamil community who are the majority in the Watta suffered because of caste divisions and economic hardships. They are from many places such as; Jaffna, Kandy, and the Indian Tamils (upcountry Tamils). Whichever religious group helps them to mobilize and come forward, that is the religion they follow (Rev. Badhdhiya, 40 years)

The monk’s statement indicates that economically and socially marginalized people convert their religion to overcome their current social and economic hardship.

Figure 5.6: Posters advertising the prophetic miracle grand festival (in Tamil)



Source: Researcher (2018)

The above poster (figure 6.6) was put up in several places in the Watta, encouraging people to participate in the ‘prophetic miracle grand festival’ that was organised by ‘Jesus Saves,’ an evangelical Christian group established in 2001. Watta residents are not hosting this event and it is not held in the neighbourhood. This is the type of

evidence that people cite to indicate how new religions come to the Watta from outside. Raja, a 42 year old Christian respondent, reported that “Initially only a few people who have problems visit this event and upon the success/ changes of participants, others will follow it.” Of the three pastors who appear in the poster, two are from India and the bottom one is the founder of Jesus Saves. Therefore, Raja said that “More people can participate in this event to listen to foreign pastors.” However, Rev. Badhdhiya and other Buddhist respondents indicated that “[T]he purpose of this programme is to convert people. They focus on people who face problems and attempt to solve it financially or psychologically. So, people think of that as a miracle of that religion and they convert to it.”

Other respondents noted another reason for conversion: evangelical Christians not only preach, but they also provide various types of help to a person or family to overcome their issues, such as family breakdown, health issues, education or addiction to alcohol. Once they come to know about the issue, they visit that particular house and help them to overcome the problem. There are incidents in some families where men completely give up alcohol consumption due to the influence and support of evangelical Christians. Several women from converted families reported that their husbands changed significantly after conversion to evangelical Christianity. After this transformation, their spouses apparently gave up most of their former bad habits and looked after the family more adequately. A Buddhist respondent said that:

I cannot imagine how it happens, people change suddenly, and they stop consuming alcohol. They get back to proper family life. This transformation is a good side of that religion. So, people think that Jesus watches us, he solved our problem,’ and it stimulates the entire family and their relatives to convert (Lalitha, female, 48 years, Buddhist).

During my interview with the pastor of the evangelical church, Rev. Mendis, he mentioned that a significant number of people in the area are severely addicted to drugs. Drug-related problems are becoming a significant problem in low-income neighbourhoods. In a media brief, Sri Lanka's minister of urban development and housing Prasanna Ranatunga stated that there are "too many drug-related menaces and social malpractices in urban low-income communities." The drug traffickers are still holding the kids captive (the morning.lk, 2022). Pastor preaches to control and overcome this issue, and with their permission, he sends the relevant person to a rehabilitation centre where he has links. Pastor Mendis had his own reason for the conversion of the Watta people. He said that Sri Lanka is a democratic country, and people have the right to choose their religion. He was clear that "[W]e do not force anyone to come to our religion."

According to the pastor, people do not change their religion at once. First, they observe, then listen and finally, they convert because of various benefits that they can get from them. "What I do is to help them to overcome their issues. It could be a financial or family matter; whatever the problems, I try to do my best for these people as it is my duty to serve them" he said. The pastor continued that if someone approached him for help, for example, by requesting a sewing machine to generate an income, he does whatever he can. He states, "[A]fter hearing the economic hardship of that family, how can I simply stay without helping them? So, I use my network of wellwishers who could help them." He notes that residents approach him for help solving family and social problems as well as requesting material support.

Not everyone converts exclusively for material benefits; overcoming social and economic marginalization appears to be the most common motivation. As a new religion to the Watta, the evangelical church brings financial, education, social and family supports. Also, people consider it is a good space to mingle with everyone without much restriction as the church conducts various events for different groups. Some programmes are exclusively designed for young people, without gender restrictions. Because of this flexibility and convenience, teenagers are also more attracted to this new faith.

While religious conversion has become a serious issue in the Watta due to programmes conducted, particularly through the evangelical church, religious conversion also occurs through intermarriage. Although intermarriage is considered a positive element of religious coexistence by some older members in the Watta, it has more recently been criticized by others due to concerns that some people purposely marry a person from another religion to in order to convert. I turn to this now.

5.5.2 Intermarriage

Intermarriages promote closer interaction between two religions but it is also a reason for religious conversion and can therefore lead to tension. Yet, it is not considered in the Watta as similar to conversion as carried out by the evangelical church; it has been a common practice among Watta residents for a long time. One respondent noted:

Mixed marriages are common among the Watta people. Because of that, many people are related to each other even though they are from different religions. For example, Mubarak (Muslim), Srimal (Buddhist), and Subramaniyam (Hindu) are related to each other due to this cross marriage (Chaminda, male, 62 years, Buddhist).

Religious inter-marriage was a significant phenomenon among the previous generation in this neighbourhood. A respondent highlighted the ethnic mixture of his family due to intermarriage: “My mother is a Christian and father is a Buddhist; my wife’s grandmother is a Muslim and wife’s brother also married a Muslim girl” (Harsha, male, 40 years, Buddhist). Parents rarely give their consent for intermarriage; therefore, most of these marriages happen through elopement. The majority of inhabitants are unhappy with the interreligious marriages that have occurred among their children and family members, despite the fact that they prioritize interethnic harmony in their daily lives. This illustrates how the people of Watta accept various religions and cultures because of their shared knowledge, but they do not desire to mix by forming intimate relationships. This is due to the fact that they consider their grandchildren's religion and post-marriage cultural practices of new member. Additionally, some people believe that their own extended family, relatives, and community will not approve this type of intermarriage. Even though intermarriages may raise tensions, they always focus on the conflict between the two families, not the dispute between the two communities. Thus, the common practice is for the couple to return to their home once the situation becomes smooth and parents eventually accept them wholeheartedly.

Generally, people are not concerned about religion and ethnicity when they fall in love. However, once they become parents, they worry about religious matters for the next generation. Some respondents highlighted post-marriage conversion and religious obligations as a significant issue. Buddhist parents with a son and two daughters described their personal experience of what happened to their son. The mother stated: “Our son told me that if we refused his choice of love, he would leave us. I felt emotional;

he is my only son. We love him more than our lives. He is the oldest one in the family.”

Finally, the parents arranged the marriage with the Hindu girl that the son wanted to marry. Although they disliked the arrangement, they are now happy since their daughter-in-law follows Sinhala culture.

In terms of post-marriage religious obligations, generally wives follow the same religion as their husband. The decision on changing religion after marriage is not always a voluntary decision for wives; on certain occasions, some are obliged to change by their husbands. Some people who married a partner from another religion following a ‘love match’ mentioned that they had to select one religion for the sake of the future of their children. After marriage it is most frequently the man who chooses and his family has to follow, so generally the religion of husband prevails:

I am a Roman Catholic. My father is a Hindu, and my mother is a Roman Catholic. My wife is a Hindu, but I have taken her to Roman Catholicism. Now, we all are Christians. As parents, our responsibility is to guide our children properly and teach them religion. If I belong to one religion and my wife to another religion, our children will be struggling to follow their religious practices. That is why we decided to follow one religion (Ramesh, male, 42 years, Roman Catholic).

Despite this, people think that some religions encourage intermarriage as a strategy for religious conversion. A community leader states that “There are intermarriages, yet a small issue in such marriages is that the Muslims do not come to our religion or become Hindu. They try to drag (others) to their side” (Sepali, female, 48, Buddhist). Buddhist religious leaders similarly believe that these intermarriages happen with the systematic fraudulent intention to convert people from one religion to another.

There are even Muslims who have converted. However, for the majority it happens the other way. I have observed how it is when a Muslim young man marries a girl from another religion. There is someone like that next door. A Muslim youth has married a Tamil woman. The man straightaway asks the woman to join his faith. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, they practice

expansionism where they sabotage whatever it is. It is a program that goes step by step (Rev. Badhdhiya, 40 years).

The post-marriage religious obligations and conversions are the key reason that stimulates people to view intermarriage negatively. However, compared with ongoing religious conversion, the number of conversions through intermarriage is very low, and this type of conversion happens among people in every religion.

5.5.3 Loudspeakers

The next issue that has led to tension among Watta residents is the use of loudspeakers. Adhan, the call to prayer, is one example. Initially, two loudspeakers were used to chant Adhan in the mosque; when this increased to four, criticism from other groups began. People believed that a Muslim parliamentarian donated new loudspeakers and the high volume is maintained according to his advice. One community leader who, like many others, states that volume of the mosque loudspeaker causes harm to neighbours explained that “Once I asked the person who chants to lower his voice a little. I did not say to stop it; instead, I asked to reduce the sound. You are shouting, and it hurts our ears” (Lalitha, female, 52 years, Buddhists). According to her, some people chant Adhan at a lower volume, not everyone uses a disturbing level of volume. However, later I was told that a Muslim donor donated those loudspeakers at the request of the mosque committee.

It is not only the mosque that uses loudspeakers: the pansala, kovil and the evangelical church also broadcast their regular services and use loudspeakers for festivals. In all three pansal, chanting ‘bana’⁴ is conducted every morning and evening for nearly 30

⁴ Religious preaching

minutes. In addition, once a month on the full moon or Poya day, special preaching takes place all day through the loudspeaker. At the kovil, every morning and evening, religious songs are played through a loudspeaker; during festivals, spiritual songs broadcast continuously for 10 to 14 days. Rev. Badhdhiya, who condemns the overuse of the loudspeaker at the kovil, states:

I asked them to turn the speakers to the other side. Those are not essential songs. They have some CDs that they play every day. Those songs are played to be heard for kilometres. Why is it played like that? The radius of this Watta is tiny.'

He also highlights the use of loudspeakers for Buddhist religious activities:

I know when we attend Pirith ceremonies at night that they go until the morning. Some people increase the sound to the level of distortion. I know that Pirith will disturb Tamils or Muslims in the area. Why should we bother them like that?

However, a Christian respondent shared another point of view on this issue. He says whatever people show to others, they have some misunderstanding in their hearts:

Yes, everyone has something about the activities of other religions in their mind, but they never show it to others. When the speaker is used in the pansala, [non-Buddhists] think 'what is this nonsense?' Likewise, when we use the speaker in church functions, other religious people may feel the same. Why does this person keep the volume so high, so everyone has something to oppose other religious activities but they never show to others (Ramesh, male, 42 years, Christian).

All religious institutions in the Watta use a loudspeaker for religious purposes. Nevertheless, most criticism is focused on the loudspeakers in the mosque. This complaint predominantly comes from Buddhist religious community leaders highlighting the frequency of the usage and the volume. Only a few Watta residents consider this a harmful matter. As I observed, all religious institutions use loudspeakers which disturb residents.

5.5.4 External financial influences

Financial contributions are one of the ways that outsiders have become involved in Watta matters in the name of religion. The success of religious festivals in the Watta depends mainly on financial collections. Although organisers collect money from Watta residents, this is usually not sufficient for festival expenses. Therefore, they often rely on outside donors (wellwishers) for further financial contributions. Approaching external donors is not only for festival funding; religious institutions seek help from outsiders for most development works and various other needs.

Only a few prominent individuals in the Watta have a link with outsiders. For example, religious leaders of kovil, pansala and church, the president of the mosque committee, local political leaders and key members in the organising committees are some of other groups. Ordinary people in the Watta rarely come to know about the contributions and other sources of materials that are exchanged between them. In some instances, the donors do not want to highlight those links and prefer to keep grants anonymous. The mosque committee president does not divulge the names or donations made for construction and other activities. "The donors do not like others to know what sort of contribution they have made. They like to contribute without anyone knowing as it is emphasised by the religion," the president said. However, some donors, particularly politicians and people who expect popularity, prefer publicity.

On specific occasions, the donors who contribute a significant amount for festivals or Aluth Avurudu are invited as the chief guest of that event by the organisers. They could be politicians, retired officers, wealthy individuals or anyone from whom they can get some support. One day, I was waiting for the chariot procession at Pillayar Kovil which

was scheduled to start at 7:30 pm. People began to gather near the kovil from 6.00 pm, but the parade did not start on schedule. I asked a person next to me why the procession had not started yet. “They are waiting for someone; that is why it does not start yet,” he replied. At around 9.00 pm, a luxury car came towards the kovil, and police officers acting as security moved the crowd to make space for the vehicle. A retired deputy inspector general of police and his wife got out and walked inside the kovil with materials for the pujawa or religious offering. A group of middle-aged men who were next to me began to gossip: “Who invited him for this function?” and another one replied, “He helps to arrange security and get permission for the procession from the police; that is why he has been invited.” After pujawa, he left and the procession started.

In addition to financial support for festivals, the involvement of outsiders in the Watta happens in a few other ways as well. For example, key positions in two religious institutions are handled by outsiders. The chief incumbent of Sri Sunanda Vihara is not a resident of this pansala. He serves as chief incumbent but resides in Maradana, six kilometres away from the neighbourhood. He visits from time to time for special occasions; despite this, he serves as a chief incumbent and deputy chief incumbent for three other pansal in Colombo and outer areas. Since he does not live in the pansala, a child monk (Podi Hāmuduruwó) aged 14 is looking after it.

Likewise, the president of the mosque committee is also not resident in the neighbourhood. He lives two kilometres away, and before serving this mosque he served as president in another mosque in Nawagampura, the nearest settlement. Although he is not a Watta resident, he was selected as president due to his successful leadership at the former mosque. Under his presidency in the previous place, he constructed a new

building and drew Muslims closer to the mosque and to their religious obligations. However, he has maintained a close link with the Watta mosque since 1987. According to him, he was requested by the residents to come and help to regulate the mosque board properly as he did in the previous place. The president elaborated on how he took over the position:

Wadulla Watta residents came and complained that the situation of the mosque was getting worse. They could not manage it properly. They called a general meeting, around 60 - 70 people came for that, and without any objection, I was asked to take the responsibility of the mosque. Except for me, all other members are from the same neighbourhood. Most of them lack education and knowledge and do not know how to administer a mosque and guide people. So my idea is to hand over the committee to the people of that area once they get familiar with the system (Zulfi, male, 48 years, Muslim).

The new board, with the leadership of the new president, is planning to build a new three story building for the mosque. In September 2018, the foundation stone was laid for this. Although there is not sufficient money for the construction, the president says that once they start the work, they can collect money from donors. These donations are not only in the form of cash, but they also include building materials such as cement, tiles, bricks and iron bars. As Buddhist women donate land for Sri Sumanarama, Muslim devotees also support mosque construction in terms of rewards from God. According to Islam, wealthier Muslims must give 'zakat' (a form of almsgiving in Islam as a religious obligation or tax) and 'sadaqah' (a voluntary charity which is encouraged in Islam). People are very interested to give sadaqah to build a mosque as it brings merit during their lifetime and after death as well.

For this reason, some Muslims donate generously to mosques for themselves or in expectation of rewards for their immediate family members who have died. Mosque boards often approach the Muslim business community for fundraising. The existing

mosque was also constructed this way. The president has confidence that he can complete the construction of a new building with the support of outside donors as he did at the previous mosque.

Some groups also visit the Watta to support religious requirements. They visit through the mosque and evangelical church. For example, members of Tablighi Jamaat visited the Watta. Sometimes, those groups include foreigners as well. When foreigners visit the mosque, people think Muslims in the Watta get generous support from them. A respondent stated:

Some groups who come from foreign countries such as Pakistan or Afghanistan visit the mosque. Sometimes, the mosque could receive help from those groups. Because initially, the mosque was not like that, it looked like a small house. But it has changed dramatically within the last five years (Jeewa, male, 20 years, Hindu).

Similarly, members of the All Ceylon Hindu Congress visited the neighbourhood and started cultural events and microfinance support exclusively for Hindu women as mentioned earlier in this chapter. While criticizing the activities and funding sources of the evangelical church, Rev. Badhdhiya reported that people often visit the evangelical church, including foreigners. He elaborated further:

Caucasians and various other nationalities come in black vans and go. Those who come to preach here go in there hidden. They do not show their faces, yet we know NGOs are behind this. They do not do this for merits. Their families depend on it. Any NGO may work as a social service without creating a religious problem, that is a good thing. But that is not how they work. They work to divide (Rev. Badhdhiya, 40 years).

The majority of people in this neighbourhood are struggling to improve their lives due to financial barriers, as most of them depend on the informal sector. Therefore, external funding sources through religious institutions play a significant role in the life of residents. While these outside funds provide an opportunity for some people to

overcome their difficulties, at least temporarily, from the perspective of some others, it becomes a factor that threatens the existing unity of the Watta residents.

5.6 Conclusion

Religion is an essential factor through which Watta residents have interacted with different groups of people over a long period of time. With a mutual understanding of other beliefs and their customs, people support each other's group in various ways in everyday life and particularly during festivals. Residents of the Watta participate in each other's religious festivals in four ways: organising, active participation, observation and financial assistance. Cosmopolitanism, the mutual understanding and respect of difference, is visible not only through their words but through their practices, as highlighted during interviews and observations. Generally, people never condemn other religions or their practices. Although they do not follow another faith, they nevertheless contribute to festivals and religious institutions.

However, now the Watta is changing as is the wider society. Religious conversion, intermarriage, public broadcasting of religious messages and outside financial support are four major factors that contribute to tensions in the Watta's long-standing coexistence. Therefore, some people have started to view each other suspiciously and think that they have to protect their own religion and people. Most of these thoughts are encouraged by various actors, such as religious and community leaders, direct involvement of outsiders and the national political and religious context. As a result, religion is becoming a significant factor in creating tensions and divisions.

There was a time, for example, when a multi-religious group of friends started an association. During this time, due to the absence of religious attentions, parents were not worried about the spiritual life of their children. Children had sufficient time to meet with their friends in evenings and weekends. This situation has been changing. Most parents developed concern for the religious education for their children as it is their responsibility to provide spiritual knowledge. For this reason, parents send their children to additional religious schools. These institutions provide faith education. Because of this emerging trend, many children have less time to play and mingle with their friends from different religions than the previous generation did. These practices stimulate children to grow up in an atmosphere of separation that often promotes individualism. For example, there are several programmes initiated for each religion in the Watta. The president of the mosque committee explains his attempts:

We started classes for women every Saturday. My daughter conducts them free of charge for women between 12 and 65. There, we teach the Quran and religious knowledge of current affairs. We do counselling for teenagers as to how to manage a family life after marriage. Only Muslims can attend. Previously, there were no religious activities for women. That meant that, religious motivations among women were so lacking in the Watta. Now with these attempts, many changes are happening among women. They are wearing Habaya⁵, and some are covering their face as well (Zulfi, Male, 48 years, Muslim).

Similarly, other religious leaders start various programmes to control ongoing religious conversion. Although most religious leaders interact with everyone in public spaces, some of them do not have a good perception of other religions and their practices, which may challenge coexistence in the future. Religion is one of the ways in which these

⁵ A full-length outer garment worn by some Muslim woman.

divisions arise, and opportunities for external influence arise. The next chapter turns to another of these: political activism.

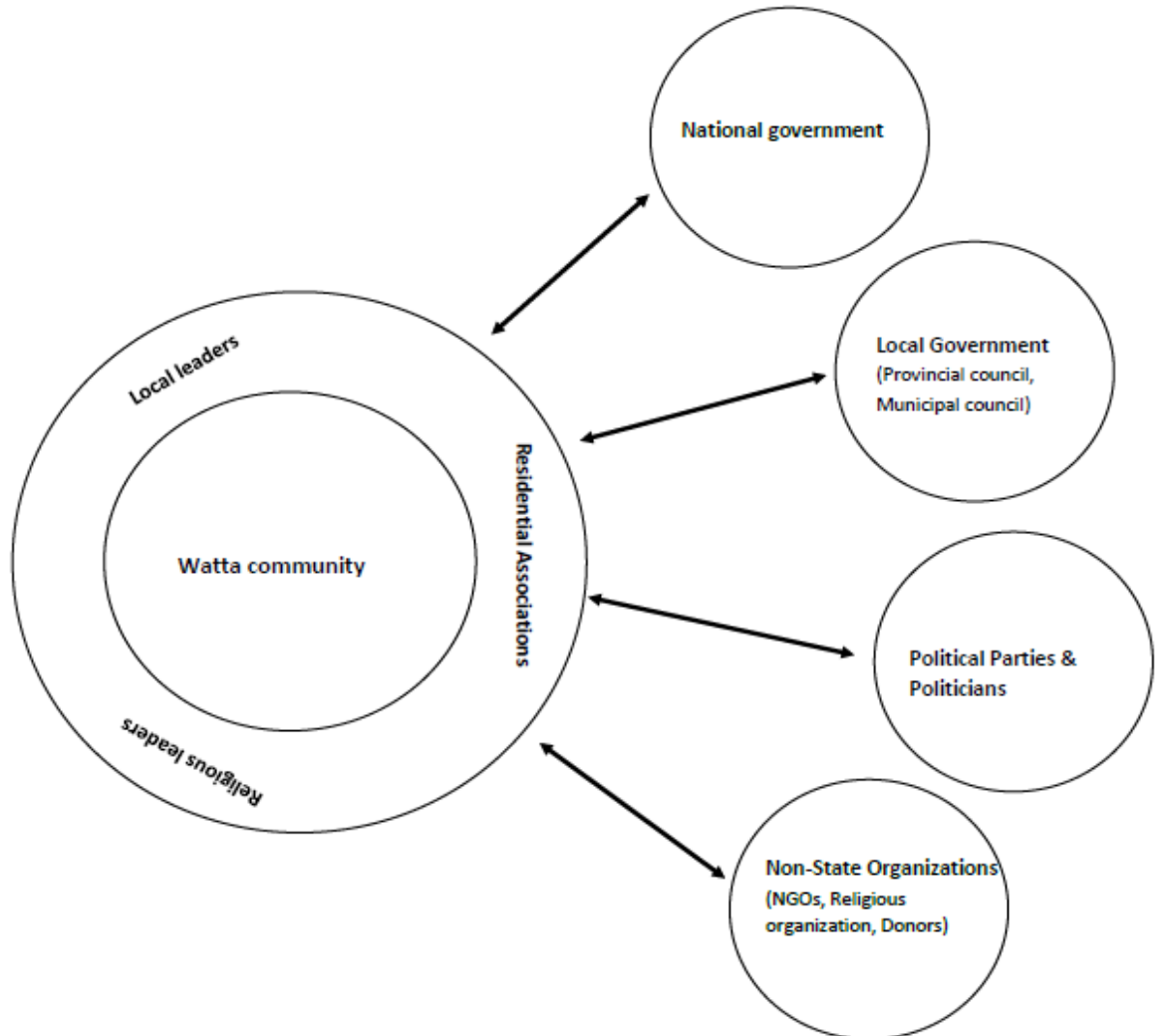
**CHAPTER SIX: GOVERNANCE DYNAMICS:
PARTY POLITICS, WELFARISM AND GROWING
ETHNIC PATRONAGE IN THE WATTA**

6.1 Introduction:

This chapter turns its focus to politics, concentrating on the key players in Watta governance who have a substantial impact on Watta matters. This chapter argues that both internal and external politics threaten the Watta's present cosmopolitanism. As shown in the diagram below (diagram 6.1), both internal and external stakeholders, play a significant role in Watta governance. While religious leaders, local leaders and residential associations develop and operate within the community, politicians and donors come from outside representing national government, local government, political parties and non-governmental organizations. Because they rely on external assistance so regularly, particularly during times of crisis, the Watta's subaltern groups' everyday lives are strongly intertwined with governance dynamics. These efforts have always had some impact in terms of provoking tensions, but the chapter highlights a recent trend for tensions to become increasingly oriented around existing religious and ethnic divisions.

This chapter is divided into three sections to understand the influence of governance on Watta residents' coexistence. The first section of this chapter explores the political affiliation of the Watta residents. The following section examines the role of influential people in the Watta and their importance in Watta governance. The last section focuses on how external stakeholders approach the Watta and how their influence on the Watta matters.

Figure 6.1: Main stakeholders in the Watta governance



6.2 Political affiliation of Watta residents

The local government election had been announced for 10 February 2018. As usual political activists and their supporters in the Watta prepared for election work for their parties. The administrative structure of Sri Lanka is divided into three divisions: (i) the central government (ii) provincial councils and (iii) local government, which is the lowest level institution. The local government institutions are also known as local authorities, which are themselves divided into three levels: municipal councils, urban councils and divisional councils (*Pradeshiya Sabhas*). Under the objectives of the 'promotion of the comfort, convenience and the wellbeing of the community in respective areas,' the local government authorities are responsible for providing services including (a) Regulatory and administrative functions, (b) Promoting public health and sanitation (c) Environmental sanitation, and (d) Public thoroughfares and public utility services (State Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government Affairs, 2020).

In the national political arena, local government elections in Sri Lanka do not have a comparable impact to the parliamentary or presidential elections. Still, for Watta residents, this election was extremely important as many services on which they depend are provided by the local government authorities. Hence, people tend to select their favourite candidates and parties on the basis of who can deliver those services without difficulties. 38 year old Hindu respondent Seetha highlighted the selection criteria of candidates: "When we choose a candidate, we prioritize who can work for us from the urban council." Further, in the context of local politics, members of local government institutions have significant power through which they can provide services very quickly, bypassing formal channels. People also depend on these politicians for recommendation

letters, which help them to get a placement at school, access to employment, a connection to the electricity or water supply, and various other services. Thus, every candidate who contests the election attempts to become a member of the local government institution as this position brings reputation, power and numerous other benefits.

Lavanya is a 62 year old woman who described how she selects a candidate: “We vote for whoever is considered as a good person by the majority of the people in this area. If people pointed out someone and said 'He will work for the village,' then we vote for him. First, this village should be better, only then people can have a better life.” In contrast, 20 year old Jeewa, who was born and grew up in the neighbourhood, expressed that “In Wadulla Watta, we cannot select the candidates based on what they did here (services). Nowadays, some people choose candidates based on their religion or ethnicity.” Likewise, other groups of people select candidates from whom they can get personal benefits, such as instant material support, school admission or job opportunities. Others prioritize political parties over individual candidates. Such people tend to vote for only one party throughout their lifetime.

However, for most people in the Watta, politics is limited to voting in elections. Politics means political institutions, such as Parliament, local government bodies and politicians who represent those institutions. They generally do not consider other power dynamics that take place in the Watta. In this view, power is a one-way, top-down process and they are unaware of the important politics that operate at the local level. For example, people do not consider competition to become a member of residential associations or religious institutions as political. Furthermore, Watta dwellers themselves are politically

important as they hold a substantial number of votes to elect members to the local government as well as other institutions. Given the density of housing, these votes are concentrated in a small area. Therefore the significance of this subaltern group to wider political institutions increases during the election period. Hence, party politics and politicians representing those parties play a crucial role in governing the people of the Watta.

6.3 Key stakeholders in the Watta governance

In this section, I look into the prominent role of (i) religious leaders (ii) residential associations and (iii) local leaders in governing the Watta. These stakeholders emerge from the neighbourhood and are among the most influential people in Watta governance as they have considerable power over decision making on behalf of the economically and socially marginalized community. They also exert influence in many additional ways. Therefore examining the position of these stakeholders and their activities helps to clarify how politics operates between these different players and how they control the Watta.

6.3.1 Religious leaders and religious associations

Religious leaders from all faiths play an important role in the governance of the Watta because of the respect they enjoy in the name of their religion. In addition to their religious activities, they become mediators when problems occur among the residents. People reach out to these leaders to seek solutions for their various issues, including family disputes, economic hardships, and clashes between neighbours. In addition to preaching religion, some people expect that these leaders will support their devotees in various ways to protect them from religious conversion, a controversial issue discussed

in the previous chapter. Buddhist respondents complained about the role of the temple as it does not provide financial or material support to its devotees. Most Buddhist respondents compared the vibrant character of the Evangelical Christian pastor with Buddhist monks and criticized the monks for not organising similar support. A 50 year old Chathura is a Buddhist man who has contested the local government election several times criticising the activity of temples, since he argues this is also a reason for Buddhists to convert religion because monks do not look after difficulties of people. He further expressed this view:

Temples do not look at the poor Sinhala families. They only seem to depend on us [from people]. We must help devotees to retain them in our religion. That is how we could increase devotion. It does not happen in ours [Buddhism]. Leaders of other religions make various efforts to attract people into their faith.

Because of these kinds of expectations, religious leaders are compelled to consider material and financial support for their devotees in addition to religious preaching and practices. This crucial role of religious leaders gives them a prominent place to become involved in Watta matters. Nevertheless, compared with other religious leaders, Buddhist monks have greater scope to interfere and control Watta matters due to the important place they enjoy according to the national constitution. A similar kind of power imbalance and hegemonic influence is visible in most parts of the country and has now reached the Watta.

These leaders also play a prominent role in establishing religious associations and they often hold the post of president in those committees. These religious committees are exclusively for people of the same religion and are generally dominated by a group of men. Religious leaders have an influential role in these religion-centric associations and they are key decision-makers for their community. In 2018, during the time of fieldwork,

the Watta had religious associations for all faiths: the pansala committee (*Dhayaka Sabhawa*), Association of Hindu affairs, the mosque committee, the Roman Catholic committee and the committee in the Evangelical Church, each exclusively serving their own religious groups. Some of these associations, like the Evangelical Church, are very active and perform well with financial support from outside donors (Woods, 2018)._

As a consequence, religious leaders of other faiths also make efforts to provide welfare support for people of their own religion. At present, most of the welfare support from outside reaches the Watta through religious associations, which is a new trend in Watta governance. Welfare provision from religious institutions has therefore become controversial in the neighbourhood. Lalitha is a 52 year old female Buddhist who has a good reputation as a social activist. She recalls an incident in 2017 to highlight how welfare provisions organized by religious leaders create tension among people:

One day, some [Sinhalese] people informed me that the mosque administration was distributing flood relief (a bag of grocery items) for Muslims. Generally, in the Watta, welfare provisions do not focus on a selected ethnicity or religion. So, I went to the mosque and asked him (the person who was distributing) whether what he was doing was right. He asked me, "What is it, sister?" I asked, "Did only the Muslims get immersed in floods?" When we do something, we distribute it to everyone. I said, "What you are doing is not good. If you cannot distribute properly, stop it." Afterward, they distributed to everyone.

In contrast to Lalitha, the secretary of the Hindu Women Association, Seetha, shared a different experience, where the Muslims helped Hindu people. She explained:

I remember one time some Muslims came and gave 3000 rupees' worth of food pack (rice, milk powder, sugar etc.) to all members in the society (twenty members). They gave this as a gift during the Ramadan period, and it was coordinated by the Rev. Vigneswaran, the chief priest Hindu temple (38 years, Female, Hindu).

These incidents indicate that religious leaders, along with religious associations, do various activities in the Watta to maintain the loyalty of their people. According to

Hasbullah and Korf (2009; 2013), mosque federations have taken over as the main provider of social welfare and are responsible for distributing benefits to the destitute and underprivileged, particularly in specific Muslim enclaves. Residents also expect various sorts of help, particularly economic, from these religious leaders. The main reason for people to think that there is discrimination in the distribution of welfare provision results from an insufficient provision that organizers receive from donors and poor management and coordination among the organizers. Studies on aid provision in Sri Lanka, found that social tension, unhappiness, and jealousy among aid-providing institutions were greatly exacerbated by the competition among them as these practices produced various categories of beneficiaries, some of whom were luckier than others (Hasbullah and Korf, 2009; Korf et al, 2010; Hollenbach and Ruwanpura, 2011; Hollenbach, 2013). Many people are not in a position to think neutrally about the facts behind these welfare provisions; people are happy when they benefit from these provisions, while others complain when they do not get support. However, these activities of religious leaders and religious associations create religious or ethnic separation within the community. Associations based in faith groups adversely affect peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence in the Watta, as experienced by the people for a long time. This division is not only created through religious leaders and religious organizations, but residential associations which had served the entire community for a long time but now began to focus on particular ethnic groups.

6.3.2 Residential Associations

Residential Associations are another key sector of governance in the Watta. They are formed by community members to improve their collective wellbeing and to fulfill their

needs. Since it is difficult to achieve their needs individually, in many circumstances, they have to work collectively and that sometimes leads to establishing organizations in the neighbourhood. Although some associations have functioned for a long time in the neighbourhood, others emerge and operate only for a short period due to improper management or internal disputes. While some of these associations are registered with the Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD) with clear objectives and a proper constitution of select committee members, a few associations do not follow any of these procedures. Registration of an association with the DSD is not obligatory to operate in the neighbourhood. Yet registration with an official authority provides a legal recognition for that committee, and it is necessary to maintain a bank account and financial procedures. Also, there is a possibility to get support from the government and NGOs if committees have proper registration. Although there is severe competition during the selection of a management body, people do not consider this form of power dynamics that takes place in the Watta as politics. Although men have exclusive domination of most associations, some associations, such as the funeral society and the women's society, are managed by a group of women. Nevertheless, the decision making power of men is more significant than women on most occasions.

Formation of this type of association in this Watta dated back to 1978 when a group of young people gathered for dansala (almsgiving) on a Vesak Poya day. A group of multi-religious friends, namely Bandula (Buddhist), Razak (Islam), Jeewanandan (Hindu) and Robert (Christian), formed this committee, and they named the association the 'Wadulla Youth Group' (Wadulla Tharuna Kelā). For their first event, they organized distribution of bread and seeni sambal (a typical Sri Lanka dish made with onions) at New Kelani

Bridge for the Watta residents as well as outsiders. At the time, Bandula, a 68 year old Buddhist man and a founder member of this association, appreciated the support of a Muslim woman (Razak's mother) who cooked seeni sambal for this event. He described this event to highlight the unity of the Watta because of the voluntary activity of a Muslim woman who came forward to prepare food for the almsgiving event of Buddhists. Bandula also spoke of the happy companionship of the association where he and his friends worked together. He recalls the memories of fundraising during that time,

We managed to collect 710 rupees [3.55 US \$] for the festival in 1988. We had to go far and many places for this collection. At that time, there were not many people in this Watta. Even if there were people, they could not make huge donations.

The association organized New Year (Aluth Avurudu) folk games for the first time in the Watta in 1988 and continued this annual celebration up to 1995 “until we handed over to the younger generation in the neighbourhood,” said Bandula. Since then, the 'Wadulla Three-wheeler society' (Wadulla three-wheeler Sangamaya), which operates in the main junction of the neighbourhood, has been organizing the New Year festival annually. The three-wheeler society consists of members from all ethnic groups who drive three-wheelers for hire from the first three-wheeler stand in the junction. According to people, this youth group does not show favoritism among people in the name of religion, ethnicity, or any other relationship when they organize Avurudhu festival or welfare provisions. They follow the same tradition of multi-religious features as their previous generation who formed the 'Wadulla Youth Group.' Therefore, this young group has a good reputation in the neighbourhood.

However, nowadays, it is more common to establish an association along religious and/or ethnic lines to serve a selected group. This severely impacts the tradition of multi-religious association in the Watta. To control religious conversion and secure their faith, religious leaders and local leaders initiate some welfare programmes. Rev. Vigneshwaran, the Pujari, attempts to bring some benefits to Hindus with the support of the All Ceylon Hindu Congress [(ACHC), a national organization for Hindu affairs]. He helped to establish a women's association exclusively for Hindu women in which members can get various types of support, including micro-credit, for self-employment. The main objective of ACHC in approaching the Watta and introducing these types of support is to prevent Hindus from converting. The secretary of this association states that neither she nor anyone else has informed the ACHC about conversion, but they are aware of it. She further explains,

We did not tell them about the conversion, but they know about it. They [AHCH] said to us that "In your area, most people are converting, and we have to stop this to prevent other religions grabbing our people because of their poverty; we should do something to stop it. That is why we introduced these self-employment and loan programmes to help women improve economically. If they can overcome their issues, then they never convert (Seetha, female, 38 years, Hindu).

The secretary further elaborates the association's support to self-employment. Beneficiaries must return the initial investment on an installment basis with no interest. After six months of membership, the association's members are eligible to apply for the scheme. Some people receive sewing machines, cooking equipment, and cash to open a grocery shop. Pujari's wife coordinated all these programmes, and the secretary assumed that they could prevent people converting to other religions through these kinds of activities.

Generally, outside donors and politicians deliver their welfare assistance through these associations. A reputable formal association helps to maintain a close relationship with politicians and to control Watta matters. When people establish associations, founders highlight that the association aims to serve the entire community; nevertheless, most of the time, a selected group of people become beneficiaries in the provisions. When these associations get limited support from donors, the key members favour their close relatives, friends and faith groups. Sometimes people establish a new committee when they get frustrated due to this favouritism.

This newly emerging trend creates tension among Watta people when donations are delivered to a select group of people. Compared with other religious groups, Hindus and Buddhists do not get very substantial support from outside donors. Therefore, while criticizing their religious leaders and associations, ordinary people carefully observe the welfare support received by members of other religions, which generally creates jealousy and tension on other religious people in the Watta. However, people who lead these committees are appreciated by Watta residents because of their involvement in taking care of their people. Some people, especially committee members, consider that active participation in an association is social work. Hence, if a person takes a leadership role in this kind of social work they are likely to become a popular figure among community members in a short period. Leadership in these groups has significant influence among Watta residents and may lead to the person becoming an influential local leader in the Watta, which is the focus of the next section.

6.3.3 Local leaders

Like residential associations, local leaders are prominent and influential in Watta governance. Generally, local leaders are well known individuals who were born and grew up in the Watta or who have lived in the neighbourhood for a long time. Regardless of ethnicity and religion, people consider an individual as a local leader if they volunteer to participate in common matters on behalf of Watta residents. Thus, most of the executive members in associations come to be seen as local leaders. In addition, some other prominent personalities who are particularly wealthy or who have direct connection with politicians outside the Watta also become local leaders due to their prominent role in Watta matters. However, holding a key position in an association is the clearest path to becoming a local leader, involvement in politics and maintaining a close relationship with outsiders. These unacknowledged politics have a significant influence in Watta governance, and their activities occasionally create tension in the neighbourhood.

Multitasking abilities and links to various networks promote an ordinary resident to become a local leader. As gatekeepers between the residents and external organizations, local leaders help Watta residents to meet their needs in many ways, such as to get water supply, electricity, a placement at school, and to make an appointment with politicians. On many occasions, these local leaders expect some fee for their services. Although people are aware that a portion of that fee goes to these leaders, they do not care as it ensures that their needs are fulfilled without difficulty. Such informal payments show that the role of local leaders is not entirely voluntary, and some of them tend to highlight their leadership skills in the hope of maximising payments. In some situations, a strong connection with external organizations is a livelihood strategy

for local leaders in order to prolong potential benefits. Maintaining a reputation and control over Watta matters is a challenge for these leaders, and they use various strategies to retain their position.

However, most local leaders wish to retain their position through political affiliation with external politicians or advance to become politicians themselves. A 41 year old Piumi has served as a development officer in this neighbourhood for the last five years. She expressed her view concerning individuals who associate with community organizations and attempt to indicate themselves as a social activist, suggesting that “Those people, get involved in the name of social service, ultimately end up with politics.” As highlighted previously, 'social service' is one of the easiest ways for some people to use as a stepping stone to politics.

Throughout the history of this Watta, people who hold key positions in associations become popular and it opens a path to the wider political arena. From the founder president of the Wadulla Youth Group to the president of Wadulla Three-Wheeler society, most of the executive members in associations end up going into politics. The first one contested local government elections a few times but he was unable to become a member of the urban council. The latter contested the election in 2018 and won, meaning that he is now a member of the urban council. In the same way, Gamini, another candidate in the 2018 local government election, is now leading a team to construct Sri Sunanda Vihara, the third pansala to be constructed in the Watta. So, involvement in social activities in the Watta is a good investment for anyone with an interest in engaging in politics.

As gatekeepers, these local leaders maintain a close relationship with politicians in local government bodies, the Provincial Council, and the national Parliament. Nevertheless, they do not all have a significant connection with Members of Parliament (MPs). Organizing pre-election propaganda in the neighbourhood is the core activity of these local leaders, which includes displaying posters, organizing meetings, conveying the message of the politician, arranging welcome ceremonies when the politician visits the neighbourhood, coordinating welfare assistance and updating the politician on the situation in the Watta. These leaders benefit from their position as gatekeeper in two ways. On the one hand, the popularity which they gain through social service activities helps them to link with outsiders, especially with more powerful politicians outside the neighbourhood. Being a president or secretary in an association confers a prominent place in the Watta and, for most of them, represents a social advancement in addition to the indirect economic benefits which it brings. On the other hand, links with the politicians also help them to increase their popularity in the neighbourhood as they bring welfare support from time to time through this channel. Some local leaders use this two-way opportunity as a livelihood strategy and a pathway to politics. External organizations also use these leaders to access the Watta as it is a convenient way to approach Watta residents. Their demands increase during the election period because politicians often use these local leaders as their electoral mediators to establish and strengthen their vote bank.

These local leaders work for the victory of the party and the candidate during the election (Thachil, 2005; Chidambaram, 2012; Sharma and Seeta, 2000; Auerbach and Thachil, 2016). When they form associations or become involved in social service

activities in the Watta, they try to represent everyone without division. Nevertheless, when they become local leaders and engage in party politics, they approach people with the concern for the victory of their party. This favoritism is a key point of entry into politics, highlighting the point at which people change course from community organizations to party politics. While associations and local leaders function within the Watta, political divisions that come from outside fuel those divisions that already exist in Watta. I now turn to the question of how external influences create division among the Watta residents in terms of ethnicity and religion through party politics and welfare provision.

6.4 External influence and governance in the Watta

This section examines the way in which external influences impact upon governance of the Watta in different ways. Party politics, welfare and development activities are three key methods that are used widely by politicians and other stakeholders to influence governance dynamics in the Watta.

6.4.1 Party politics and emerging ethnic sentiments

The issue in the country today is that everything has become politicized. The toilets and taps have become a political issue. The person who carried the glue buckets for the posters expects a job [from politicians]. Qualifications and skills are disregarded. Today, the priority is to get a job in exchange for working in the election (Harsha, male, 40 years, Buddhist).

As already noted, low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo are very important politically as they hold large vote banks. Nearly half of the city population lives in these highly concentrated areas with the democratic power to have a major influence on the selection of members of local government bodies and national political institutions. Wadulla Watta holds the largest number of potential votes in Kolonnawa electoral

division. Thus, all main political party members who contest from this electoral area maintain a close relationship with the Watta through local leaders. Politicians approach the Watta with programmes to provide welfare and development projects that allow them to secure popularity and enhance their vote. At the same time, although these people live in core urban areas, some facilities, such as infrastructure, employment and housing are still in limited supply or of poor quality in these neighbourhoods. Due to the absence of these services, urban subalterns rely on politicians to fulfill their needs. The vote is their significant power through which they demand politicians to solve these basic issues. Politicians also prefer low-income dwellers to rely on them as it enables them to demand their vote with the promise to sort out their problems.

From the date of the announcement, the local government election was the main topic among residents of the Watta. Before the election the Watta became more colourful with posters and decorations from various parties. Generally, these posters are stuck on walls near major gathering places, such as shops, three-wheeler parks and on some hoardings where they could attract people's views easily. There is a competition to capture the walls to stick posters in public places among local leaders of the main political parties. Sometimes this competition could lead to clashes between them and these types of disputes between party members are common in the Watta until the election is over. Five candidates stood for election in the 'Kolonnawa Urban Council' electoral division, representing four main parties, the United National Party (UNP), United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), Sri Lanka Podhujana Peramuna (SLPP) and People's Liberation Front (JVP) and one candidate stood as an Independent. Except for the UNP candidate, the other four were born and raised in the neighbourhood.

Therefore, posters of these parties and candidates were posted in almost all public places in the Watta.

Party meetings are usually held in the evening. Before these events, a group of supporters led by devoted local leaders decorate the public spaces, particularly the first three-wheeler park in the junction as it is a main entrance to the neighbourhood with empty land. Since the majority of the Watta residents are UNP supporters, the whole area is decorated in green flags with a picture of the elephant to represent the party. A 53 year old Murugan is a Hindu and drives a three-wheeler. He described the voting pattern of Colombo people as “the unity of low-income people in Colombo sustaining for a long time. Due to that unity, people cast their vote for the UNP, and Colombo has become a hub of the UNP. People consider only the party and not who is the candidate.” The domination in the decoration depends on the influence of the party because generally the ruling party candidate receives regular support from the party organizers. However, supporters of other parties also decorate spaces with their own party symbols for public meetings; nevertheless, the level of decoration depends on the financial stability of the party as well as the candidate. Therefore, in addition to the UNP, the Watta was decorated in red flags with flower buds on to symbolize the SLPP, the party of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

The number of attendees to these meetings vary between about one hundred and three hundred, depending on the popularity of the party and the welfare and entertainment events that take place during the meetings. The organizing committee led by the local leader uses various techniques to encourage attendees to these meetings to impress candidates and senior politicians of their party. Distributing material support, such as

school stationary supplies, dry food packets or spectacles, and providing entertainment through musical shows are some of the attractions offered. The financial strength of candidates and the party support dictates the size of the meeting and what the candidates are able to offer to the participants. In some instances, wealthy people from the Watta or beyond are able to sponsor this type of event for certain candidates as a lobbying exercise with the expectation that they will receive personal benefits later.

Among the five candidates, the UNP candidate was 48 year old Ganesan, a Tamil Hindu who was born in Galle and migrated to Colombo for employment twenty five years ago. Now he is a permanent resident of Colombo and lives in the nearest neighbourhood to the Watta. He was elected to the Kolonnawa Urban Council (KUC) at the last election. The remaining four candidates are all Sinhala Buddhists who were born and raised in the Watta. Although there are five candidates, the real competition is between the UNP, SLFP and SLPP. A 50 year old Chathura is a supporter of SLFP; nonetheless, with the change in national politics, he stood for SLPP. Since there is no candidate to contest from SLFP, the party decided to nominate a new candidate and approached 30 year old Amila, a Sinhala Buddhist, because of his popularity in the neighbourhood which he gained through the presidency of the three-wheeler association. He explained his reasons for standing and the way he is involved in active politics:

I was invited by several political parties to be a candidate for their party and they promised to help me for election expenses. Initially, I refused their proposals, yet due to encouragement from friends and family members, I agreed to stand. My friends insisted that I should stand because, in the past, outsiders come only at election times; but they did not do anything to this neighbourhood.

In the past, whoever stood as a candidate for the UNP became a member of the urban council due to the popularity of the party among the residents of the Watta. When

talking about party politics, most of the respondents expressed that “this Watta is UNP fort, we vote anyone whoever is nominated by the party.”

Supporters of Amila were well aware that it is difficult to compete with UNP candidates as the majority of people in the Watta are supporters of the UNP. Therefore, they organised the campaign to support their candidate Amila as a ‘village boy’ (gamé kolla). Through the use of the slogan ‘village boy,’ Amila’s supporters emphasised that he was born and grew up in the Watta, whereas his competitor Ganesan was an outsider to the Watta. In addition to his position as someone from outside the Watta, the use of the traditional Sinhala phrase ‘village boy’ also carries an unstated ethnic sense of ‘one of our boys’ highlighting that Ganesan was an outsider not only in terms of residence but also from an ethnic point of view, but without saying so directly. In this way they tried to attract votes from Sinhala Buddhists and other minority groups in the Watta. Although initially it began as a competition between two parties, the election gradually transformed into a competition between two ethnicities, Tamil vs Sinhala. As a result, the supporters of Amila spread the ‘village boy’ label in every meeting and asked people to vote for the village boy and not for an alien. Also, they used the village boy slogan in public, in informal meetings, and door to door canvassing to highlight the ethnicity of candidates as Sinhala and Tamil. A political activist in the Watta stated that supporters of local candidates used ethnicity as an element to increase the vote from the Watta residents. He further explained:

In private meetings and personal propaganda, they [Amila's campaigners] spread racism by saying that ‘he [the UNP candidate] is a Tamil person from another area. But Amila is our boy from our village, so we have to vote for him and send him to the urban council.’ In their mind, they had ‘we should not allow a Tamil person to be a king of this area’ (demalayakuta raja wenne denne be) (Abdul, male, 60 years, Muslim).

The ethnic based propaganda of SLFP supporters to focus the victory of Amila worked well, but it created division along the lines of ethnicity among Watta people. Sixty-eight old political activist Bandula stated that “this is the first time the Watta people start to look at candidates in terms of ethnicity. Usually, there is a competition between parties, but people do not consider ethnicity or religion of candidates” (male, Buddhist). However, the village boy concept worked well as SLFP supporters had planned. As a result, people who usually worked for other parties supported Amila as he is a resident in the same neighbourhood. A UNP supporter explained why he had changed his voting behaviour:

Working for a candidate in an election is different and voting for a candidate is different. Usually, I work for the UNP, but this time I worked and voted for the boy who was an SLFP candidate because he is a well-known person. I knew that boy for a long time, and his house is in front of my mother's house (Aron, male, 51 years, Christian).

During informal conversations, many people from all ethnicities mentioned that they voted for Amila because he was from the same neighbourhood and for his un-biased role as a president of the three-wheeler association. I found that people supported young Amila regardless of ethnicity, although supporters of Amila and the majority of Sinhala people thought Tamils voted for the UNP candidate due to shared ethnicity. Yet several Tamil people argued that “Amila could not become a member of the urban council if Tamils did not vote for him. Because Tamils are the majority in the Watta.” A Tamil respondent who usually cast his vote for UNP explained,

Many people who usually vote for UNP, cast their votes for the SLFP candidate [Amila) in the last election as he is from this neighbourhood. Up to now, he did not do anything for the people, and he is a new face to politics. I do not know what he will do for this Watta, but we all thought that we should have a member from our neighbourhood because up to now, we voted for an outside candidate who usually disappears after the election. So, by considering that experience, we supported Amila (Murugan, male, 53 years, Hindu).

However, finally both Ganesan and Amila become members of the municipal council. It was the first time in history that a person from the Watta had been elected to the urban council from this constituency. Some people said that it was good that both candidates won seats in the election. If the local candidate Amila had lost, it would have been difficult to guess what kind of issues it would have created in this neighbourhood. Although both candidates won this election, it created an ethnic based tension among residents. After the election, people complained to each other on the basis of whom they supported. Mainly Sinhala people criticized the people who supported the UNP candidate Ganesan.

Sinhala people had a perception that the majority of Tamils cast their vote for Ganesan since he was a Tamil, but some Tamil people stated that they cast their vote for Amila, which was accepted by Amila as well. During the interview, he also mentioned that without the support of Tamils, he could not have won in the election. However, this election showed politicians and their supporters that the use of ethnicity was a way of winning votes. For a long time, residents considered only the party when they cast their votes; nevertheless, now they switch parties based on the ethnicity of the candidate as well. Although Amila is a village person, the majority of the people saw him as Sinhala and his competitor as Tamil. This ethnic division had an important impact in the election, and it continues even in the post-election period in the Watta. A 47 year old political activist and social worker Ram mentioned that this kind of division might affect the unity that they had for a long time:

When parties and candidates have fallen into ethnicity and religion, it will affect unity. A Sinhala person may think that I should not cast my vote for Tamils or Muslims. Tamils and Muslims also could have similar thoughts. Finally, it will divide people based on ethnicity. In the last election, two different ethnic

candidates fell into separate parties. They [both candidates] carried out propaganda base on ethnicity, and they pointed each other 'He is Tamil, and he is Sinhalese' [*Ooo dhemalaya, Ooo sinhalaya.....*] When a candidate highlights ethnicity and religion ordinary people also try to follow them (male, Hindu).

The interaction of politicians is not limited to the election period or through welfare support. On one occasion, government officials came to the Watta to demolish some houses that had been constructed without permission in the area. People could not convince the officials to stop, and they started to knock down the houses. Local leaders who have contact with politicians attempted to pass the message to politicians in power to stop the demolition, but they could not make contact. Finally, a person who had a link with a powerful parliamentarian called Mano Ganesan was able to contact him and explain the situation. He visited the place and asked the government officials to stop demolishing the house. He then filed a case against this demolition in court. Many people recalled this incident saying “yes, they (government officials) demolished the house and threw away our things. After that, Minister Mano Ganesan came here and stopped that.” Since then, Mano Ganesan has had a good reputation among the Watta residents, mainly Tamils. This incident changed the perception of Tamil UNP supporters. Since then, they have supported Mano Ganesan and candidates from his Democratic People's Front (DPF) party.

Now a few local leaders complain about Mano Ganesan, saying that he is the one who spread racism to get Tamil people's vote. They know that a significant number of UNP supporters have voted for the DPF. According to a local leader:

There was no division between us. Ethnic divisions were provoked when Mano Ganeshan came here. His party came and started talking in favour of a particular ethnic group [Tamil people]. Nowadays, many people come from the Estate [sector] and listen to Mano Ganeshan. So, people gradually shifting towards him (Bandula, male, 68 years, Buddhists)

The changes in political affiliation indicate that ethnic sentiments impact the coexistence that residents of the Watta have enjoyed for a long time. People attempted to select and support politicians from their ethnic groups when they feel others neglected them due to their ethnicity. The selection of Amila as an urban council member shows that people do not like to depend on external politicians because of their broken promises. Nevertheless, the way in which electoral propaganda has created division among them has divided the community in terms of ethnicity. Similarly, the involvement of Mano Ganesan also fuelled the division which people experienced. Politicians are well aware that they can enhance votes when they interact with people in ethnic and religious sentiments. Welfare provision, which gives a pathway for outsiders to approach the Watta, also impacts the coexistence of Watta residents, which I turn to now.

6.4.2 Favouritism in welfare provision

On a rainy day, I had to go to the community centre, where the Grama Niladhari's (GN) office is also located, to stay dry. Around 10-15 people were in the queue to get various services from the GN. While I was there, a middle-aged woman entered the office with two other people carrying three cardboard boxes. She began by saying "it is difficult to find food at this time as many shops are closed due to flooding." While looking at me, a 52 year old Chamal, who has served as the GN in the Watta for nearly ten years, said: "These boxes are full of bread rolls for people who have been affected by the floods." He went on to say that this was the fault of his senior officers and said in front of people "How can we distribute these two hundred and fifty bread rolls to everyone?" looking at the woman who brought them. Subsequently, he called his assistant, Selvam, (a Tamil man and one of my key informants) and asked him to distribute the rolls. He called for

another two people to help carry the boxes and a Sinhala man and a Muslim woman volunteered to help him with the delivery. After they left, the GN introduced me to the women who brought the bread rolls. She is also a Grama Niladhari and serves in Salamulla, another GN division. He knew that I was keen to know about people who had been relocated from Wadulla Watta to Salamulla due to the road expansion project.

While I was having a casual conversation with her, Selvam, who had gone to distribute the rolls, returned looking upset and complained that people had scolded him asking “why did you give rolls to that woman [the Muslim woman] to distribute? Now she gives only to her people.” The GN was not concerned about Selvam’s complaint and he continued his work. I went out and asked Selvam what had happened. He said,

It is difficult to distribute two hundred and fifty bread rolls to people who have been affected by flooding as everyone is claiming that they are affected. So, people complain when they did not get a roll. Today that woman took a box to the other side where her house located. People got angry when they saw this incident and they shouted at me. I’ve encountered this kind of issue many times" (58 years, male, Hindu).

Around twenty minutes later, Asma, a 42 year old Muslim woman returned to the community centre after distributing the rolls. During my conversation with her, she said, “We have to help people at this time; that is why I came here to help. Usually, no one comes to our site (where her home is) for any distribution, so I took those rolls and distributed them to people in my area.”

Flash floods are one of the regular hazards in the Watta which make people depend on each other. During the rainy season, water collects to about two to three feet deep across most of the Watta, sometimes for several weeks at a time. Most people are unable to carry out their routine chores at this time. Since many people depend on daily

wage labour and their livelihoods are severely affected, they mostly depend on relief from others. Flood relief is one of the ways in which outsiders, politicians, government officials and private donors interact with the Watta. The government provides instant support such as cooked food and a secure place (mostly public places) to those people who have been affected. As a first step the government provides cooked meals through the GN. Dry rations are offered to people who stay in a safe public place where they can cook. The GN is responsible for updating information on affected people and arranging cooked food which generally consists of a bread roll for breakfast and a packet containing cooked rice and some curries for lunch and dinner. The GN plays a vital role during moments of crisis and his management is essential to the smooth distribution of provisions to the affected people.

Another incident highlighted the importance of the role of government officials and how the people's anticipation can turn into inter-ethnic tension due to the provision of compensation for affected people in the Watta. 'Cyclone Mora' in May 2017 caused heavy southwest monsoon rain which affected 15 districts in Sri Lanka, including Colombo. Wadulla Watta was also severely affected due to flooding and the government, including the military and civilians, were involved in attempts to rescue people affected by the floods. Relief boats were directed to rescue trapped people in the water. The government had taken steps to provide instant relief and compensation for affected people. However, after the disaster, some people directed complaints to one particular government minister – S.M. Marikkar, who is an MP representing Kolonnawa electoral division. He is a member of the UNP and party organizer for Kolonnawa. A 52 year old woman summarised the major complaints directed against

Marikkar: “He provides support only for his own people (Muslims) when allocating compensation of affected people (Lalitha, Buddhist).” She further described the mismanagement in the provision of compensation:

We heard that Minister Marikkar gave as much compensation as possible to Kolonnawa, the area where most Muslims live. Some people received over two hundred thousand [rupees, US\$1,000]. The Watta people received only ten thousand rupees (US\$ 50). We were told that we would be given the remaining compensation after the election, but still, nothing happened.

While I questioned the incident, I knew that the GN is the government officer authorised to identify the loss and recommend compensation. The government issues payments based on the damage, and the majority of affected people in the surrounding areas received twenty-five thousand rupees (US\$ 125). Nevertheless, most of the people in the Watta did receive only ten thousand rupees for the damage. Although there is no fixed allocation from the government, the reason for lower compensation in the Watta is because of the estimate of damage given by the GN. People mentioned that the GN justified his estimation by the fact that “this area was not affected by the floodwater, but the rainwater.” People were critical of the GN's criterion asking, “how does he [GN] distinguish floodwater and rainwater during the flood due to heavy rain.”

When I raised this with the GN, he stated that “this area was not affected by the flood as severely as other divisions. It was just the water level which rose by about 3-4 feet, but it did not damage the properties of the people. They keep their valuable things safely before the water rises because they are used to this type of disaster.” He also mentioned that politicians could not influence the allocation/compensation amount as it has to be approved by government officials; nevertheless, he noted that politicians can influence to speed of the process of compensation.

Although some people understood the role of the GN in the allocation, a group of people assumed that Marikkar had played a significant role in the distribution and amount of compensation. A UNP supporter, Bandula mentioned that “in the compensation form, there is a section called GN's recommendation; so, he has to recommend an amount for the compensation.” After people complained about the compensation, Bandula said that he had contacted Marikkar and explained the situation. He further explained:

The reason for ten thousand rupees allocation is because the Grama Niladhari had reported that there was no flood here. Marikkar called people for a rally against the Divisional Secretariat to demand more compensation. I informed everyone in the Watta about this protest, but only five people attended (68 years, Male, Buddhist).

The amount of disaster compensation provided by the government was used against Marikkar because of his identity as a Muslim. Although government officials are responsible for the calculation, recommendation and allocation of the compensation amount, people are critical of politicians because they have a perception that politicians can do whatever they want. Having compared the compensation amounts distributed in other severely affected areas, Watta residents, particularly Sinhalese, thought that the differences were evidence of ethnic nepotism in the allocation because of Marikkar. A group of Sinhalese led by two local leaders spread this view among others in the Watta, claiming that a Muslim minister provided greater support for Muslims. This view significantly influences peaceful coexistence in the Watta when they discuss and debate ordinary Muslims and local Muslim leaders in the neighbourhood.

In addition to instant support and compensation from the government, it is usual for the pansala, Church and mosque to organize additional relief for Watta residents through their own connections. During this kind of situation, residents expect assistance from all

institutions regardless of religion. While describing the situation during the flood a 53 year old Hindu devotee Shanthanam stated that “during the flood, all religious institutions provided support [relief] to everyone in the Watta without considering their religion and ethnicity. When the Church, pansala and mosque provides relief, they give to all people.” Flood relief is another occasion where outside donors contribute to relief for people who have been affected through religious institutions. Rev. Mendis of the evangelical Church recalled how he organized a relief distribution in a flood time a few years previously. “One of my well-known friends, send five hundred relief packets worth about 1,500 rupees (US\$ 7.5) after the conversation that he held with me about the flood. I provided those packets for everyone,” he said.

However, not every relief distribution happens smoothly. People complain that most relief coming through religious institutions is delivered to their own religious group. Several occasions were highlighted by respondents and religious leaders to show that the distribution happens in a discriminatory way. Rev. Badhdhiya was extremely critical of how flood relief was distributed by the pastor in the evangelical Church. He grumbled that

I gave flood donations to three hundred people. A card and a number were given, and people were asked to come in the following morning. I had made the bags and sent them off. What did these people [evangelical Church administration] do? People were standing in the Church hall from 6 am to get that packet. The pastor went around 10 am and did a service. They were asked to bring photocopies of their identity cards. What is this game that they play? They are trying to convey their faith by using this opportunity.

The tense situation created during the delivery of bread rolls that I discussed above is not only because a Muslim woman was involved in the distribution process, but two key issues should be highlighted. On the one hand, it is the sole responsibility of GN to

deliver the food to affected people accurately. But without any proper instruction, the GN delegated the responsibility to his assistant. Thus Selvam, the assistant, and others who distributed the rolls did not have clear guidance; they said they distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. On the other hand, the provision sent by the government was not sufficient to distribute to everyone who had been affected by the flood. As the GN pointed out, two hundred and fifty bread rolls were not enough for all the affected people. This highlights a lack of coordination between the government and the GN, or the government does not allocate enough money for relief. As a result, affected people created difficulties for the people who volunteered to distribute provisions. Despite the complexity of the allocation process involving provision from the central government and the critical role of the GN, residents attribute the insufficient allocation to the religious background of the person conducting the distribution.

Furthermore, some people who are not affected in floods also tend to claim that they have also been affected with the intention of getting relief from the government and other donors. So donors and distributors often encounter the issue of determining who has actually been affected when they deliver welfare support. People expect this type of welfare support on all occasions without considering the objective of that provision and the target group. If they did not get the provision, then they complain to the distributors and the organizers of that programme.

There is an emerging trend in the Watta that religious organizations and local leaders [political activists] focus on their own group of people and supporters when they deliver welfare assistance. When relief comes through politicians, local leaders consider that they have to give it to their supporters first. Similarly, when welfare comes through

religious institutions, the members of the associations consider their religious group first. While religious organizations and religious leaders favour their own groups during the welfare distribution, there is a trend in the Watta that associations are established without considering the balance of disadvantaged or minority groups. The Hindu women's association is a good example that focuses on the welfare association for a limited, specific group of people to achieve a universal goal of poverty alleviation. When welfare support is organized for a specific group, it leads to tension amongst those who have not benefited. While welfare distribution creates tensions in the Watta, people have begun to view and criticise the development support taken by the politicians in terms of ethnic and religious nepotism. This trend is the focus of the next section.

6.4.3 When development support creates conflict

On a Ramadan day in 2018, the Watta mosque committee organized an Ifthar programme and invited Marikkar as the chief guest. The former president of the mosque committee, a 60 year old Abdul, is a political activist and the supporter of UNP. While describing the visit of Marikkar to the mosque, Abdul mentioned that

[Marikkar] observed that the road was damaged and he said 'This road is damaged, isn't it? We will renovate it' and asked me to draft a letter with the signature of residents. During that time, some people pointed out empty land at the corner of this road and pointed out that something should be done with that land; otherwise, people will encroach on it. Marikkar walked towards that land, and he promised to develop that place as a play area for kids. He sent that equipment on the following day to construct a play area and road repair also starts simultaneously.

On the day of road opening, a name board displaying photos of politicians and details of the road construction was installed at the entrance. Tensions began after that name board was unveiled because the newly constructed road had been named 'mosque lane' (palliya patumaga). Some Sinhalese respondents said that it was unfair to give it a

religious name after the renovation because the road had been in the neighbourhood for a long time. Further, they pointed out that this section of neighbourhood refers to the 'Victoria Housing Scheme'; thus, the name of the renovated road reflects the scheme. A well known social activist in the Watta, 52 year old Lalitha, a Sinhala woman, led a team to oppose the naming of mosque road. She described the situation:

It has been named 'palliya patumaga' (mosque lane). I opposed that because it cannot be like that. The name of the scheme must be represented when naming the road. I told them [party organizers] you do not need to put the name of the pansala, kovil, or mosque – it should be named as 'Victoria Housing Scheme.' So, I asked them to remove that name board. If not, I may remove it.

This issue became a serious topic among Watta people. Although people who opposed this name did not make any issues in public, they talked among themselves and gave hints about their views when they met people near the new road. Abdul is one of best known UNP activists in the Watta and he encountered verbal abuse:

One day some Sinhala women stayed at a place and one of them said by looking at me 'apart of construct the road in front of the mosque, they named it as 'mosque lane' (palliya patumaga) and grumbled they would construct a road in front of the temple and name it as 'pansala para' (temple road)'

Abdul went on to explain that "although we did not name the road with that in mind [a focus on religion], people think in that way. Bandula is the one who wanted to name it 'mosque lane.'" Bandula is a local Sinhalese leader and longstanding UNP coordinator whose image was also displayed on the name board. Abdul argued that a Sinhalese person suggested the name, and neither he nor Marikkar chose the name for the renovated road. However, some others like Ramesh, a 42 year old Roman Catholic devotee who is doing small business for livelihood, supported the new name:

Having a name like 'mosque road' is also fine because that road is constructed in front of the mosque. It is common that when assigning a name for a road to consider any religious institution in that area. So, this is also fine because the mosque is the leading site on that road.

Figure 6.2: Renewed road with name board



Source: Researcher

The first image on the left side shows the renovated road with a name board. The name board itself is shown in the top right image indicating the pictures of (from left to right) Ranil Wickramasinghe (the Prime minister), Parliamentarian Marikkar and two local leaders (UNP coordinators pictured in slightly different sizes to indicate the political hierarchy). The description appears in the name board in Sinhala and the translation is given below:

‘Wadulla Watta’ – Palliya Patumaga [Mosque lane] had been renovated under the special project of rural infrastructure facilities development and fund allocation from the ministry of national policy and economic activities, as requested by Mr. Ranjan Sinna Alagan and Mr. Gnanarathna Paragahawatta and proposed by Honourable Parliamentarian Mr. S.M. Marikkar

However, the image of Marikkar on the name board was defaced within a few days of the board going up. In two weeks, the entire name board had been removed, as shown in the right-side bottom image. Another respondent who witnessed this tension in the neighbourhood stated that

If another minister (non-Muslim) had built the road and chose that name, it would not create a problem. If you go and see that name board, you can see that there is no image of Marikkar; maybe it was torn or cut. The problem is the road was built by a Muslim MP with an Islamic name (Jeewa, Male, 20 years, Hindu).

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the expectation that a particular candidate will bring development to the area is one of the main motivations people reported in voting for them. But sometimes development activities create issues when people think they are motivated by a disproportionate focus on one group or for the exclusive benefit of a politicians’ supporters. Although development works are carried out from government funds and the government appoints officials to look after development in the neighbourhood, politicians are key decision-makers of projects and select beneficiaries. A 51 year old Piumi works as a development officer attached to the Kolonnawa DSD and she is responsible for development activities in the Watta. In that capacity, she has to handle infrastructure and livelihood improvements representing

DSD. While explaining how development work is happening in this area, Piumi mentioned that there are allocations to every minister (national and local) for development works for their areas. Ministers have the sole power to decide the projects and select beneficiaries. She elaborated the process:

In the case of infrastructure developments, [politicians] decide what to do and where to do it. That is how Marikkar constructed the mosque road. They give priority based on the number of their supporters. If they find an area where they can get more votes, they give priority to that area. In the case of ministerial allocations, our role is minimal. We just have to monitor the work and confirm the quality of the work. We are not involved beyond that, so I do not know who has named that road as mosque lane. But we as government officers always keep a distance from politicians and their supporters.

As explained by the development officer, relevant parliamentarians have the independence to decide what development work to do through this ministerial allocation they receive from the government of Sri Lanka. Despite this, politicians have significant power of decision making when development projects come from relevant ministries and departments. Therefore, people rely on these politicians to improve individual and community wellbeing. However, when politicians allocate money for development work, they prioritize their party supporters and the number of potential votes in that area. Political nepotism in return of votes is therefore a significant influence on where the project is carried out. The road renovation work is also carried out in a similar way through the ministerial allocation. However, residents and some local leaders were critical about the name of the renovated road. Since the fund was allocated by a Muslim minister and the renovation carried out in front of the mosque, people thought that everything was done in favour of Muslims. That was the key cause of the criticism of the name of the road and the removal of the name board. Although all residents in the neighbourhood use the new road, the critique of some local Sinhalese

leaders and their supporters targeted Marikkar as a Muslim. Subsequently, their concerns are directed more broadly at ethnicity and the religion in general. This had implications for the many Muslims in the Watta and caused verbal arguments and increased tension between groups.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the key players in the governance of the Watta who have a significant influence on Watta matters. The everyday life of the subaltern groups in the Watta is strongly related to the dynamics of governance. Governance can either strengthen or weaken the cosmopolitanism in the neighbourhood. A small group of residents are key to governance decisions in the Watta, influenced by outsiders' involvement. This involvement in the form of party politics, welfare assistants, and development actions sometimes stimulates divisions in terms of ethnicity and religion in the Watta.

Politics play a significant role in the life of Watta residents. Associations and local leaders conduct various strategies to maintain their power in the neighbourhood. Their competition for power disturbs the unity that Watta residents have enjoyed for a long time. People also support associations through which they can get personal benefits. It is clear that until recently, people prioritized party politics. However, this trend is changing along ethnic lines. Residents now tend to consider the ethnicity of a candidate when they vote. Informality and socioeconomic background of residents makes them more dependent on politicians, donors and other institutions to fulfill their needs. Politicians use various strategies to increase their votes in this neighbourhood. During the election period, politicians have started to use ethnic slogans in this ethnically

heterogeneous community to extend the number of votes and ordinary people also attempt to show ethnic patronage through their vote.

Informality and the absence of the state provide a platform for external institutions such as politicians, NGOs or religious and ethnic-based organizations to reach residents. People expect support from the government, NGOs, religious institutions and other donors on specific occasions, particularly during an emergency like a flood. Since the Watta is a flood-prone area, support comes through different channels like residential associations, religious leaders and local leaders. These provisions are generally not sufficient to distribute to the entire community, even though all members expect it. So key stakeholders deliver the provision which they receive from outside donors according to their selection, and religion, ethnicity, personal relationships and neighbours all play a factor in finalizing the beneficiaries list. Residents are frustrated if they do not get support while their neighbours do. When relief comes through a religious association, they prioritize to deliver their own faith groups. It is possible for one person to receive several forms of relief while a relative gets none. This imbalance in distribution leads to antagonism against an ethnic or religious group by those people affected.

Development projects also tend to create tension among Watta residents. When development projects focus on a group of people, or the ways in which the projects are carried out by politicians and local leaders indicate ethnic patronage, this inevitably increases tension. Although development projects are generally funded by the government, politicians, including local leaders, are keen to highlight their names to show their influence in the particular project. Projects that are carried out without considering the ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood also cause unnecessary tension.

It is easy to approach economically disadvantaged people with material support that then disturbs their peaceful coexistence. The involvement of ethnic-based political parties and religious organizations can disrupt coexistence in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. Ultimately this competition in politics and favouritism around resource distribution divides people along lines of ethnicity. Studies on tsunami relief efforts have shown that the manner in which relief efforts were administered contributed to conflicts between interethnic communities (Hasbullah and Korf, 2009; Korf *et al*, 210). De Mel and Ruwanpura (2006), also emphasize that the aid distribution should take into account the political background of those who are affected and should not exacerbate existing tensions and fault lines within communities.

The Watta is changing. These changes have a significant influence on coexistence in this multi-ethnic neighbourhood. People think that they can get benefits or protection if members of their own ethnic group come into power. As a result of this perception, people now like to have their own ethnic representation, from associations to higher political institutions. This can create what we could call a superiority complex, meaning that residents are keen to demonstrate their superior access to power.

Nowadays, some Sinhalese residents in the Watta develop a perception, as in the national context, that they have to be in front of every organization. This hegemonic perception is a result of external factors that happen in the majority society. They like multiculturalism and welcome other ethnic and religious groups to live with them, yet from their point of view, it should happen under their control. When they feel anything happens beyond their control or without their knowledge and permission, they tend to make those incidents issues. People start to look at other groups with suspicion. Many

activities organised by other ethnic groups are criticised simply as a result of this suspicion. This hegemonic position pushes minority groups to take various steps to protect themselves and their rights. Increasing ethnic patronage among Watta residents is an outcome of this ongoing tension. Although Watta residents attempt to show to the external world that there are no issues between them, the tension and division between ethnic groups are increasingly severe.

CHAPTER SEVEN: WATTA CULTURE: THE PLACE WHERE DIFFERENCES MEET

7.1. Introduction

One of the essential characteristics observed throughout the research in this neighbourhood is multicultural diversity, which turns the Watta into a unique example of living together; people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds live together as one community in this congested neighbourhood. In contrast to wealthier neighbourhoods, the interaction between individuals in low-income communities is hard to avoid where space is typically limited. In this chapter, I argue that this neighbourhood's unique culture, which I referred to as 'Watta culture', is changing. Watta culture allows differences to mingle without much restriction. People share many activities in everyday life, which help them to understand others' cultural practices. As a result of this mutual understanding, generally, most residents do not see ethnic or religious divisions in the Watta in the same divided way as the majority community. Watta culture causes people from different ethnicities, religions and language to rub each other regardless of differences. These connections, despite the differences, produce subaltern cosmopolitanism in this low-income neighbourhood. However, the space for mingling with different groups in the Watta is reducing because of emerging ethnoreligious sentiments and social issues.

I examine the way in which Watta culture is changing through (i) social networks, (ii) the nature of women's engagement and (iii) social reproduction of the Watta. The first section focuses on the significance of social networks in Watta culture, the way they are established and the threat they encounter. Secondly, I discuss the importance of women's role in everyday interactions, how this interaction helps construct mutual understanding among different groups and the challenges they face to maintain these

engagements. The final section is about the social reproduction of the Watta. Since most of people were born and grew up in the Watta or a similar neighbourhood, they enjoyed their childhood with a diverse group of children and generally maintain the same group consciousness for the rest of their life. This section focuses on how 'understanding others' happens through everyday interactions that most people carry on from childhood, how parents' concern restricts mingling with other children and how it will impact the Watta culture.

7.2. Who knows whom? The strength of the social network in everyday life

In dense communities like Wadulla Watta, people are closely connected via multiple relationships that produce dense informal social networks among residents. These relationships help residents enjoy many resources and provide an essential space for different groups to interact (Kottegoda, 1991:2004; Ruwanpura, 2008). White (2002, p. 261) defines social networks as 'a web of social relations or resources that surrounded Individuals, groups or organisations and the characteristics of their ties.' Social networks strengthen and expand social capital, according to Carpenter, Danier and Takahashi (2004, p. 855), who state that 'social capital is a resource available to individuals that emanates from group contact because of trust, reciprocity, and co-operation.' These networks could increase the collective actions and cooperative behaviour to yield community actions (White, 2002). The types and size of social networks help people in many ways, such as financial, material and emotional support (Kottegoda, 1991; 2004; Ruwanpura, 2008; Matthews and Besemer, 2014). The Watta is a unique geographic location that enhances the reciprocal relationships between different groups in everyday engagement.

The geographical layout and economic marginalisation are two significant factors strengthening social networks in Wadulla Watta. It is difficult to avoid interacting with others in the Watta setting because of the limited space and dense population. The majority of the houses in the neighbourhood range in size from 350 to 450 square feet, comprising room(s), living space, kitchen, bathroom and toilet. This narrow domestic space encourages children to play in open public spaces, which is also limited in the Watta. When children play in these public spaces, they meet children of a similar age from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Gradually, they develop strong relationships with each other and maintain them throughout their life. Some peer groups in the Watta have held close relations since their childhood. These groups' social networks become an essential element among the members because of the multiple supports they accumulate from their peers.

Respondents spoke of strong social networks with family and friends. People use their social networks for multiple reasons, such as childcare, finding jobs (particularly in the informal labour market), accessing instant loans, getting support in emergencies and organising religious festivals and New Year celebrations. The nature of social life and social networking among the Watta residents undoubtedly impacts their sense of belonging to the community. People who were born and grew up in the Watta have a strong understanding of their neighbours and their cultural practices through social learning since childhood. In low-income neighbourhoods, the space of socialisation with others is impossible to avoid because of much higher population densities. These social networks help enhance trust among residents in the community to take collective action

in more productive ways, increase reciprocal trust and ultimately improve support for tackling differences in everyday life.

As demonstrated in Chapter five, these social networks help to establish Residents' Associations in the Watta. The first association, the 'Wadulla Youth Group', was formed by a multi-ethnic group of young people, is a good example. Through their networks, these multi-ethnic youths organised various events in the community. The next generation also followed a similar trend and through their networks, a group of young people from diverse backgrounds worked together in the 'Wadulla Three-Wheeler society', organising many events in the community. 60 year old Abdul is well-known in the Watta because of his involvement in social activities. According to him, social networks were established because of everyday relationships among Watta residents. It helps to enjoy myriad benefits, including interaction with different groups of people.

Describing the experience of people building social networks, Abdul states:

You know we can establish any association in this community without much effort because everyone knows each other. They maintain good relationships either through family or friends' networks. So, always there are people behind anyone who does any good things for the Watta people. Whenever emergencies arise, people are used to gathering and working together. But, unfortunately, they do not value such relationship and networks. They use their strong relationship only for a short time, like during a flood. They do not work with a longtime target (Male, 60 years, Muslim).

Gradation of class is another significant factor that integrates different groups in the Watta. A substantial number of inhabitants in the Watta depend on the informal economy. These social networks are an essential source of information for finding a job in an informal labour market or starting self-employment. A household survey for the Migrants on Margins project mentioned in Chapter three reveals that 34.1 per cent of females and 33.3 per cent of males in the neighbourhood received no more than primary

education (up to grade five). The remaining people, 65.9 per cent of females and 61.1 males, completed up to secondary level (grade six to ten). Compared to the national picture, this is a very low rate of completion of secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2020). This lack of education means that Wadulla residents are highly dependent on the informal economy. Among male respondents, 85.0 per cent are involved in self-employment, such as three-wheeler drivers, vegetable and fish vendors, small grocery and food shops. The remaining 15.0 percent of males are labourers who work in nearby fish and vegetable markets and warehouses for a daily wage.

However, only 37.0 per cent of the women report that they are involved in income-generating activities, such as cooking meals for others and running small meal shops which also support their husbands' self-employment. Sangeetha helps her husband, who is a vegetable vendor. While the husband sells vegetables to the neighbourhood and surrounding areas, Sangeetha sells vegetables to her neighbours, bringing additional income for her family. She describes her economic hardship and struggles to earn income as follows.

In here [Watta], we are concerned about daily routine life. We don't think about the next day. All we worry about is today's life. Whatever income is earnt from our vegetable business is not even sufficient for daily expenses. Thus, we don't have big plans in our life. We depend on daily income, which mainly depends on our neighbourhood (Female, 42 years, Hindu).

Most people use their social networks to find new jobs and to start self-employment. Describing the way in which members of the community support each other and the reason behind this close interaction, Harsha explains,

There is a friendliness and humanity that exists here. The people who live here have suffered and earn their living through sweat and toil. So, they know how much they have to go through to make a hundred rupees. They have empathy

towards others who have the same kind of hunger or pain. The community lives tightly knit. So, we live with understanding (Male, 40 years, Buddhist).

According to the respondent, the majority of Watta residents are employed in the informal sector. As a result, they confront similar economic limits in their daily lives. The need to balance income and expenses appeared to be a part of most residents' regular survival strategy. Economic marginalisation has produced social networks among residents and through which they get essential support. Insufficient income forces people to remain in the Watta although they are keen to move elsewhere for multiple reasons. Similarly, the affordability of life is the main reason for new people to move to Wadulla Watta. It was evident that people were attracted to the Watta because of cheap housing, the low cost of living, better opportunities for informal employment and educational opportunities for children. Although there was some discontent in terms of the physical environment, low-income residents, mainly migrants, still manage in this neighbourhood because of its location and affordability.

63 year old Ganesh has lived in the Watta for more than 40 years. He came to Colombo for employment from a tea estate in Ratnapura district, which is located 140 kilometres away. After moving to several similar neighbourhoods in Colombo, Ganesh finally ended up in Wadulla Watta. He described reasons for people to move to Wadulla Watta:

People who are living here came from many places. Some of them were born in Colombo and some are from the suburbs. Some people migrated from the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka and even moved from upcountry [the central highlands of Sri Lanka]. These people moved 100km to 300km from their native places. If you consider the land prices, you can buy a piece of land for lower prices here than in other areas of Colombo. Also, there are business firms with employment opportunities that are available here. So, people are attracted quickly and settled here (Male, 63 years, Hindu).

Among respondents who participated in the survey, 42.4 per cent mentioned that they had always lived in Wadulla Watta. Amongst the respondents who reported that they had not always lived in the Watta, 33.3 per cent had been living there for more than ten years. People like Ganesh also belong to this category. Although they were not born and raised in the Watta, they had spent most of their lives in Wadulla Watta or a similar neighbourhood and closely mingled with the community. Over time, they too seemed to get accustomed to and happy with these social relationships in the Watta. Priya migrated from Hatton 140 kilometres away from Colombo twelve years ago. Wadulla Watta is the fifth place that she has moved to within Colombo. Compared with her native areas and previous location in Colombo, Priya stated that,

I prefer Wadulla Watta because all the facilities, including employment opportunities, schools and medical facilities, are available here. It is hard to get the same facilities at my native place. In our native place, our children should leave home at 5.00 am to reach their school on time. But, here, it is not like that; it is a better place to live. However, alcoholism and drugs usage are a little high. That is the problem (Female, 48 years, Hindu).

The level of community engagement and strength of social networks depends very strongly on the period of migration. Some residents, mainly new migrants to the Watta, were reluctant to form relationships with others in the community because of social concerns. This neighbourhood had a reputation as a home of professional criminals in the past. Even though the threat is currently either absent or weak, migrants still seem reluctant to believe that this neighbourhood is safe. Also, the increasingly unpleasant physical appearance of the Watta encourages them to move from the neighbourhood. This perception is most significant among recent migrants who stay in rental houses and parents who have children of school age. 51 year old Kalai is a mother with two daughters and one son. Her husband is working as a labourer in a shop. She moved to

Colombo from Digana in Kandy District (140 kilometres away) eight years ago because of her husband's work. Kalai adapted to life in Wadulla Watta, where she has lived for four years in a rented house. However she still recalls her hometown. She compares her childhood and lifestyle in her village in Vavuniya with her children's lives in the Watta:

I prefer my native place rather than here. I don't have my own house here, there is not sufficient space available. We cannot live here as we would like to with freedom. From water supply to the house, everything we have to pay money for. The place is not hygienic and has lots of problems. My children cannot play the games which I played at their age and cannot experience the pleasures which I was experiencing at a young age. They are stuck in the house. I feel sorry for them. They can't experience even ten per cent of the pleasures I was experiencing at their age. The ongoing highway expansion project even narrows down our area. We are gradually losing our public space used to play and spend time in to relax (Kalai, 51 years, Hindu).

27 year old Chithra moved to Wadulla Watta after her marriage. Her husband is from a similar neighbourhood in Colombo and they moved to Wadulla Watta five years ago. Although the couple tried to find other places, they could not find a place to fit their budget. Finally, they ended up in Wadulla because of affordable house rent and proximity to her husband's workplace. However, Chithra is keen to move away from this neighbourhood because of increasing environment-related issues. She felt that the surrounding environment of the Watta was becoming more unpleasant day by day. As parents they think the increasing disturbances may not give their daughter a good future. Although they want to move to a better place than the Watta before their daughter grows up, they are unable to make it happen because of their economic struggles. Chithra describes why she stays in the neighbourhood and the reasons for and barriers to moving:

I am living here as my husband works here. We have adapted to this place accordingly. This place is very convenient for school, employment, markets and hospitals as they are located very close and easy access with convenient transportation. Nevertheless, the features of this area are getting worse day by

day. There is no proper drainage system and it causes overflows of water every day. The situation is worst during the rainy season. Flooding is the main issue for us. Our livelihood and children's education are severely affected during floods. The new highway expansion project is severely disturbing because of the noise and dust from the construction site. It is good to go for a better place than this, but we don't have any other option. So, we are living here. We can't leave this place due to our economic situations (Female, 27 years, Hindu).

Many people like Chithra are waiting for an opportunity to move out. Recent migrants who came to the Watta within the last five - six years are very keen to find an alternative place. Although recent migrants are not happy with the physical environment of the Watta, they appreciate the support of the neighbours. Migrants often move to the Watta through networks of friends and relatives so they quickly adapt to Watta culture and mingle with people. Several authors have identified the close knit social relationship through various social networks in the low income settlements which play a crucial role in their life (Kottegoda, 2004; Perera, 2015: 2016; Lakshman *et al.*, 2016; Abeyasekara *et al.*, 2019).

42 year old Milek migrated fifteen years ago from an estate in Nuwara Eliya, located 180 kilometres away from Colombo. After several jobs in the informal sector, Milek now rides his three-wheeler. His family moved to Wadulla Watta eight years ago and are still living in a rented house. Milek has a group of friends, both migrants and non-migrants, in the Watta. Milek states that "When I need any assistance, there are people to help me. Some of them helped me to find jobs in shops and warehouses sometime ago." At the same time, describing the diversity and unity of the Wadulla people, Milek states:

For us, we have every good thing in the Watta in many ways. No disturbances to the people out here. We only have problems related to money, floods and employment. There are no other problems beyond that. Some people drink alcohol here. That problem is limited within that particular family; it doesn't cause trouble to neighbours. Although they fight today, they will become friends tomorrow. People will turn up for assistance if there is a funeral, marriage,

disease or emergency. People here share both sadness and happiness among themselves. Whatever the problems we are having, the unity is within us (Male, 42 years, Christian).

Another trend in the Watta that weakens social networks is the out-migration of the host community. People who have been living in the neighbourhood since they were born and for a long time think that increasing in-migration in the Watta disturbs their routine life. This perception mainly comes from Sinhalese. They think that the increasing density is because of recent Tamil and Muslim migrants from Colombo and elsewhere.

42 years old Sumedha explains how migration became a challenge for the Sinhalese:

However, now the majority in this area are outsiders. Tamils and Muslims are high in number. They like to live in this manner and like to stay in a populated area. Sinhalese need separate places for their residence. Our people (Sinhalese) don't like this life in a highly dense area that we are experiencing now. Sinhalese need more freedom than this. We don't have enough space in our houses. Some people say we can't take visitors to their house. Some are renting their houses to others and moving away from here. Some are waiting to sell their houses to move to other places. If the opportunity arises, most Sinhalese move from this Watta. They say they want freedom. The majority of Sinhalese think in that manner (Female, 42 years, Buddhist).

Discussion so far indicates that social networks provide an ideal space for diverse groups to mingle together. These informal networks are essential for the kind of support that leads to an improved understanding of difference. People who were born and grew up in the Watta setting construct networks with friends from their childhood and remain for long periods of time (Kottegoda, 2004; Perera, 2015: 2016; Lakshman *et al.*, 2016; Abeyasekara *et al.*, 2019). While these networks provide multiple support discussed, it is a key factor that ensures the mingling of people with diverse cultures. However, many people are eager to move away from the Watta because of increasing environmental disturbances such as flash floods, garbage, and drainage issues and unpleasant local characteristics such as rising drug-related problems, conflict with some people, and

using foul language. As both in and out-migration are increasing rapidly, this could affect social networks, which are generally established through long-term relationships and understanding. The nature of these networks also informs social norms from one generation to another. However, since a significant number of people are waiting for an opportunity to move, they do not try to develop close relationships with the remaining people in the Watta. The in-between situation of people reduces interaction between people and loses the space to establish good social networks.

Looking back to Watta's history, these networks bolstered community efforts and assisted locals in obtaining their basic requirements from the government and other external stakeholders. Community members can better their overall well-being and meet their needs through these networks. Due to the difficulty of meeting their needs individually, individuals frequently had to work together, which occasionally resulted in the creation of neighbourhood organizations. The first organization, Wadulla Youth Group, is a good example of how social networks of various ethno-religious community members led to the establishment of a formal organization and the satisfaction of Watta inhabitants' demands. The organization organizes a variety of activities for the wellbeing of Watta inhabitants, and in most cases, these activities require outside financial assistance. Additionally, especially when faced with flooding, they approach local governance institutions to request emergency aid and infrastructure facilities.

Residents of Watta usually act as a group when they are threatened by outsiders or during a flood. Collective action against strong external influences is the behaviour of the Watta residents during the July 1983 riot. The majority of Tamil residents of Colombo were attacked by Sinhalese mobs during these unrests, along with their

homes. Respondents emphasized, however, that they did not allow outsiders into Watta to assault Tamil residents. They claim that in order to overcome this obstacle, they work with all the Watta residents.

They work together during a flood to protect one other and their resources. Additionally, they demand from the government for emergency assistance and compensation, albeit this usually happens during times of crisis and the residents gradually stop making these collective demands when things return to normal. According to Bayat (2000), urban subalterns typically make an effort to address their own requirements, which he described as "quiet encroachment" (2000, p. 536). Additionally, some inhabitants like using their own networks rather than working as a team to meet their goals. Furthermore, as was already said, people of the Watta do not strive to work together for neighbourhood concerns because of the regular in-out migration from and within the Watta.

Even though there are already many kinds of social networks in the Watta, they primarily function within kin and immediate neighbours. Therefore, due to a variety of circumstances, community collaboration is declining. For instance, as was said in chapter six, when a group of individuals are subject to forcible demolition by the government, they do not receive assistance from Watta residents and leaders. They were forced to contact a politician who represented their own ethnic group. Similar to this, when a group of residents were forced to evacuate from the Watta neighbourhood owing to a road expansion project, other residents did not express any desire to keep them or speak up on behalf of those who were impacted. Instead, they see that as their problem.

These occurrences show that although while social networks are very important to the residents of Watta, they only use them for emergency support and typically only with their immediate family and neighbours, and they try to gather their needs individually. As a result, residents of Watta are acting individually rather than collectively more often now than they were in the past. However, these networks are helping people stay in touch with existing contacts and support the formation of new interactions. These relationships are usually with people that share common interests. For these reasons, women's social relations in the Watta are especially significant since they spend more time in the neighbourhood.

7.3. The role of women in Watta culture

In this section, gender is approached from a different perspective: that of women's role in the low-income community in the context of cosmopolitanism. I am looking at the way in which the everyday engagement of women contributes to wider community connections in the Watta. Studies on gender in low-income neighbourhoods have offered important proof of how women establish strong bonds with neighbours through everyday interactions (Kottegoda, 1991:2004; Ruwanpura, 2008). According to Kottegoda (1991), women frequently use their kin and neighbourhood networks in the informal sector. In her investigation of women's everyday interactions, Kottegoda (2004) claims "women who spend most of the day in the settlement maintain networks of social contacts among kin groupings, within ethnic groups, and among neighbours that result in reciprocal exchange with their neighbourhood or members of their ethnic groups" (2004, p. 8:123). Ruwanpura (2008) emphasizes how networks in low-income

areas vary by ethnicity but also have significant commonalities. These networks are important for women's survival and welfare (2008, p. 414).

Everyday encounters on the ground in specific spaces play a significant role in constructing 'social relations' (Jazeel and Brun, 2009. p. 2) As discussed in Chapter five, mutual understanding and interaction with others are most noticeable among women in their everyday engagement. Physical proximity in the congested neighbourhood leads them to share rituals, childcare and food (Datta, 2012). Neighbours are the essential source for new migrant women to gradually develop an understanding of Watta culture. Migrant women generally receive most information about Watta resources and services from their immediate neighbours while their spouses are mainly concerned about employment. These neighbours are typically not from the same ethnic or religious groups; nevertheless, they form strong bonds through their everyday interactions.

The role of women in marginalised communities is much more important than men as women spend more time in the community and engage in a wide variety of both family and community activities. Compared with men, interaction among women in everyday life is reasonably high in the Watta. Generally, men go out of the neighbourhood for work in the morning and return in the evening. Thus, their interaction with other men in the Watta happens at a specific time, mostly once they return from work. In contrast, most of women spend most of their time in the neighbourhood from the morning till night (Kottegoda, 2004). In some families, women are engaging in various livelihoods from home in order to earn supplementary income for their families. As discussed in the previous section, the survey results revealed that only 37.0 per cent of women engage

in income-generating activities, often through cooking meals for meal and grocery shops in the Watta. The low participation of women in income-earning activities indicates that women, both income earners and homemakers, spent more time in the neighbourhood than their male partners, which allows them to interact with other women in the Watta.

These interactions often happen in public places, such as collecting water from the communal tap, purchasing daily grocery shopping needs, garbage disposal, and picking up children from pre-school and tuition classes. These are all activities performed virtually exclusively by women. These neighbours also meet each other for mutual assistance, for childcare, borrowing money, kitchen help and spending spare time together. Members of the community have a mechanism enabling these women to cope with Watta culture. This support may help new migrant women to overcome the psychological marginality in a culturally diverse space. Thus, the opportunity to engage with different people in everyday life is higher for women in the Watta. Priya is a Tamil migrant woman from Hatton; she describes the way in which her neighbours help her:

My native place is Hatton; I came to this place six years ago with my two daughters and son. Despite some minor issues, people are still friendly and always help-minded. I like our interaction with our neighbours, although most of them are not from the same ethnicity or religion as me. My neighbour is a Sinhalese and since the first day of my arrival, Rita *Akka* [sister] has helped me in many ways. She shares information about the Watta and people, which helps me understand how to manage people. I grew up in Tamil society and this is my first experience of life with different ethnic groups. Initially, I panicked about this neighbourhood, but I quickly adapted to this atmosphere with my neighbour Rita *Akka's* help. They [Watta people] do not consider me an outsider, and we are more like friends and sisters (Female, 48 years, Hindu).

The experience of Priya is an example of how the interaction between women helps newly arrived migrants to engage with the community and adapt to the Watta. Many migrants who came to the Watta in different time periods have a similar experience with

their neighbours to Priya. These interactions are a product of everyday engagement. As mentioned previously, compared with men, women spend more time with their neighbours. These interactions help them share information and receive help; beyond that, talking to their neighbours also serves a valuable psychological function, helping relieve stress. Women respondents state that since their spouses are out most of the day, they do not have anyone to share their everyday life difficulties with. Most migrants' parents, siblings and relatives are in their hometown and only the neighbours can share and care for them. When these women have spare time, mainly after lunch, they visit neighbouring homes and talk about many topics, including gossip about Watta people. Thus, the engagement between women in the Watta plays a significant role which gradually constructs a mutual understanding and respect for each other regardless of ethnicity, religion and language.

These engagements are not only essential for migrants; they enhance the mutual understanding and trust among longer term inhabitants of the Watta, some of whom have lived there from birth. Another essential element of coexistence in the lives of Watta residents appears through culinary culture. Food practices help create an atmosphere that is labelled 'Watta culture' by residents themselves more frequently than other spheres of their daily lives. Generally, women share food, especially the curry they cook, with neighbours, usually every day. On festival days and special occasions, they prepare special foods and share them with neighbours, which they perceive as a moment of conviviality. As mentioned in the previous chapter, women are very concerned and respectful of others' ethnicity, religion and food preferences when sharing food. Sharing food during festival times among families, friends and neighbours

is a convivial moment for most women in the neighbourhood, which they recounted with pride. A 51 year old Hindu woman describes food sharing culture with Muslim and Sinhala families: "During festivals, we receive meals from their home and give meals to them during our festivals. This food sharing takes place with both Sinhala and Muslim families." Similarly, other Hindu women express how Muslim families help them at times of need. She elaborated:

I am a Hindu and we do not consume beef. But when my son got affected with dengue fever, the doctor advised me to give him meat. Since I do not know how to cook meat, I looked for a Muslim *dhatha* (sister), and she cooked beef for my son. In the same way, she prepared things for us a few times. Like food, we share many things between us. They know our religious and cultural practices as we do about them. I am very concerned about their religious practices when preparing the meal for festival days (Female, 51 years, Hindu).

During the research, I also experienced how far women care about their neighbours and respect their friends' culture. Uma is a 37 year old Hindu devotee who made an appointment for an interview on a 'Ganapathi Pooja' day (a special pooja for the Lord Ganesha). When I visited, Uma and her family members were conducting religious rituals and I was asked to wait ten minutes until they finished. After formal rituals, Uma came to meet to explain about the pooja and during our conversation, Uma asked, "Would you like to have Pongal?" Pongal is a sweet rice meal prepare by Hindus with grains, dates and nuts for special occasions. Sri Lankan Muslims also prepare a similar sort of meal for special occasions, which call as *kichadi* so Pongal is not an unfamiliar meal for me. Although I replied, yes, Uma thought I was saying it without much interest because the Pongal is offered to the god. Then, she suddenly says, "Do not worry, I cooked another pot of Pongal separately to serve with my Muslim friends. So, you also can have from that without any concerns." While having Pongal, I asked Uma "Why cook separately?" She replied:

When we cook meals like Pongal for special occasions, we offer the first meal to the god. We follow this ritual because offering the first food to the god will return rewards to us. Meanwhile, I know some of my Muslims do not consume food if it has been offered to the god. They [Muslim friends] think that consuming food which was offered is a sin. Therefore, on special occasions like today, I cooked in two pots. One I use to offer food to the god and I serve my Muslim friends from the other pot. (Female, 37 years, Hindu).

As this chapter has tried to emphasise, understanding of the culture of others comes from social learning from childhood onwards. Food preparation and sharing it with others is a valuable tradition that has been followed by Watta residents for a long time. Mutual understand and respect for other cultures is a fundamental element of cosmopolitanism that can be observed as part of everyday life among women in the Watta. The sharing of food with due respect is not only a convivial moment for givers; it also stimulates a strong understanding among recipients. Importantly, when food is prepared and shared with respect from other cultures, recipients also respect the givers in the same manner. The engagement of women with others is not limited only to daily situations. Their role of working together is even more prominent in emergencies like floods.

As discussed in Chapter four, flooding is a common disaster that disturbs Watta residents' lives almost every year. During floods, most people gather in public places and houses of relatives and friend that have not been affected by flood waters. Sometimes they receive a pack of foodstuffs such as rice, sugar, tea powder, flour or lentils from the government, NGOs or well-wishers. In this kind of situation most women, regardless of ethnic and religious differences, get together and cook for people who have been affected. They do not feel that this is a burden for them and at the same time, they do not consider the differences between them. For them, all are Watta residents. They

enjoy cooking in the same way that they prepare a meal for their own family. A respondent shared her personal experience of what usually happens when the Watta floods:

Neighbours who are not affected will invite those who are affected into their homes to stay. At that time, they do not consider ethnicity or religion. If neighbours are affected by the flood, we invite them. They welcome and help us. We care for each other because we cannot wait until the government or any other organisations provide the meal. We cannot feed only our kids, while other kids are starving. These are examples where people stay together without considering differences, whether Muslim, Tamil or Sinhala. Everyone has to share meals and other necessary items with everyone due to the limited space and provisions. Our group of women works as a team representing all religions and ethnicity, we always volunteer to cook meals for affected people. We cook together and eat together. We do not consider difference among us (Female, 42 years, Muslim).

Density, informality and marginalisation are significant factors that lead women to engage together even in emergencies in the Watta. This interaction is essential for survival during the challenging routines of everyday life, as well as at particularly difficult times, such as floods. Importantly, in the context of cosmopolitanism, women's role is absolutely essential as they interact with other women in the Watta through individual and community management. Mutual understanding and sharing with different people would not be possible if women did not interact with each other in the community.

While some women are happy to form relationships with their immediate neighbours, others prefer widespread social networks across the community. A significant number of women in the neighbourhood engage through formal networks, for example, the women's society, the funeral aid society, microfinance associations and the welfare society. Interestingly, in addition to regular membership, they undertake leading positions in some of these associations. For example, three key roles, such as president, secretary and treasurer of the funeral aid society, are women. Most of these

associations do not have ethnic, religious, or language restrictions to become a member. The Women's society (*Kantha sangamaya*) is a prominent example that encourages Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim women in the Watta to participate regardless of differences. There are a few microfinance associations operating in the Watta, and almost all members of these associations are women from a mixture of different ethnicities and religions.

So far this section has highlighted the vital role of women in the Watta, leading to mutual understanding and respect of others, the essential cosmopolitanism element. Nevertheless, socio-cultural norms which reinforce women's unequal status persist in the Watta and limit women's ability to engage in the public sphere. The Watta is a male-dominated community and, as a consequence, women lack influence in political, economic or social contexts as compared with men. Although some women engage in livelihood activities, their income source is dependent primarily on the livelihood activities and is typically an extension of socially constructed, gender roles. Although women engage with other women through informal talks, culinary culture and especially during emergencies, their voice is not equal to men in decision making for the entire community. As a result, women are excluded from roles of significant power.

Sri Lankan feminist academics critically investigate how gender roles are created in various geographic contexts. (De Alwis, 2002; Kottegoda, 1991:2004, Ruwanpura and Hamphries, 2004; De Mel and Ruwanpura, 2006; Ruwanpura, 2007:2008:2009, De Mel, 2009). Socially constructed gender roles and lack of political engagement is common amongst women in Sri Lanka more widely. 'Sri Lankan women, be they Sinhala, Tamil, or Muslim, continue to be constructed as the reproducers, nurturers, and disseminators

of "tradition," "culture," community and nation' (De Alwis, 2002, p. 676). Ruwanpura (2007) emphasizes that 'households are not the same everywhere because they are a sub-system of larger social relations and realities and because their structure depends on the social context. As a result, various social, cultural, political, and economic contexts influence gender roles (2007, p. 525).' According to Kottegoda (1991), the domestic life cycle of the household and anticipated household role responsibilities and obligations influence women's choice of income-generating work. Further evidence of how ethnic identification and cultural views of women affected the types of networks comes from Kottegoda (2004).

Regardless of socio-economic status, Sri Lankan women are expected to perform a gendered role in which they do not have significant power and their mobility in public space is limited. Jayawardena and De Alwis (1996) emphasize that Sri Lankan women have historically been subjugated due to socially constructed gender expectations although they have been taking an active role in political activities over the years. Despite Sri Lanka electing the first female prime minister in history, gendered social and power dynamics remain a challenge for the country's elite political women (Rambukwella and Ruwanpura, 2016). A significant number of male respondents I spoke with have the perception that women refrain from public political affiliation. They think that "women cannot manage politics," and "engagement in politics may destroy the reputation of women and it could lead to family disputes." Most female respondents have a similar perception to men. Female respondents think that "engaging in politics is men's work and not women's".

Consequently, most women in the Watta are engaged outside the homework in unpaid welfare work and regular everyday practices, which are primarily limited to women's circles. This unequal status is evident in women's under-representation in political and decision-making positions in the Watta. 52 year old Lalitha is a well-known person in the Watta because of her engagement in social activities. She was the president of the funeral aid society when this study was conducted. Lalitha said she got interested in involvement in social activities from her elder brother, who spent most of his time with the people. Through experience from involvement in social activities over a period of more than fifteen years, Lalitha recounted how difficult it is to be involved as a woman:

Involvement in social work (in associations directly) is not an easy task for a woman in this Watta. First of all, we (women) have to prepare ourselves to listen to direct and indirect criticism. Mainly Watta people spread it as a form of rumours through gossip. Although both men and women appreciate our services, a small mistake could harm our reputation. The most challenging task is to maintain our dignity while working with men. When we engage with social services, we have to work with men and a minor incident can destroy our name and self-respect. That is why most women in the Watta do not engage in any social activities, although they have interests and capacities to do it. We need support, encouragement and understanding from our spouse and family members; if not, social work will end up with family dispute (Female, 52 years, Buddhist).

Like Lalitha, most of the women I interviewed have a similar perception of women's involvement in social activities. Similar expectations are held by broader society, which have been highlighted by Jayawardena and Alwis (1996), Rambukwella and Ruwanpura (2016). Besides, Lalitha and two other women hold the positions of president, secretary and treasurer of the funeral aid society partly because men in the Watta are not interested in undertaking this unpaid work. Nearly six years earlier, the society was functioning badly due to the lack of involvement and interest of men. Two years earlier, these women's groups took responsibility. However, during the interview, Lalitha

mentioned that it was difficult to successfully carry out this work without the support of men in the Watta.

Faith-based organisations, which are mainly operated by men, have also influenced the creation of ethnic/religiously-based associations to exclusively support a selected group of women. The Hindu women's association, discussed in Chapter six, is an excellent example of how ethnic based organisations are formed to serve Hindu devotees in the Watta. Similarly, a programme for Muslim women organised by the mosque president with his daughter's help (discussed in Chapter five) is also considered as differing from existing cosmopolitanism among women in the Watta. Although there is a reasonable justification to create this type of organisation, they nonetheless disturb the everyday interaction of different women's groups. Since they are economically marginalised and depend on support from internal and external institutions, they have to obey men's instructions. Thus, individually and at the community level, women are expected to adhere to socially constructed, gendered roles. They face many challenges to retain relationships constructed with culturally diverse groups. Any conflicts among men in the public space directly impact the household and women mostly have to obey their husbands. As a result of conflict between men, women may lose the opportunity to spend time with their neighbour. Thus, the engagement of women in the neighbourhood is fragile and partly outside of women's control; as a consequence, the next generation also loses social learning opportunities and this contributes to gradual, long-term change in the Watta.

7.4. Social reproduction in the Watta

This section focuses on children in the Watta and how emerging critical social issues control the opportunity to mingle with other children. As I highlighted earlier in this section, the Watta is a unique place which provides a space for people with diverse cultural backgrounds to mingle together. Living together with difference with due respect for other cultures has come from the childhood of residents of the Watta. Many respondents mentioned that when they were a child, there was sufficient space in the Watta, allowing them to play with friends from different ethnic groups. As mentioned in an earlier section, most social networks in the Watta were established through this type of social learning from residents' childhood. When looking at cosmopolitanism among Watta residents, they do not intentionally mingle with others. The physical space of the Watta plays a key role in shaping these interactions between people and accelerating the formation of cultural bonds. Children playing with friends from different cultures is an essential method of social learning through which their cultural understanding develops. However, most parents complain that Watta is changing with a growing threat of emerging social tensions.

Existing research suggests that social networks have a crucial role in facilitating interactivity in low-income settlements. For a variety of requirements, women in particular rely on kin and neighbourhood networks (Kottegoda, 2004; Ruwanpura, 2008; Perera, 2015: 2016; Lakshman *et al.*, 2016; Abeyasekara *et al.*, 2019). For instance, 'sharing childcare among neighbours, close friends, and family groups demonstrates how women actively interact with such networks for their own advantage as well as for the sake of their households (Kottegoda, 2004, p. 239).' Although Watta has also had

comparable experiences and sharing through social networks, things have changed recently.

Most of the residents interviewed were concerned about the situation in the Watta from the perspective of raising their children. Abuse of drugs was highlighted by almost all parents interviewed. Devi is a 51 year old mother of three sons who moved to the Watta in 1983. She reported that when she moved to this neighbourhood after her marriage, there was no drug issue compared to the current situation. She expressed her concern for children in the Watta and how difficult it is to keep them safe:

Earlier, this place was good; but, the situation has been changing a lot. The current situation of this place is becoming more and more problematic. So many issues are happening due to drugs. Here use of drugs and alcohol is high. In this area, heroin, ice and several kinds of drug tablets are available for sale. Some children gradually become addicted to these. My own children are addicted to drugs now. My elder son started to engage with drugs when he was seventeen. One day, I saw him travelling on a bike with a person who sells drugs. So, if he travels with him today, tomorrow he will do the same. I quickly prepared a passport and sent him to Malaysia. But all mothers do not have such control over their children and some are already addicted (Female, 51 years, Hindu).

Sumedha is the mother of two daughters. When I interviewed her, she was very keen to move away from the Watta because of increasing drug-related disturbances. She was very critical of the social changes that have been occurring in the Watta recently. She said:

We are very eager to leave this place. It is a challenge to raise our children here. Some are leaving from here so that they can raise their children in better ways. Alcoholism and drugs are very prevalent here. Nothing is acceptable, including the words people speak, dresses and behaviour. Not only boys, it's even challenging to raise girls in this Watta. How can we leave our kids' future in a place even if we cannot say the name of the place to outsiders? They [outsiders] do not have a good reputation for this Watta (Female, 42 years, Buddhist).

When I visited the Watta after the Easter attack, I heard that Sumedha had left the Watta to Kadawatha 16 kilometres from Colombo, where a majority of Sinhalese live. Outsiders perception of the neighbourhood influenced Sumedha's decision to leave. She felt that the increasing problems in the Watta would not provide a promising future for her children. The survey result of the Migrants of Margins projects revealed that around 90.0 percent of male respondents and around 80.0 per cent of female respondents indicated that the Watta does not have a good reputation amongst people from outside. This perception of outsiders disturbs parents who want a better future for their children.

However, according to other respondents, the situation is changing in more positive ways compared with the past. 42 year old Ramesh is a father of two children, a son and a daughter, both studying at school. According to him, drugs are not a significant issue in the Watta because only a small group of people are involved and if parents are vigilant, they can guide their children properly. He also assumes that the perception of the neighbourhood will change with time:

In comparison with the past, the problems have been reducing in the Watta. If there are drugs and thefts happening today, only a few people are involved in it and they do not carry out these things on a large scale. The new generation has changed a lot. Those stereotypical name-callings [for this area] will diminish with time (Male, 42 years, Christian).

Only a few parents, mainly those born in the Watta, seriously believe that positive changes will occur. Yet the parents who are eager to provide a better future for their children with good education, employment and decent lifestyle are concerned about many disturbances emerging in the Watta. Not only drug consumption but also emerging attitudes and behaviour changes such as using filthy words, not respecting elders and patterns of dressing are examples highlighted by many parents during

interviews. Although the Watta is a convenient place in many ways, increasing social issues are a significant reason for parents to move from the neighbourhood because of their children's future. However, every parent does not have the opportunity to send their children abroad or leave the Watta like Devi and Sumedha. Therefore, as a precautionary measure, parents adopt other approaches that threaten social learning.

With the aim of keeping children safe, many parents restrict their children's free movement in the community. Some parents encourage their children to engage in extracurricular activities, such as tuition classes and religious classes that I highlighted in Chapter 5. Extracurricular activities ensure that children's attention focus on matters outside of the Watta and children would have little or no time to mingle with 'bad company' in the community. Though helpful in resolving parents' immediate concerns, these mechanisms are not conducive to developing social ties among community members in the long run. The restriction of children's free movement within the community will not facilitate social integration between the members of younger generations. It is an important issue that concerns Watta residents' coexistence and threatens its long-term unity as a community. 58 year old Selvam is very concerned about the changes in the Watta in recent years. He believes that the existing coexistence will not appear in the future. He states, "It does not mean that people will fight each other, but they may not mingle together as we are experiencing today." Describing his reasons for this view, Selvam said,

In our time [when we were children], we all played together in the field. When we had spare time, we always stayed together and tried to do something together. I remember most of the days I had meals at Sinhala and Muslim friends' homes. I used to call friends' family members 'mom' and 'sister'. Although we belong to different ethnic groups, our parents did not have any concerns about it. In our circle, we had friends from all ethnic groups. But look at the current

generation; they do not have a life we experienced when we were young. Now, parents are more concerned about their children's future. So, they are always behind them to provide education. Children are restricted to go out and how can they mix with others? I think they might have only a few friends within the same religious, ethnic groups (Male, 58 years, Hindu).

Although Selvam is concerned about the lack of space for children to mingle in their free time due to parents' restrictions, some are happy about their decision to develop more engagement with religious institutions. Parents think that attending religious institutions and getting religious education will help children avoid the wrong path and will good for their future. Also, it will prevent them from engaging with drugs and bad company in the Watta. Anoma has a small grocery shop in the neighbourhood and she believes that religious knowledge will bring the children to the right path. According to her,

The current generation of children is growing up with religious understanding. Our children visit the village temple and educate themselves with religious knowledge. There is an intellectual generation here. Earlier, the temple was smaller and no such programme was conducted. Now it has been developed and the new priest hopes to bring Watta children on the right path with proper religious knowledge. Due to that, our Watta children are growing up with good manners (Female, 56 years, Buddhist).

On Sunday mornings, I observed Buddhist children moving to the temple wearing white clothes. Christian children went to Bible church, Hindu Children go to the Kovil and Muslim children go to the nearest Muslim school (Ahadiyya) to obtain a religious education. On weekdays, after school, most of them follow tuition classes in the neighbourhood and elsewhere. Although these religious institutions provide religious knowledge to these children, this practice restricts the space for diverse groups to mingle together. Even the school education of Sri Lanka also segregates children according to ethnicity and religion because of the ethnic base schooling system. Since they lose the opportunity to interact with diverse groups in the school, free movement

and playing together in the Watta is the only space for them to engage with others. When children are cut off from the traditional mechanism of free movement, they also lose opportunities for linguistic fluency and mutual understanding of other cultures that they grasp through the socialisation of friends in the Watta. As a consequence, the space to learn cultural traditions through social learning is becoming threatened. This segregation could threaten the cultural fabric of the Watta people, which they have experienced and enjoyed for many decades.

7.5 Conclusion

Watta culture is unique, allowing different groups to interact with each other in everyday life. The significance of social networks, women's roles and social reproduction are three key ways in which Watta culture develops to help people understand different groups' cultures and construct mutual understanding. However, the opportunity to interact through these methods has been reducing. It is difficult to avoid close relationships among different groups because of the high population density and economic marginalisation. People enjoy many benefits through social networks. While providing material and non-material support, these networks also provide space for diverse cultural groups to interact in everyday life.

However, increasing in-migration and emerging environment-related problems weaken the existing social networks and restrict the construction of new bonds. The Watta is a shelter for most migrants because of its affordability and convenient location. Some people in the host community assume that increasing migration disturbs the social and physical environment that they have enjoyed for a long time. Therefore, some of them take up opportunities to move away from the Watta when they arise. Similarly, a

significant number of new migrants are also waiting to move out of the Watta because of the growing problems in the physical environment. People understand the Watta does not have a good reputation among outsiders. Most parents firmly believe that there is no better future for their children in this neighbourhood. Since people are waiting to move out of the Watta, existing social networks become weaker and people gradually lose the space to mingle with others.

The engagement of women also helps to establish close interactions among diverse groups of people in the Watta. Compared with men, both homemakers and income-generating women spend most of their time in the Watta. Everyday interaction in many places leads to sharing of many things, from childcare to instant money exchange. Newly arrived migrant women receive tremendous support from their neighbours, which helps them quickly adapt to the Watta culture. Some interactions go beyond informal relationships and establish formal associations in the neighbourhood. Some women's associations offer help in many ways for women regardless of their ethnic or religious background to overcome financial issues. However, with emerging ethnoreligious consciousness and masculine values in the culture, the women often face many challenges to retain their engagement in the Watta. The challenges women face limit interaction among women and the space for the next generation to understand one another's culture through social learning.

Increasing social issues, mainly drugs, severely affect Watta residents' lives. One of the main reasons for the existing coexistence in the neighbourhood is that many people grew up together. They have enjoyed their spare time with their friends since childhood. Most of them develop knowledge of others' culture through social learning from their

childhood. However, to prevent children from engaging with bad company and to protect them from drug-related issues, parents now widely restrict children's free moment. This restriction could harm the long-term development of the area as many of the existing senior members in the community learnt about others through this informal interaction from their childhood. Children are gradually losing the opportunity to engage with other children in the Watta because of parents' restrictions. Parents are more concerned about giving their children religious education to prevent them taking up bad habits. This practice leads to segregation along lines of ethnicity and religion.

With all these difficulties, people still have hope in the Watta. Abdul and Selvam are senior members of the community. They think that Watta people can continue their coexistence. Abdul states:

people here always look at themselves and this environment from a negative perspective. I also agree that this neighbourhood needs to be changed in term of social and physical settings. But people have to understand those changes will not come from the sky. They have to work together to overcome those issues without waiting for politicians and others to help us (Male, 60 years, Muslim).

Selvam states that people may not leave here if certain things in the Watta change. To keep the people, he states:

If we want to stop such a movement and to make them live here, some changes should be made in this area. Houses should be built properly, drainage and wastewater discharge should be adequately maintained and the government should come forward to eradicate alcoholism and drugs usage. These changes would decrease the negative perception of the Watta (Male, 58 years, Hindu).

Watta residents have to remain in this place to maintain the Watta culture. They have to continue their engagement through social networks, women's engagement and social reproduction. If the Watta could overcome existing social issues with significant changes to the physical environment people would remain in this neighbourhood. The Watta is

the only space that produces a unique 'Watta culture' that allows diverse groups' engagement, which is essential to maintain its existing cosmopolitanism.

CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction: Revisiting the context

This thesis aimed to provide an understanding of the way in which culturally diverse groups live together in low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo. I used 'subaltern cosmopolitanism' and 'multilevel governance' to explore how economically and socially marginalised people live together and the problems that may arise. Subaltern cosmopolitanism frames an explanation of how diverse groups mingle together, including what produces conviviality and tension. Multi-level governance is used to understand how low-income settlements interact with diverse stakeholders in governance and how these interactions impact the cosmopolitanism of subaltern groups. In this thesis, I have found extensive evidence that subaltern cosmopolitanism does exist in this low-income neighbourhood. Culturally diverse Wadulla Watta is a prominent example of living with difference. However, governance dynamics from different levels and various stakeholders have a substantial impact on the cosmopolitan life of Watta residents. I argued that tensions between different religious groups do not emerge because of the everyday interaction of Watta residents but are triggered by external influences. These elements of external governance are a significant factor that affect the coexistence of the Watta community. In order to formulate my argument, I structured the thesis into eight chapters.

Chapter two aimed to identify research gaps by reviewing literature related to the main theories, subaltern cosmopolitanism and multilevel governance. These concepts have only rarely been studied in relation to low-income neighbourhoods. The chapter traced an important recent approach that argues that cosmopolitanism is not an exclusive, elite phenomenon. Although low-income neighbourhoods are inevitably networked with

external actors through multilevel governance, the ways in which this impacts the everyday life of inhabitants is not widely researched. This chapter also discussed the suitability of Colombo to this study. Drawing on archival work, I demonstrated that Colombo has been home to people from diverse ethnic groups and has experienced cosmopolitan elements for centuries. The final part of this chapter elaborated research questions for further investigation through amalgamating theories and empirical evidence.

In Chapter three, I discussed the selection of study areas and methods used in the research. This chapter describes the origin and development of low-income neighbourhoods in Colombo and the appropriateness of Wadulla Watta for this study. It also justified the relevance and importance of the ethnographic approach used in this study as well as data collection methods such as observation, interviews and archival research. Positionality determines a researcher's reception during fieldwork and influences interpretation of context; I discussed my positionality in this study and how on balance it strengthened my interactions with Watta residents.

In Chapter four, I focused on how ethnic categorisations change over time through analysis of the national census of Sri Lanka. I argued that ethnic categorisation in Sri Lanka is closely linked with the census initiated by the colonial administrators. This chapter also examines how identity politics emerged in Sri Lanka, how elites have an interest in perpetuating it and how this influenced the spread of identity politics among the working class in the post-colonial period. In the last section of this chapter, I focused on everyday experiences of living together with different ethnic groups in the Watta and the production of a subaltern cosmopolitanism.

The central aim of Chapter five was to explore the ways in which diverse groups interact with each other in the Watta. In this chapter, I focused on the role of religion as a means of both conviviality and tension. This chapter argued that religion is a central part of the lives of residents of the Watta through which different people interact. I noted the events and moments recalled by individuals belonging to different religious groups and the pleasant or tense character of those remembered experiences. However, now the Watta is changing, in line with society more broadly. People are increasingly likely to view each other suspiciously and religious authorities have initiated programmes to 'protect' their religion and people. Most of these suspicions were created in the post-war era by politicians and religious revivalist movements from outside the Watta and religious and local leaders in the Watta. Thus, I conclude that religion is a significant new factor creating tensions and division in the Watta.

In Chapter Six, I explored the key stakeholders in the multilevel governance of the Watta. By examining internal and external stakeholders, I addressed how they influence decisions concerning the Watta. The everyday life of subaltern groups in the Watta is strongly related to the dynamics of governance since they depend so frequently on external support, particularly during moments of crisis. A small group of people are influential in Watta governance and channel outsiders' involvement through party politics, welfare assistance and development actions. These activities have always had some impact stimulating divisions, but the chapter highlighted a recent tendency for them to become more orientated around existing religious and ethnic divisions. This has exacerbated these divisions.

In Chapter seven, I characterised 'Watta culture', a pattern of behaviour and expectations that has been learned throughout residents' lives and examined the way in which Watta culture is changing. This chapter explored the importance of social networks and particularly women's role in constructing mutual understanding among different groups. I argued that the Watta has a unique culture, distinct from wider society, which frames the interaction of very different groups in everyday life. Because of its high population density and economic marginalisation, close relationships between different groups are actually hard to avoid. Watta residents enjoy many benefits through social networks. While providing material and non-material support, these networks also provide space for diverse cultural groups to interact in everyday life. However, in this chapter, I also explored how emerging ethnoreligious consciousness challenges the existing culture and threatens the next generation's understanding of others' culture through social learning.

In this final chapter, I conclude the study by answering the three key research questions of this study: (i) Can cosmopolitanism operate in low-income neighbourhoods? (ii) How does multilevel governance function in low-income neighbourhoods? (iii) How does multilevel governance impact on cosmopolitanism of residents of low-income neighbourhoods? Furthermore, I revisit the methods and their significance to studying the diversity of subaltern groups in low-income neighbourhoods. In the following section, I highlight the significant contribution of the study to knowledge. The last part of this chapter provides the overall conclusions of the study.

8.2 Can cosmopolitanism operate in low-income neighbourhoods?

The Watta is a unique geographic location that intensifies the reciprocal relationship between different groups in everyday engagement. One of the essential characteristics observed throughout the research in this neighbourhood is multicultural diversity, which turns the Watta into an exceptional place of cosmopolitanism. Ethnically, religiously and linguistically, different people live as one community in this congested neighbourhood. In contrast to wealthier neighbourhoods, it is difficult to avoid interacting with others in the Watta setting because of the limited space and population density. The way cosmopolitanism is constructed in the Watta can be most clearly observed through (a) social networks, (b) the engagement of women and (c) the religious landscape.

Geographical layout and economic marginalisation are two salient factors strengthening social networks in Wadulla Watta. Social networks provide an ideal opportunity for diverse groups to mingle together. While providing material and non-material support, these networks are also a platform for diverse cultural groups to interact in everyday life. The physical space of the Watta plays a key role in shaping interactions between people and accelerating the formation of cultural bonds. Residents' understanding of other's cultures is usually developed through everyday life in the neighbourhood from childhood. Social learning from childhood is an essential method through which children learn to live with their friends from diverse cultures. In dense communities like Wadulla Watta, people are closely tied in multiple ways, establishing social networks among residents. These networks help people stay in touch with existing contacts and support the formation of new interactions.

Mutual understanding and respect for other cultures is a fundamental element of cosmopolitanism that can be observed as part of everyday life among women in the Watta. The role of women in creating informal networks within marginalised communities is much more important than that of men as they spend more time in the community and engage in a wide variety of family and community activities. Interaction among women is essential to manage everyday life and especially in emergencies like floods. Mutual understanding and sharing would not be possible if women did not interact with each other in the community. Food preparation and sharing with others is a valuable tradition followed by Watta residents for a long time. The sharing of food with due respect not only creates a convivial moment for providers, it also stimulates a real understanding among receivers. In a crisis situation like a flood, most women get together and cook for all people who have been affected. They do not feel this is a burden. At the same time, they do not consider differences with others; they are all Watta residents regardless of ethnicity and religion. Compared with men, women spent more time with their neighbours. These interactions help them share information and receive help; beyond that, discussing experiences also helps them relieve stress. Thus the engagement between women in the Watta plays a significant role in the construction of mutual understanding and respect.

Religion is a central site of cosmopolitanism in the Watta. The majority of people, regardless of religious divisions, were proud of the diversity of religious institutions and the way in which people participate in festivals of other religions as a symbol of coexistence in the Watta. The religious landscape of the Watta neighbourhood highlights how religious institutions are located in close proximity and how people who

belong to different religions interact with each other. In other parts of the country it is uncommon to see people participating in the religious festivals of others. Religious festivals appear to be convivial moments for most residents in this neighbourhood. Religion is an essential factor in interacting with different people in the Watta and has been for a long time. Understanding others stimulates residents to support each other in various ways in everyday life, particularly during festivals. Apart from belief, people contribute to festivals and religious institutions because of friendliness. Religious festivals are a joyful occasion for the majority in the Watta in which everyone, regardless of age, gender or religion, can get involved.

8.3 How does multilevel governance function in low-income neighbourhoods?

The everyday lives of subaltern groups in the Watta are strongly influenced by the dynamics of governance. The study finds that governance does impact the cosmopolitanism of the Wadulla community. Watta governance is particularly complex as it includes both internal and external stakeholders representing different levels. Three key influential agents are (i) religious leaders (ii) residents' associations and (iii) local leaders. Individually and as a group these agents have substantial power in decision making and control over the Watta. Politicians and faith-based organisations and donors are prominent external stakeholders who influence events in the Watta through intermediaries amongst the residents.

Religious leaders of all faiths play an important role in Watta governance because of the privileges they enjoy in the name of religion. This crucial role of religious leaders provides a prominent and influential position from which they may become involved in

Watta matters. However, none of these leaders was born or raised in the Watta. They have all come from outside and most continue to live elsewhere. These leaders have an influential role in these religious-centric associations and they are key decision-makers for their community. In addition to spiritual activities, residents expect material and financial support from these leaders and religious institutions. This expectation has emerged and is stimulated because of the activities of the Evangelical Church. Through observing how the pastor and the church help their followers, people who belong to other faiths have come to expect a similar kind of material help from their own religious leaders. Therefore, religious leaders and religious associations are bound to fulfil expectations of material support for their people, at least on special occasions. Thus, these leaders seek help from outsiders to bring support for their followers. This invitation from religious leaders provides an easy introduction and entry to outsiders to approach the Watta and influence Watta matters. Religious based welfare provision affects the multi-ethnic coexistence in the Watta in multiple ways, which I discussed in the next section.

Residents' associations have had a significant influence on Watta governance for a long time. Community members have formed these associations for various reasons and in different periods. Committee members of the earliest associations originated from diverse backgrounds. Their activities and outcomes were focused on the entire Wadulla community, not restricted to a particular group. Now these associations are closely engaged with politics and religious organisations, however. Some office bearers are affiliated with outside politicians and political parties. Holding a key position in

associations is the fastest way to become well known among Watta residents. Thus, some office bearers use these associations as a ladder to get involved in party politics.

Further, in an attempt to restrict religious conversion and secure their faith, religious and local leaders have initiated welfare programmes exclusively for selected groups. The recent trend in the Watta is to establish associations along religious or ethnic lines to serve a specific group, which severely affects the traditionally multi-ethnic nature of associations in the Watta. These days residents' associations in the Watta are managed and controlled by politicians, faith-based organisations and their representatives.

Most local leaders are well-known individuals, often born and raised in the Watta or having lived in the neighbourhood for a long time. They become influential individuals in Watta governance. Multitasking abilities and links to various networks promote an ordinary person to become a local leader. As gatekeepers between residents and external organisations, they manage Watta needs in many ways. Regardless of ethnicity and religion, residents consider an individual as a local leader who voluntarily participates in everyday matters on behalf of Watta residents. Besides, some other prominent personalities who are financially well-off and have a better affiliation with outside politicians also turn to local leaders due to their reputation in the Watta. Holding a key position in associations is a path to becoming a local leader, getting involved in politics, and maintaining close relationships with outsiders. Their politics significantly influences Watta governance, and their activities occasionally create tension in the neighbourhood.

While religious leaders, residential associations and local leaders emerge and operate within the community, politicians, religious organisations and donors come from outside. The connections between internal and external stakeholders highlight how multiple stakeholders must coordinate to govern the Watta at multiple different levels. While politicians and religious institutions are involved in Watta governance with a clear mission, individual donors' involvement is temporary, restricted to emergencies. However, in terms of outside interaction, only a few prominent individuals in the Watta have a link with outside organisations, such as religious leaders of Hindu and Buddhist temples, church, president of the mosque committee, local political leaders and key members in the organising committees. Having these positions, the influence of these leaders in Watta governance will grow significantly.

8.4 How does multilevel governance impact the cosmopolitanism of Watta residents?

This study demonstrated that subaltern cosmopolitanism does exist among Watta residents. The high density physical layout and commonalities of socioeconomic status help to produce mutual understanding of others' cultural background. Diverse ethnic, religious and language composition along with significant in-migration have made Wadulla Watta a multicultural community. The cultural landscape of the Watta provides visible evidence that people live with mutual understanding in this densely populated place. However, the Watta is changing along with the wider society. Instead of embracing multicultural diversity, residents from all groups are becoming more concerned with ethnoreligious differences. Poverty and lack of regulation of the area means that residents have to depend on politicians, donors and other institutions to meet their various needs. The impact of governance on the cosmopolitanism of these

subaltern residents in the Watta can be distinguished through (i) religious conversion, (ii) party politics and (iii) welfare assistance.

Religion plays a significant role in the life of Watta residents. It has been emphasised as a key element that diverse groups mix with each other. However, traditional religious interaction leading to cosmopolitanism in the Watta, as discussed in Chapter five, is gradually declining. Compared with the recent past, religion has become a significant factor that creates tension between residents. Religious conversion is one of the most significant causes of religious tension in this community. Sinhalese and Tamils view religious conversion as a serious matter, seen as unethical and fraudulent since it is motivated by material support. The Evangelical Church receives financial and material support from its local donors and international networks. With the help of outsiders, they have organised various programmes, including welfare provision, to attract vulnerable and marginalised people. Compared with other religions in the Watta, the Evangelical Church is well organised. Its members often visit homes to convey their faith. As a new religion to the Watta, it brings something that people have not seen before. Some programmes, which do not have strictly enforced gender separation, are exclusively designed for young people. Given this flexibility and convenience, teenagers are attracted to this new faith.

Conversion is not motivated exclusively by material support, however. Some internal issues, such as caste, improper guidance and lack of awareness of faith are also cited as reasons for conversion. Watta residents convert to overcome social and economic hardship. Some residents and religious leaders are aware that people turn to other

religions due to a lack of support from their own but they are unable to retain their believers due to financial constraints.

Intermarriage is another factor affecting religious conversion, which also leads to tension among residents. Cross marriage was a significant phenomenon among the previous generation in this neighbourhood and became a significant way of connecting people who belong to a different religion. Although some residents view intermarriage as a positive factor that leads to coexistence, some others are more critical since it also often leads to conversion. Some residents reported thinking that some religions indirectly encourage intermarriage as a strategy of religious conversion because of the emerging religious consciousness. Post-marriage religious obligations and conversions are the key reason that cause people to consider intermarriages problematic.

Politically, Wadulla Watta is significant because it holds a substantial number of votes to elect local and national political representatives. Thus, all main political party members who contest this area maintain a close relationship with the Watta through local leaders. Due to the absence of essential services, residents also rely on politicians to fulfil their needs. Politicians use various strategies to enhance their votes in this neighbourhood. During the election period, politicians use ethnic slogans in this ethnically heterogeneous community to increase votes. This inevitably creates further division along ethnic lines. Politicians are aware that they can enhance votes when interacting with people who prioritise ethnic and religious identification.

Until recently, residents prioritised party politics. Yet, associations and local leaders try to maintain their power in the neighbourhood and residents also support associations

through which they can get personal benefits. The shift in political affiliation according to ethnic identity indicates that an ethnopolitical perspective is becoming more common among residents. It directly impacts the coexistence that Watta residents have enjoyed for a long time when resource allocation becomes politicised in favour of a particular ethnic or religious group. Residents attempt to select and support politicians from their ethnic group when they feel others have neglected them on the basis of ethnicity, in the hope they will gain benefits or protection if their ethnic group members come into power. It is easy to approach economically disadvantaged people through material support that disturbs peaceful coexistence. The involvement of ethnic-based political parties disrupted the coexistence of the Watta community. Ultimately competition in politics and favouritism have divided people in ethnic terms.

Welfare contributions related to religion are one of the most significant ways that outsiders have become involved in the Watta. Organisers of religious events in the Watta often rely on outside donors to conduct religious festivals successfully. They not only approach external donors for festivals, but for most development work and various needs in religious institutions. At present, most of the welfare support from outside reaches the Watta through religious associations. This is a new trend in Watta governance since religious institutions offer a fast, easy way to reach the community. People become popular quickly when they interact with religious institutions and support functions. In the name of religion, these individuals attempt to fulfil a broader political agenda. Therefore, at present, welfare provision from religious institutions has become controversial in the neighbourhood.

In an emerging trend in the Watta, religious organisations and local leaders focus on co-religionists and supporters when they deliver welfare assistance. When relief comes through politicians, local leaders feel they must give it to their supporters first. Similarly, when welfare comes through religious institutions, members of the associations consider their own group first. The Hindu women's association is a good example that focuses on the welfare association for a limited, selected group of people to achieve a universal goal of poverty alleviation. When welfare support is organised for a particular group, it leads to tension with those who did not benefit. As a result of the research methods used, fieldwork revealed evidence of these hidden tensions. The following section describes the methods used in this study and how they contributed to knowledge production in this study.

8.5 Methodological significance

Doing ethnographic research in a place like Wadulla Watta would be difficult without the trust of the residents. Nearly twelve months of direct observation provided the basis for a rich descriptive source to understand the everyday life of the Watta community. Without ethnographic methods, it would be much more challenging to understand the culture and dynamic social interaction of the Watta residents.

The Watta looks problematic to outsiders because of its reputation and associations with organised crime and drugs. I therefore began by explaining the research to key political figures, such as the area police officer, Divisional Secretariat, Grama Niladhari, religious leaders and local leaders. This approach helped to avoid unnecessary issues and misunderstandings and also made smooth entry to the study area. However, I faced a significant challenge to convince the chief priest of the main Buddhist temple because

of my Muslim identity. When I started fieldwork, there was a tense situation between Sinhalese and Muslims in some parts of the country. Mobs and rioters led by radical, neo-nationalist Buddhists attacked Muslims and their property in several towns in central and southern Sri Lanka. As a result, approaching a Buddhist priest in the Watta as an unknown person was not as easy as I had initially assumed it would be. The authority of the priest in the Watta revealed the substantial power held by religious leaders. Although I eventually convinced him and we developed a good relationship during the fieldwork, this incident shows how such a fundamental encounter for the research turned on complete chance. The researcher's identity could play an essential role in researching these types of neighbourhoods in the future because of the Easter Sunday bomb blast in Sri Lanka. Specifically, ethnographic methods where the researcher has to spend a significant time in the field might face a more significant challenge.

Positionality also played an essential role during the fieldwork and writing stage of this study. My identity, gender, cultural competencies and language fluency allowed a smooth entry to the Watta and facilitated nearly twelve months in the field without any practical difficulties. On certain occasions, my positionality was more of a barrier, for example, the incident with the Buddhist priest and some Buddhist residents, meant that I had to spend a significant time convincing them because of my identity. Apart from that, my identity, nationality and way of dressing facilitated my engagement with the Watta residents. Although the Watta is not a restricted place for a stranger to move around, I always tried to ensure that my presence did not create any unnecessary issues.

Language fluency was an essential element for the success of this ethnographic study. My fluency in two of the national languages, Tamil and Sinhala, helped in numerous ways in all stages of fieldwork. A non-native researcher could employ an assistant to interpret during interviews or use a translator to translate them afterwards. However, such a researcher may encounter challenges to understand informal chats as well as non-verbal language in public places, such as three-wheeler stand, grocery shops, tea stalls, marriage, funeral and during festivals. Since Watta residents primarily used Sinhala and Tamil, my language fluency helped me interact with residents and understand their everyday colloquial language without further assistance.

I have been living in Colombo for nearly two decades. My own home is only a few kilometres from Wadulla Watta. Proximity to the study area and previous research experience helped me understand the culture, lifestyle and behaviour of the Watta residents. I did not consider Watta culture too different from the everyday life of my own neighbourhood. I have seen many similarities between the Watta and the place where I live. Thus, gradually, I felt like an insider. From an insider's perspective, I was not concerned with certain events as an essential element for the research so at one stage, I had to remind myself to observe closely what happens in the Watta. Thus, although I could fit into the area smoothly and quickly, as a researcher I realised I could also easily overlook certain events in everyday life because of my familiarity with the culture.

On the other hand, Watta residents saw me as an outsider. They were well aware that my presence in the Watta was temporary and that I came from outside their area, even if my home was fairly nearby. In terms of identity, culture and language, I am very similar

to Watta residents. Nevertheless, they did not see me as one of them. Their sense of belonging is very spatially constrained. They consider only those who live in Wadulla Watta as Watta residents. Although I often considered myself an insider, from the point of view of Watta residents I was certainly an outsider. Therefore, in this study, I consider my positionality to be an inbetweenener. My positionality was a tremendous help in carrying out ethnographic research successfully and understanding the broader context.

8.6 Contribution to knowledge

The first contribution of this thesis is that it opens a pathway to consider low-income neighbourhoods in a more inclusive way, at least in the Sri Lankan context. Historically these settlements have been viewed as a problematic place. Living together with difference is a significant characteristic of subalterns in these neighbourhoods; nevertheless, these positive elements of slum residents are not widely recognised. Multicultural aspects of low-income residents have not attracted the attention of the external world. Exploring everyday interaction with diverse groups in this settlement, I conclude that the Watta culture is unique in the wider society. Although living with differences is a challenge in many places, places like Wadulla Watta still enjoy cultural diversity. Thus, this important characteristic of Watta residents is an excellent example for Sri Lanka.

Secondly, this study adds a new perspective to existing knowledge. By demonstrating that cosmopolitanism is part of the everyday life of low-income residents in Colombo, this thesis strengthens the argument that cosmopolitanism is not exclusively an elite phenomenon. Also adding a new insight that subaltern cosmopolitanism exists among the Watta residents in Colombo. Through this study, I further argue that the low-income

settlements in Colombo are networked with diverse stakeholders from different scales. This conclusion that multilevel governance is also applied to study the life of urban subalterns because it significantly disturbs the cosmopolitanism of residents.

Finally, I emphasise the methodological contribution of this study for future researchers. Without an ethnographic approach, it would be challenging to understand how people get along with each other in the Watta on a daily basis, and difficult to identify the conviviality and tension of this culturally diverse group when they engage in everyday life. Also, my positionality as an inbetweeners provides a good basis for future researchers on how to approach these types of neighbourhoods. It also shows what practices they have to strengthen to engage with them. Cultural understanding and linguistic fluency will help researchers excavate hidden elements of everyday interaction.

8.7 Conclusion

Unity in diversity is a perfect slogan to refer to Wadulla Watta. This place has been established layer upon layer by economically and socially marginalised people within a spatially constrained physical area, creating extremely dense living arrangements and subject to continual in-migration. Cosmopolitanism refers to living together with a culturally diverse community with mutual understanding and moral engagement; Watta culture is an excellent example. Heterogeneous communities in terms of ethnicity, religion, and language have lived together for many decades. Through everyday engagement, they have created their own form of cosmopolitanism. Their life is a blend of conviviality and tension; nevertheless, ethnic and religious identities have not formed the basis for physical conflict between individuals or groups, at least in public.

Understanding others' cultures is a part of everyday life that has been enabled with social learning from childhood. However, the Watta is changing in similar ways to the wider society. Although the physical layout of the Watta does not allow people to segregate, the division in ethnicity and religion now arises in the community.

As highlighted in the previous section, both external and internal factors lead to these divisions. Financial and material support is the primary reason residents, religious institutions and residential associations in the Watta depend on external stakeholders. Politicians attempt to influence the ways in which residents vote. Faith-based institutions and individuals approach the people either to protect them from religious conversion or to spread religion. One of the fundamental questions arising in this study is whether it is possible to destroy a long-term construction of mutual understanding through these external influences.

When looking at Sri Lankan society, cultural clashes between major ethnic groups have been significant at a national level. As pointed out in Chapters 4 and 5, some Buddhists in the Watta also worship Hindu gods and goddesses, and some Hindus worship Buddha. This is a common practice through which Sinhalese and Tamils interact closely on a religious and cultural basis. Similarly, the Christian community in the Watta intersects ethnically with both Sinhalese and Tamils. They also have similar cultural practices in terms of clothing, food and practices of worship focused on statues in everyday life. It allows all three ethnic groups except Muslims to visit one another's religious places. However, Muslims have deviated from other communities in the Watta and the country because of religious and cultural practices. Thus, significant tension has arisen in the

Watta recently between Muslims and Sinhalese due to differing religious and cultural practices.

Ethnoreligious tensions have characterised Sri Lankan society for centuries. Except for a few minor incidents, most violence has been carried out by the ethnic and religious majority Sinhala Buddhists against minority groups. The majoritarian ideology that emerged in colonial times has fuelled chauvinism and direct attacks against selected groups. For example, ethnic politics have been used to frame attacks on Tamils and religious practices have provided a justification for attacking Muslims and Christians.

The ethnic sentiments that have driven the country's political and religious movements in the post-war era also rejuvenated the Sinhala Buddhist consciousness among some key Sinhala Buddhist leaders in the Watta. As I highlighted in various places in this study, external stakeholders with the support of Watta leaders can significantly influence Watta residents' lives. Ethno-centric politics and religious-centric welfare fuelled by outsiders gradually spread to the Watta through the intermediaries of local leaders. It has significantly changed and challenged the tolerance so far maintained by Sinhala Buddhists. Like the support given by Buddhist movements to the 1956 election campaign of S.W.R.D Bandaranaike, revivalist Buddhist movements in the post-war period supported the Rajapaksa government. On this occasion, religious divisions against Muslims have come to the forefront of the country's politics.

Anti-Muslim discourse contributed to the return to power of former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa as President of Sri Lanka. The president's inauguration ceremony carried strong symbolic reminders of Sinhalese supremacy. The increasing militarisation

in the public sector heavily influences civilian life in multiple ways. Increasing ethnoreligious consciousness of Watta residents is causing ethnic polarisation in the Watta setting.

The Easter Sunday suicide bomb attack in April 2019 opened a new chapter in hostility towards Sri Lanka's Muslim community. This has now reached the Watta. Like the majority community in the country, Watta residents also see practices such as the dress code of Muslim women, Adhan and religious education as problematic. They critique these differences in public and link them with extremism. The Evangelical Church is also facing a similar situation. At present, there is no conflict with Tamil groups, at least in public. Maintaining coexistence, however, will be a challenge for Watta residents in the future.

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