



THE CURRENT RELEVANCE OF DASA RAJA DHARMA

The promise of dasa raja dharma (ten principles of Buddhist governance) has been a trademark emotional appeal that our rulers have used to win elections. In 1977 when JR won, our SLBC sycophants played the song "danno budunge" following the announcement of every election result. Premadasa gave Buddhist sermons from temple Trees with TV cameras close by. This sacred practice is being continued today. Besides, Mahinda Chinthanaya simply oozes out with the spirit of dasa raja dharmaya.

I thought of identifying each element of this concept of dasa raja dharmaya in order to ascertain its applicability and its practice today. "These (principles) are not mentioned by the Buddha in any particular discourse," says Professor Kapila Abhayawansa former Professor of Buddhist Culture in Sri Lanka and now working as Professor of Buddhist Studies in a University in Thailand. "They come in Jatakas," Shall we take these elements in order?

1. Dana -- Liberality, generosity, charity. The ruler should not have craving and attachment for wealth and property, but should give it away for the welfare of the people. This principle may be regarded as being too idealistic and even unrealistic as rulers are humans beset with all the failings of human beings. Rulers are politicians today and they don't get into politics to give away what they have for the love of the country. Our rulers prefer to utilise public office for private gain and they wouldn't have any guilt in having a go at taxpayer funds or in ensconcing their kith and kin to public offices or in interfering with tender procedure.. This is why they are averse to checks on their power. The FR, AR, and Establishment Code are creations of Western imperialism.

2. Sila -- a moral character. He should never destroy life, cheat, steal and exploit others, commit adultery, utter falsehood, or take intoxicating drinks. I think an important characteristic of leadership is this element of moral integrity. Nor is this principle unrealistic since human beings can be moral beings with a sense of right and wrong and a feeling for others. One does not need to cheat to live or to rule. The fundamental basis for living together is trust and cheat-

ing undermines such trust. Falsehood is also cheating. How do the following acts compare with this principle of sila: the treatment of our of our war hero General Sarath Fonseka? Taking away his stripes and pension? Releasing criminals convicted for double murder but refusing to release this imprisoned hero who is sick with bomb shrapnel embedded in his body fighting as he did for his country? Giving sanctuary to KP? Making Karuna Vice President of the SLFP? Extolling Lichchavi democracy at the UN while crushing democratic dissent at home? No less a person than our Prime Minister alleged that some of our parliamentarians have links with drug dealers. Good? You want more? The list is long.

3. Pariccaga -- sacrificing everything for the good of the people. He must be prepared to give up all personal comfort, name and fame, and even his life, in the interest of the people. Not realistic as no saints take up politics. Gandhi may have adhered somewhat to this but Gandhi was no politician. Our politicians may describe him as a lunatic.

4. Ajjava -- honesty and integrity. He must be free from fear and favour in the discharge of his duties, must be sincere in his intentions, and must not deceive the public. This is relevant and can be applied but our politicians deceive the public all the time with false promises. They grab the media for that purpose and dish out falsehoods with the help of sycophantic backers like the artist who stated that the First Family is along a line of descent from the Buddha.

5. Maddava -- kindness and gentleness. He must possess a genial temperament. Applicable. It is possible for humans-rulers or not- to be kind to others. A virtuous life of kindness to fellow humans and animals gives one pleasure. Allowing dissenting journalists to be murdered in the public street or getting thugs to assault you are not of this kind; nor is the tying of a Samurdi officer to a tree.

6. Tapa -- austerity of habits. He must lead a simple life, and should not indulge in a life of luxury. He must have self-control. Sri Lankan leaders love lavish living. Not long ago, we had a Minister of Foreign Affairs who would take his entire family during his official trips and live in luxury hotels at tax payer expense. He could not be removed until he was mercifully voted out of parliament. While Indian Ministers go about in India- made Hindustan or Fiat our ruling elite are known to mentally salivate when

they see luxury cars.

7. Akkodha -- freedom from envy, ill-will, enmity. He should bear no grudge against anybody. Bearing grudges is a human failing but someone exalted to high positions is big enough to avoid that. Have our rulers refrained from this? You answer.

8. Khanti -- patience, forbearance, tolerance, understanding. He must be able to bear hardships, difficulties and insults without losing his temper. In recent times one political leader I have observed has shown such forbearance is the Leader of the UNP when dealing when dealing with the volatile 'reformists' of his party who jump up to cut his neck whenever a local government poll is lost.

9. Avihimsa -- non-violence, which means not only that he should harm nobody, but that he should try to promote peace by avoiding and preventing war, and everything which involves violence and destruction of life. Now this principle is central to Buddhism and deserves detailed discussion in the current context. We can take it up with the final principle number

10 Avirodha (non-opposition; non-confrontation) as they are related though not the same.

As already suggested, our government's response to the opposition has been essentially confrontational (Avirodha)-liking to have it destroyed somehow. The fact that an Opposition is vital for a functioning democracy is never realized. There is no space for democratic dissent. Either you are with me or against me. If you are not with me you are a traitor. At the Colombo Municipal election campaign one Minister has stated that only a government backed Council will have funds to develop the Municipality. Why have elections at all?

When it came to dealing with the issue of Tamil secession, our rulers all along had no faith in one of the most fundamental tenets of Buddhism, namely ahimsa. Ironically our JHU-led erudite Buddhist monks were the first to discourage ahimsa in confronting the most dangerous crisis in contemporary times. JR first issued a command to Brigadier Weeratunge to vanquish the LTTE by "ceasing and destroying them." Our Peace talk initiatives were adopted not out of ahimsa but out of a percep-



Shyamon Jayasinghe

tion that the war was unwinnable. That assumption had been conveyed to the leadership by the respective Army Commanders of the time. The geopolitical circumstances of the time had also contributed to this assumption. Even the present President carried the assumption and in fact continued with Rani's Peace Accord for a significant. However, he was quick to abandon the peace approach when an Army commander of a different character came up to him and gave his assurance that the war is winnable.

Thus in tackling the LTTE our preference right along had been not to go with Ahimsa. It is not easy to agree with the decision to turn our back to this defining principle of the Buddha Dhamma; that



meant an admission that Buddhism is not a practical doctrine. I believe we failed ahimsa firstly because we did not understand its true potential; least of all the influential monks didn't realize it. Ahimsa assumes an advanced state of consciousness. Secondly, we had no spiritual leaders of the calibre of Gandhi who alone could have led us to that path. Thirdly, the Ahimsa approach to reconciliation must be perceived and felt by the opposition as coming sincerely from the heart. It wasn't so as there was no space in our hearts and minds for a pluralist society of live and let live with other communities. Sinhala Buddhists had been nurtured by school education upwards in the Mahawanse ideology that the island belongs to the Sinhala race. One cannot blame the monk authors of the Deepawansa and Mahawansa; they were not chauvinist but were simply imbued and prodded by a devotion to the Buddha.

Furthermore, at the time the country had not really become so plural and multi cultural as in modern times. However, perhaps as a defence reaction to growing pluralisation of society this ideology integrated much later into the political stream to develop a vicious fundamentalist sectarianism that lay at the heart of the crisis that eventually led to the emergence of an even more vicious counter chauvinism in the form of militant Tamilism.

Forbearance (Khanti) disappeared with the resultant tension. Thus ahimsa failed not because of anything false in the doctrine but because the context for its application was not forthcoming.

Sannasa Online

www.sannasa.net
www.sannasa.com