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Recording, Translating and Interpreting Sri Lankan Chronicle Data

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Prologue

I profess a religion which I not only inherit from birth but which I have also studied, examined and evaluated over a period of well over three score years and ten. For me it is not a Winter coat nor a shirt for Summer wear. No matter in which part of the world I lived, my religion has been my inseparable companion. While I was a student at the University of Cambridge from 1949 to 1951, I lived in the midst of a host of renowned theologians like Canon Raven and Rev. Bouquet. While teaching Buddhism at the University of Toronto in Canada from 1969 to 1972, I was cross-appointed to the Department of Theology. Professionally, circumstances have never necessitated me to re-tailor my religion or dye it in a different colour. This watchful critical eye which I keep on my own religion has crossed over with me to the recent twelve years of my life as a Buddhist monk. Even today, I speak about Buddhism but not for Buddhism.

The subject of my paper forms an integral part of the study of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka which is the theme of our Conference today. This subject has engaged my attention for more than three decades. Even prior to Sri Lanka's Independence of 1948, we've heard rumblings of this

ethnic tremor. Political grey-beards of the times, men who were born and bred under colonial patronage, in a culturally alienated set up in their own homeland, both before and after Independence, were probably not adequately forewarned about it. Even in their graves, these heroes of the bygone days, have to be answerable for the inestimable disaster in which the country has been plunged today. But those who knew more sensitively Sri Lankan history in proper perspective thought differently, silently though. Their voices were never heard

Composition of the Early Sri Lankan Community

During the time the Sri Lankan chronicles like the *Dapavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa* were compiled about the 5th century c.e. Sri Lanka was unquestionably called the land of the Sinhala. The Chinese traveller monk Fa Hsien, journeying through India during the years 399 to 414 C.E., who came to Sri Lanka circa fifth century C.E. seems to refer to Sri Lanka as the country of Sinhala [See *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* - James Legge / Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi 1991. p.100 f.]. This means 'the Country of the Lion.' In the same work, Fa Hsien translates the name of the country into Chinese as *Shih tse kuo* which means the country of the lion progeny.

On the other hand, Hiuen Tsiang whose travels over India spread from 629 to 645 C.E. [but had not the opportunity to visit Sri Lanka] refers repeatedly to this country as Sinhala, i.e. Seng -chia-lo. [See *Buddhist Records Of The Western World* - Samuel Beal / Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi 1983. ii. p. 206 f.]. Referring to the island of Sinhala, he seems to use the Chinese characters *Chi-sse-tseu* [Ibid. i. p. 188].

Taking into consideration these references by the Chinese travellers whose activities stretch over a period of two to three centuries, we are inclined to believe that they would have been

necessarily backed by local traditions of at least two or three preceding centuries which held this country of Sri Lanka as the land of the Sinhalas, further backed by the legendary belief that these people trace back their origin to a *Lion Community* [*Shih-tse kuo*]. This line of thinking certainly is not due to the *Mahavamsa* influencing the visitors to the island. Obviously the Chronicles of Sri Lanka themselves inherit a much older tradition regarding the early inhabitants of the island.

This early use of the word Sinhala to refer to the island as well as to the people of Sri Lanka, far from giving any indication with regard to the precise demographic situation of the island population, indicates the unquestioned and unassailable position of leadership of the Sinhala people in the island. We do not believe that this evidence is exclusive and shuts out the possibility of the existence of other ethnic groups in the land. With the proximity of the island to the mainland of India, it is reasonable to assume that a few people from the neighbourhood of the adjacent country moved in here from time to time and soon learnt to co-exist in a spirit of friendship with the people of their new homeland. This may well be before the official introduction of Buddhism to the island during the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa [247- 207 B.C].

A bit of fragmentary evidence incidentally recorded in the *Mahavamsa* offers a further valuable point in this direction. Chapter xix of the said Chronicle which describes in detail the arrival in Sri Lanka of the branch of the Bodhi Tree in India, refers to a Brahmin by the name of Tivakka who lived in that northern most region of the island. The Sri Lankan King Devanampiya Tissa who received this gift of the Bodhi Tree sent by his friend Emperor Asoka at the northern port of Jambukola is said to have made offerings to the Bodhi at the village of Brahmin Tivakka [*Tivakkassa Brahmanassa gamadvare ca bhapati thapapetva mahabodhim thanesu tesu tesu ca. Mahavamsa. Ch.xix. v. 36*].

Tivakkassa Brahmanassa gamadvare of the above quote would mean to us one of two things or both. It can mean either i) a Brahmin village to which Tivakka belongs or ii) a village [not necessarily Brahmin] of which Tivakka Brahmin is the chieftain. Both put together, he can also be a chieftain of a Brahmin village. What emerges out of this is that referring to events of six or seven centuries earlier, the *Mahavamsa* speaks of a Brahmin or of Brahmins living in that northern part of Sri Lanka at that time. They can probably be both non-Buddhist and non-Sinhala. But they are, small though, indeed a part of the Sri Lankan community. Undoubtedly they were regarded and treated so. Collectively they seemed to have constituted a part of a co-operative friendly society.

Further proof of this amity and friendship is provided in the same Chronicle [Ch.xix. vv 53 and 60] where we are told that the Brahmin Tivakka referred to earlier, together with many Khattiyas [Kshatriya] from Kajaragama and Candanagama arrived in Anuradhapura for the Bodhi Festival. We are further told in verses 60 and 61 that out of thirty two Bodhi saplings which were produced by the newly planted parent tree, one each were sent for planting to the townships of Tivakka Brahmana, Candanagama and Kajaragama. The mention here of one named Brahmin and of others as Khattiyas from two distinct localities make us guess about the existence of several other ethnic groups, non-Sinhala and apparently non-Buddhist too, who though relatively small in number, shared with the major community the cultural life of the island.

These are best bits of evidence we can gather from our ancient chronicles regarding the peaceful co-existence of several distinct groups who integrated themselves so well with the major community, admitting their leadership and sharing their cultural heritage. Towards the furtherance of this wholesome and healthy spirit in the growth of a

nation with a collectivist ideology, the ruler seems to have contributed immensely. Thus was the role played by King Devanampiya Tissa.

The New Religion and its Cultural Impact

Quoting from the Sri Lankan chronicles, we have shown above that at the time of the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, there probably existed in the island a co-operative and peace-loving body of people whose minorities or smaller segments of different ethnic groups seem to have blended efficiently well with the majority. It is a well established fact in history that wherever Buddhism went, China, Korea and Japan in the east or Afghanistan, Bactria, Iran and Iraq in the Middle East, it carried with it a rich wave of new culture, enriching the lives of the new converts. It is well worth noting here what Sri Jawaharlal Nehru has written about this new wave of acculturation in his great classic *The Discovery of India* (p. 105)

Buddhism spread rapidly in India from Kashmir to Ceylon. It penetrated into Nepal and later reached Tibet and China and Mongolia. In India, one of the consequences of this was the growth of vegetarianism and abstention from alcoholic drinks. Till then both Brahmins and *Kshatriyas* often ate meat and took wine. Animal sacrifice was forbidden.

Here is Professor B.A. Litvinsky writing about the early impact of Buddhism in the Middle East. In the words of Barthold , neither the Sassanian state nor its official religion, Zoroastrianism, ever comprised the entire Iranian world. In the later-period cultural life of the Iranian world, Buddhist Iran played a part of no less importance than Zoroastrian Iran. He further writes [*Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* - IV. p. 151 f.]:

The above gives us grounds for radically reviewing the role played by Buddhism in the history of Western Turkistan

civilization. In the course of more than 500 years, from the 1st - 2nd to the 7th-8th centuries A.C., Buddhism and the associated elements of secular culture were an important component in the life Western Turkistan society. Its impact did not come to an end with the Arab conquest and the spread of Islam. Buddhism offers a clue to the origin and essence of many phenomena of medieval (Muslim) spiritual and material culture.

The Healthy Growth of the Sinhala Nation

The receptivity of the Sri Lankans, particularly of the ladies of the royal household, at grasping the fundamentals of the new religion, reveals an incredibly noteworthy high-water mark in Sri Lankan culture. Princess Anula, the wife of the king's younger brother Mahanaga, came with five hundred women to meet Thera Mahinda on his arrival in the island, bringing the message of Buddhism. Listening to his sermons, she is said to have attained the first stage of spiritual uplift. Thereupon she informed the king that, together with her five hundred ladies, she wanted to join the higher religious life as nuns. It was a remarkable step forward in spiritual culture in human history anywhere in the world.

At this juncture, the king took very prompt action to facilitate the establishment of an order of Buddhist nuns [*bhikkhuni*] in Sri Lanka. On the advice of Thera Mahinda, the king sent word to Emperor Asoka and invited Theri Sanghamitta, i.e. Mahinda's own sister, to come to Sri Lanka and perform the task of ordaining Anula and her court ladies, conforming to the established Vinaya traditions. Sanghamitta, on her visit to Sri Lanka was accompanied by several accomplished Buddhist nuns of Indian origin who are specifically referred to as being young in years [*eta dahara bhikkhuniyo Jambhudapa idhagata*. Dpv. Ch. xviii. v. 12. See also *Mahavamsa*. Ch. xix. vv. 64-84]. She also brought to Sri Lanka a branch of the sacred Bodhi Tree in India.

Thanks to the vision and wisdom of the ruler of the land, within a very short period of time after the introduction of the new religion, Sri Lanka came to possess a dedicated and vibrant body of Sangha of both sexes, of Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. Buddhist learning and Buddhist living apparently went hand in hand. The young nuns who came from India were reputed students of the Vinaya, Dhamma and the Abhidhamma and they are reported to have recited these in the city of Anuradhapura. They obviously popularized and propagated the study of the Tripitaka, both in Anuradhapura and subsequently at Rohana too in the south. As *Dipavamsa* repeatedly records [See Ch. xviii.], the knowledge of these nuns of the Tripitaka seems to have been all inclusive.

Target of Envy and Attack

We also discover that this tremendous success in the cultural growth of Sri Lanka in this part of the world, with a geo-physical and more or less ethnic independence of its own, seems to have appeared to many ethnic sub-groups in peninsular India of the Deccan a thorn in the flesh. To many of them, this may have appeared a veritable threat to their survival. And this for two reasons. The first is the emergence of a vast religio-cultural empire on both sides of their homeland of the Deccan. On the southern side, the threat of Sri Lanka emerging as a new progressive religious block, with very close ties with Asoka's Buddhist India in the north. The other would invariably have been, particularly after the Kalinga war of annexation of Asoka, the rise of Sri Lanka on the southern edge of their homeland, as a political power with equally strong alliances with the Asokan empire of the north.

Early monastic literary and historical records of Pali Commentaries known as *Atthakatha* [or *Viharavamsa Atthakatha*], the Pali chronicles like the *Mahavamsa* and the *Dipavamsa*, and the village level popular records like the *Rasavahini* and the *Sahassavatthu* written in the

Pali language, all know of the distressing episodes of regular invasions from the neighbouring subcontinent.

These neighbouring communities must have also entertained on their own, expansionist political ideas of finding in Sri Lanka, as a growing up new political unit, new pastures for their own over growing native populations. Sri Lanka, they would have very naturally believed, could possibly offer them more land for settlement of people, more opportunities for employment and more chances for acquiring wealth by whatever means, fair or foul. The concentration of non-Sri Lankans [or inhabitants of Dravidian or South Indian origin] we discover today in the more northern regions of the island clearly points towards this.

It is this vision of fulfilment of multiple needs and requirements, we believe, that perhaps led from time to time to the infiltration into Sri Lanka of inhabitants of peninsular India. They undoubtedly did use force and come as invaders in groups of varying magnitude, large or small. Once within the island, they did use violence and rob, plunder and even kill to gain their own ends. Depending on the degree of success, they even set up petty provincial power pockets and claim themselves rulers over the region or the community. Thus they came to possess claims for traditional homelands. Within a hundred years after the introduction of Buddhism, Anuradhapura came to be under the rule of a Tamil king by the name of Elara.

Menacing Hostile Neighbours in Action

Sri Lankan history records that what began as a positive threat to peace and prosperity of the island country in and around the time of Dutthagamani, namely violent militant attacks from neighbouring India, continued intermittently thereafter for centuries. The Eminent Sri Lankan historian, Senarat Paranavitana records [*University History of Ceylon* Vol.I. p.563] as follows.

The Buddhist religion suffered great calamities during the Cola occupation and the extensive monasteries which flourished at Anuradhapura and other places in the tenth century were abandoned. The *dagabas* were broken into, and the valuables deposited in their relic-chambers were plundered. It is in this very complex situation of political ramification that disastrous threats to the newly established Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka were showing themselves up in many ways. The invader from the neighbouring subcontinent seems, in the first instance, to have been keener and sharper on the destruction and elimination of whatever were the external mainstays of the new religion.

The invaders seem to have worked on their mission of destruction with Machiavellian ingenuity. Speaking of these assaults on Buddhism in Anuradhapura, it is said that their main target was the Buddhist monk. Physical attacks were directed at him. The miscreants tore apart the robes the monks wore. Their begging bowls were plundered and damaged. The life of the monk in the midst of this unseen enemy was insecure.

The invader also ruthlessly attacked Buddhist places of worship like the Bodhi trees which they mercilessly cut down and the *stupas* which they broke into in search of valuables deposited therein [*thapadisu asakkaram karonte Damile tatha. Mahavamsa. Ch. xxiii. v. 9*]. The impetuous behaviour of this infiltrating invader was unspeakably sacrilegious. This threat to Buddhism was not any less dreadful than the sword of Democlese of classical mythology. It made little sense to the people of the time as well as to those who ruled the country [both who valued their newly inherited religious culture well above their lives] to take lightly the danger of these events.

Variegated Records of Bitter History

The *Rasavahini* describes these vividly and in great detail as follows.

*Anuradhapuram rammam saggakhandamva bhasuram
 akamsu Damaa sabbam susanam viya amakam.
 Cetiyanī ca bhindimsu malakapi manorama
 channita ta samantasum manussakunapakula.
 Chindanti abhiruhitvana mahitam suranaradihi
 dumindam tassa sakha ca sandussenti maladihi.
 Buddharaṇi bhindanta vasanta patimaghare
 anacaram karonte te tiracchanava Damita
 Disvana bhikkhavo tattha acchindanti ca cavare
 bhindanti chattapattepi khipanta kathaladayo.*

[Rasavahini pp.79-80 Saranatissa 1907]

These ethnic and religious bickerings which were inflicted by the neighbours on the smaller island community of the Sinhālas who were Buddhists would not have been, in the early stages, anything more than nibbling on the fringes. However, absence of retaliatory action on the part of the aggrieved Sinhālas seems to have been apparently misjudged as weakness. It is through such gradual deterioration on account of gross neglect that Anuradhapura had fallen into the hands of the invader with Elara on the throne.

Time had come, and that within a century after the introduction of Buddhism, to take serious note of this threat [the threat to the religion and culture of the people], of the menacing neighbour. The ruler at the time, being non-Buddhist and non-Sinhāla, [whatever else sense of justice he might have had in his own head or heart according to the author of the Mahāvamsa], sufficient deterrent action does not seem to

have been taken to arrest these acts of villainous behaviour. The people of the land, grieving over the threatening disaster, and the absence of any law enforcement to rectify the situation, evidently had to take the law into their hands. Wherever they detected and discovered the miscreants, the justifiably angered people dealt with them severely. The depletion of the population of the menacing invader appears to have even been reported to the king who at that stage seems to have initiated investigation. *Rasavahini* once gain details out these in the following.

Devabrahmasuradahi muddhana nicca manditam
saggapavaggasukhadam sammambuddhasasanam
Nasenti Damitadani kapparukhamva aggina
ayuttam tam udikkhitva saddhenedha upakkhitum.
Mantvana Nandi te Damite gahetva jatakodhasa
arum akkamma padena hatthena itaran tu so.
Gahetva sampadatetva bahikkhipati thamava
deva antaradhapenti tena khittam kalebaram.
Evamevam nisagamma karonte tena anvaham
Damitanam khayam disva jana rannno nivedayum.
Sahasa ganhathenanti raja tesam niyojayi. [Rasavahini p. 80]

King Kakavanna Tissa [Kavantissa] of Rohana in the south, father of Dutthagamini [101-77 B.C.E.], had already sensed the danger of these infiltrations. He was no political imbecile. He was conscious of the need to safeguard the political integrity of the island country and the cultural identity of its people. This is the major threat which Sri Lanka was facing a generation before the time of Dutthagamini.

History shows us that growth of religious power is as much a cause of envy and bitter hostility as the triumphs of political power. Through historical studies one can discover the vicissitudes of Buddhism in South India in the centuries that followed, almost to a point of total expulsion of Buddhism from that region. It is in this same line of aggression and encroachment that the attacks on the cultural achievements of Sri Lanka made their way to the island in this very early period.

Emerging from such a historical context, we are not surprised that Dutthagamini had to take a firm decision to get down to action. There is not the slightest doubt that he had studied his brief very carefully and was confident of his line of action. It had been well sensed and sorted out for him. To his father, the strategy was already known. Our literary sources like the *Mahavamsa* and the *Rasavahini*, though of course at different levels of authenticity and acceptability, are full of information about what Dutthagaminis father, Kakavanna Tissa, with his political sagacity, had done in anticipation to arrest the incoming tide of political infiltration. Being the ruler of the south of the island, he knew the path of the invader. He picked up a midway point at Dighavapi and appointed his second son Tissa there as the provincial ruler, to look after its security, after setting up adequate granaries and garrisons.

Raja rajasutam Tissam Dighavapimhi vasayi arakkhitum janapadam sampannabalavahinim. [Mahavamsa Ch. xxiv. v. 2]

Rajapi tesam gama-nigama-khetta-vatthu-adani datva Tissakunaram janapada-rakkhanattham balavahane datvaDighavapim pesesi. [Rasavahini p. 66]

The Rise of a Defender of the Faith

Seeing and hearing of what was happening around him, Dutthagamini had no alternative but to conclude that time was ripe for action.

Situation was more than provocative and he felt his military strength was adequate for the task.

Kumaro Gamana kale sampassanto balam sakam

yujjhissam Damitehati pituranno kathapayi [Mahavamsa Ch. xxiv. v. 3]

[Gamani kumaro] so hatth-assa-ratha-padadi-caturanga-senam dasa-maha-yodhe ca passanto idani Damitehi saddhim yujjhissamati cintetva tam pavattim ranno kathapesi. Kaloyam me lokasasananuggaham katum. Tato me tam anujanatati. [Rasavahini p. 66]

On this issue of when exactly to strike the enemy, both the *Mahavamsa* and the *Rasavahini* highlight the disagreement between the father and the son. Out of an extra sense of security for his son [*raja tam anurakkhanto*], the father seems to have dissuaded him from going into battle at that moment. But reviewing the father's apprehension of the threat of the invader and his earlier line of action of military preparation referred to earlier, we cannot but point out an error of judgement when the chronicles make the father say that the land south of the river is enough for us [*oragangam alam iti. Mahavamsa. xxiv. v. 4*]. These words put into the mouth of the father, suggesting a total abandonment of the encounter with the enemy, does not, in our opinion, make the father necessarily a seeker after peace. It is no more than a bit of misconceived showmanship.

Chroniclers Bungle

The chronicles make a ridiculously mock dramatic situation of getting the son, in retaliation, to send his father ornaments befitting a woman' in chastisement of his alleged cowardice, not living up to his manly courage.

Pita me puriso honto nevam vakkhati tenidam

*Pilandhatati pesesi itthalankaram assa so. [Mahavamsa. Ch. xxiv. v. 5]
[Rasavahini p. 68]*

In an attempt to illogically glorify Dutthagamini as a hero of a unique type, we see the *Mahavamsa* making a couple of serious blunders like this. We shall handle them in due course. Chapter xxv of the *Mahavamsa* sees Dutthagamini setting out in full battle array to fight the enemy beyond his own kingdom in the south [*paragangam gamissami*] to make the religion of the Buddha shine in its full glory [*jotetum sasanam aham*]. Judging by what has preceded this situation in Sri Lankan history, and not deliberately putting the telescope on the blind eye, we have every reason to believe the honesty of Dutthagamini's motive. He knew the cause for which he was fighting.

Sri Lanka was predominantly the land of the Sihalas. Buddhism was their religion and in those early years the entire culture pattern of the land was based on Buddhism. Whoever ruled the land had to be a defender of the faith of the people. As Dutthagamini goes out to war with the invader, he has to take with him what was symbolic of the cause for which he was fighting. So in his own symbol of royalty, namely the royal sceptre which was carried ahead of him wherever he went, he had the relics of the Buddha deposited [*kunte dhatum nidhapetva Mahavamsa. Ch.xxv. v.1*].

The people of Sri Lanka, down the centuries, fully understood the significance of this. The Pali *Thupavamsa* while talking of the story of the Mirisavetiya uses this same reference to the *kunta* with the relics. The ancient Sinhala translation of this work which belongs to the 13th century translates this as *dhatu sahita jayakontaya*. This means the imperial sceptre with the relics deposited in it. Furthermore, subsequent Sinhala literature of the early period, following the Sinhala translation of the *Thupavamsa* referred to above, very definitely emphasize the idea of the *kunta* as the royal sceptre. While the *Saddharmalankaraya* [14th

century] repeats the *Thupavamsaya* phrase *dhatu sahita jayakontaya*, adding also the phrase *magul kontaya*, the *Saddharmaratnakaraya* [15th century] has the phrase *dhatu pitavu jayamaha kontaya*.

Criminal Errors in the Hands of Translators

The misunderstanding and mistranslating of this vital sentence by an early Buddhist scholar monk of Sri Lanka [1912], and followed without question by equally eminent lay professors has led to calamitous results.

George Turner who was the first to translate the *Mahavamsa* into English, and that as far back as 1837, although not a son of the soil, clearly grasped and sized up the historical circumstances of the Dutugemunu Elara war, showing complete familiarity with the authentic Sri Lankan tradition which apparently had suffered no contamination so far. Turner translates the word *kunta* as the sceptre and imperial sceptre. Wijesinghe's second edition of 1889 carries the same rendering intact.

Around 1887 Hikkhaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thera appears to have completed his Sinhala translation of the *Mahavamsa* and this came out in print in 1912. What sort of historical tradition or inspirational background he had immediately before him, we are not certain. But in translating the word *kunta*, he first used the identical term *kuntaya* in Sinhala [Ch.25. v.1] and at its second occurrence at Ch. 25. v.9. translates it as *kuntayudhaya*, i.e. the weapon *kunta*. This, we are compelled to call a grave error of very serious consequences. This has enabled later writers on Sri Lankan history to give the national and religious consciousness of the day an unfortunately malicious slant.

We have clearly indicated above, and in great detail, the circumstances which compelled Dutthagamini to go into battle against the foreign invader who was wrecking Buddhism and its cultural heritage in the island. It was necessarily a war of defence and liberation. He was going to fight it out like a gentleman. Even his treatment of dead

Elara who fell in battle establishes this beyond doubt. We are quite certain that he would not descend so low as to carry relics of the Buddha in a spear-like killer weapon or *ayudhaya*.

This is a scandalous wedlock and carries with it a taint of vulgarity which tarnishes the exalted character of Dutthagamini. It is this same royal sceptre with relics of the Buddha deposited therein which he took along with him when he went to war that he used subsequently, in time of peace, as a symbol of royalty, when he went for water sports in the Tisawewa. The story would have it that this sceptre associated with war got immovably fixed on the ground where it was placed during the king's bathing. It had to be buried there for ever. This is the origin of the Mirisavetiya *stupa* which was built over it, terminating, as it were, all associations with war. First ever act of disarmament, as it were.

Historical Incidents Misjudged and Misreported

The most important and equally controversial in the life of Dutthagamini are the reports about his post-war reactions. Few scholars, as far as we know, seem to be aware that these reports are decisively divided. They come from two entirely different camps. The *Mahavamsa*, and its very close village-level follower, the *Rasavahini*, take the view that Dutthagamini, after his final triumph over the invader, was taken with remorse over the loss of life during the battles. That he had to crush as many as thirty two provincial rulers or sub-kings of the enemy [*dvatimsa Damila-rajano jinitva*] is widely known to everybody. This is what decides victory in war. No body goes to war without an awareness of this need to crush the enemy.

Some Sri Lankan chroniclers or history writers [in the *Mahavamsa* and in the *Rasavahini*] who obviously are familiar with the story of Asoka of India and are over enthusiastic about identifying their own hero

Dutthagamini with Asoka as a great Buddhist king in as many details as possible, seem to attempt to create a parallel in the story of Dutthagamini with Asoka's post-Kalinga-war lament over the loss of life in battle. Dutthagamini himself is made to make this confession of guilt of causing the death of people in battle to a visiting team of arahants, who are dramatically brought on the scene, flying through the air.

Dutthagamini is made to express his regret and remorse in the following words.

Kathannu bhante assaso mama hessati yena me

*akkhohinamahasenaghato karapito iti. [Mahavamsa Ch. xxv. 108]
[Rasavahini p. 76]*

How can there be comfort to me, O Sirs, me who has brought about the death of many men in battle?

Compare what Asoka says after his Kalinga war of annexation, as recorded in the Rock Edict XII: The Beloved of the Gods felt profound sorrow and regret because the conquest of a people previously unconquered involves slaughter, death and deportation. But one is not to forget the circumstances that prompted these two national heroes in two different parts of the world. They undoubtedly stand on two different pedestals .

A Non-Buddhist Solution - Both Clumsy and Incompatible

Poetic ingenuity and dramatic creativity of these Sri Lankan chroniclers seem to have led them to the fabrication of these historical absurdities. Having put their good king into this historically absurd situation of regret, remorse and repent, the chroniclers fabricate equally fanciful stories of arahants coming from the northern islands to console him.

Piyangudape arahanto natva tam tassa takkitam

attharahante pahesum tamassasetum issaram. [Mahavamsa. Ch. xxv. v. 104]

They are made to tell the king that among those killed in the war, one only had taken the three-fold refuge and yet another one only had accepted the observance of the five precepts. Therefore the total killed amounted to only one and half humans. The rest are no better than animals [*sesa pasusama mata Mahavamsa. Ch. xxv. v. 110*]. On the basis of this argument, the so-called *arahants* are made to absolve the king of his self-pronounced guilt of mans slaughter in the battle. This, we believe, is a disastrous distortion of facts, unnecessarily fabricated and complicated, whether deliberate or otherwise.

Modern Researchers and Their Perpetuation of Heresies

It is extremely lamentable to find Sri Lankan researchers of recent times who take these references as gospel truth. One does not know whether it is in blissful ignorance of the other side of the story or in deliberate mischief. We maintain that both are equally disastrous and ruinous.

We discover in the *Viharavamsa Atthakatha* [Historical Records of the Monasteries], as against the chronicles like the *Mahavamsa*, an entirely different presentation of Dutthagamini 's post-war reactions. We have repeatedly, and we believe convincingly pointed out the historical realities of pre-Dutthagamini Sri Lanka, specially with regard to the temperament of the contemporary non-Sinhala ethnic groups living in the northern regions of Sri Lanka, particularly in the neighbourhood of the cultural centre of Anuradhapura.

At least over a period of two generations, these injuries and insults in the hands of the invaders had been suffered by the native Sinhalas who were legitimately rejoicing over the cultural heritage they had received from the Buddhist Emperor Asoka of North India. Whoever thought they had a right to call themselves rulers of this land had to

come forward to redress this situation, to safeguard the newly inherited nearly global Buddhist culture and to enable the people of the land to live in peace and prosperity. Two generations of royalty in the south, King Kavantissa and his household, we believe the father and the mother and the two sons, were getting painfully sensitive to this. The strategy was carefully planned over decades, as is clearly evident, first by the father, and lines of action carefully thought out. Dutthagamani only took over the reins at the correct time, and moved into action with the unanimous support of the people of the land.

Under his command, he had a band of well-trained dedicated and loyal soldiers, swordsmen, archers, horsemen etc. who accompanied him on this triumphant march. On his way from the south to Anuradhapura, he had to meet as many as thirty two provincial rulers whom he crushed completely [*dvattimsa Damita-rajano vijitva*]. Finally Dutthagamani slew Elara in a hand to hand fight in Anuradhapura. He was thereupon anointed king over the territory. Knowing fully well what Dutthagamani embarked upon in this venture, it only requires a reasonable degree of sanity to determine his post war mood.

Revelation of the Truth

The *Viharavamsa Atthakatha* referred to above [which we believe belongs to an older and more authentic and unbiased tradition than the Chronicles] records precisely what we believe would have been Dutthagamani's feelings after his triumph in this war of liberation. Here is the *Sumangalavilasini*, Commentary to the *Digha Nikaya*, recording this with commendable precision.

Ayam pana attho Dutthagamani Abhayavatthuna dapetabbo. So kira dvattimsa Damitarajano vijitva Anuradhature pattabhiseko laddhasomanassena masam niddam na labhi. Tato niddam na labhami bhanteti bhikkhusanghassa acikkhi. Tena hi maharaja ajja patova

uposatham adhitthahati. So uposatham adhitthasi. Sangho gantva Cittayamakam sajjhayathati attha tbhidhammika-bhikkha pesesi. Te gantva Nipajja tvam maharajati vatva sajjhayam arabhimsu. Raja sajjhayam sunantova niddam okkami... Natthi bho mayham ayyakassa darakanam ajanana-bhesajjam nama. Yava nidda-bhesajjampi jananti yevati aha. [Sumangalavilasini PTS. II. p.640] [Sumangalavilasini II. Simon Hevavitara Bequest XIX. p.452]

The meaning of this is to be clarified with the aid of the story of Dutthagamini Abhaya. As for him - He having conquered thirty two Tamil rulers, was anointed as king in Anuradhapura and on account of the joy he gained, he could not sleep. Thereupon he informed the community of monks that he could not sleep. [They replied] If that were so, your majesty, this morning itself you observe the Uposatha. He did take upon himself the observance of the *uposatha*. The Sangha sent eight Abhidhammika monks, asking them to go and chant the *Citta-yamaka* selection [of the *Samyutta Nikaya*]. They went and asking the king to lie down, commenced the recital. The king, as he listened to the recital, fell asleep... The king remarked : There is no medicine that the disciples of my Master do not know. They even know sleep-inducing-medicine. [Translated by the author.]

This bit of evidence from the *Atthakatha* is in itself self-explanatory. As far as researchers on Sri Lankan history are concerned, we have yet to see any one who has any idea at all about this side of the story. Whether it is in blissful ignorance or in a bid to conceal what is not in favour of one's own preconceived notions, we have yet to pronounce judgement.

Most of these problems have been thoroughly examined by the present author in 1987 while he was a layman [Professor Jotiya Dhirasekera], in his annual lecture at the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri

Lanka [See *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka - New Series Volume XXXII* - 1989. pp.25-44. *Art. Dutugemunu Episode Re-examined*].

In our opinion, one of the first to be put off on to the wrong track in this area of research or plain history writing is Venerable Walpola Rahula in his *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (1956). We shall take only a few statements of his as typical instances of misinterpretation, both as a result of inadequate examination of data which should have been examined and as a result of over enthusiasm for chastisement generated through misconceptions. See what he says on p.79. Dutthagamani ... organized a great campaign to liberate Buddhism from foreign rule.

We have clearly shown above that at this time there was the urgent need to liberate Buddhism. But from what and from whom should be the next specific question of a researcher. The menacing threat from which Buddhism was suffering at the time is not to be overlooked or minimized. Historically, the stress is not on the foreign rule. Rahula is here unfortunately using an unwarranted inflammatory slogan.

On the same page, he continues with the following. This was the beginning of nationalism among the Sinhalese. ... A kind of religion-nationalism, which almost amounted to fanaticism, roused the whole Sinhalese people. This, we maintain, is more than he could honestly and legitimately say. The *Mahavamsa* nowhere uses the word *Sinhala* in this context. He persists [still on p.79], this time swallowing in its totality the most gullible story of the *Mahavamsa* of Flying Arahants from the northern islands who come to console the grieving king. We are sorry that he either mischievously ignores the Atthakatha evidence of the Sumangalavilasina about the sense of triumph of Dutthagamani quoted earlier or is lamentably unaware of it. Consequently he concludes: A non-Buddhist was not regarded as a human being, [*sesa pasusama mata Mahavamsa*. Ch. xxv.110]

These are all instances of incorrect recording and reporting as well as incorrect interpretation in the hands generations of writers, call them historians, researchers or analysts or whatever you will.

A Word to World Scholarship and Research

Finally, to say the least, it is irreparably damaging to find even in an Oxford University Press [1994] publication, the two errors under discussion the correction of which we published as far back as 1987, i.e. seven years earlier, are repeated in *toto* in what we consider their incorrect form, and apparently weighty arguments are built upon them (See *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, ed. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, Oxford University Press, 1994. p. 309 f.).

It is recorded that in the second century B.C.E., King Duttagamani (Gamani, the ferocious) went to war with a non-Buddhist king, bearing a relic of the Buddha on his spear. He eventually won a bloody victory, but when, as a good Buddhist, he expressed remorse for all people he had killed, he was informed by some monks that he need only worry about two of the victims, who happened to be Buddhists. No mercy was due to the others, said the monks, because the non-Buddhists were not more to be esteemed than beasts.

What a catastrophic misinterpretation based on misinformation. It is our conviction that these references to the relic of the Buddha on his spear as well as remorse for all people he had killed have both to be dumped in the garbage bin in the face of historical realities. In our search for a real solution to the problem, the story of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka must be re-studied with sanity and sobriety. International interference or pressure from anywhere is by no means the answer.

But on p. 272, the book we refer to has this well framed sentence which, we believe, could be used to handle the situation of the Dutthagamani war from a more sensible angle. Talking of Emperor

Ashoka of India to whom we have referred many times in this paper, the book adds the following. He then went on to try to forge *a kingdom in which the various religions could dwell together peaceably*. Even more importantly, he decided that his commitment to the middle way of the Buddha, *although it allowed for self-defence*, excluded all wars of aggression. [Emphasis mine]. Herein lies a lesson. Look for it clearly.

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