

THE DUTTHAGAMANI-ELARA CONFLICT :  
A HISTORICAL REINTERPRETATION\*

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History, as Edward Hallett Carr states "is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past".<sup>1</sup> Carr therefore recommended to his students the study of the historian before turning to study the facts handled by him.<sup>2</sup> The 'facts' of early Sri Lankan history are mostly found in the chronicles of the island, the priestly authors of which were preoccupied with the theory and practice of religion. They took religion to be the supremely important factor in all affairs and recorded most things relating to it. It is no surprise therefore that the Dutthagamani-Elara conflict of Sri Lankan history was treated by them chiefly from a religious point of view.

With the dawn of the modern era a 'national consciousness' became pronounced in most countries of the world. In small plural societies like the society in Sri Lanka however it did not reach full maturity. For most Sri Lankans 'race' and 'religion' were more important than the 'nation' in its wider connotations. Consequently, writers including historians, elevated the brief spells of fighting between military adventurers with their small armies in early days of pioneering and colonization into racial and religious wars. They introduced 'Aryan' and 'Dravidian' differences into history and the

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\* This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Seminar on Nationality Problems organized by the Social Scientists' Association of Sri Lanka in December 1979.

1. E.H.Carr, What is History, London 1961, p.24.
2. Ibid., p.17.



Dutthagamani-Elara saga received treatment befitting these circumstances. Their ideas have also crept into school texts and literary writings. A reassessment of the historical treatment of this episode, becomes important therefore not for the glorification of the past nor for emancipating from it; but for the greater understanding of the past as well as the present.

The Dīpavamsa, our earliest extant record of historical tradition, attributed to the middle of the fourth century A.D.,<sup>3</sup> contains only a brief reference to Dutthagamani Abhaya and Elara. It is interesting to note here that Sena and Guttika, the earliest invaders from South India are referred to as Damilas in this account, but Elara is not identified as such. It merely states that the Kshatriya prince named Elara, having killed Asela, ruled righteously for forty-four years. In its recording of events, the Dīpavamsa states further that the prince named Abhaya, the son of Kakavanna, supported by ten warriors, overcame and killed<sup>4</sup> thirty-two kings and thereafter ruled for twenty four years.<sup>4</sup> The objective of the Dīpavamsa was to relate the history of the visits of the Buddha and the introduction of Buddhism into the island which "existed as Sihala after the lion".<sup>5</sup> Thus the author of the Dīpavamsa gave articulation the Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness which was strengthened by subsequent chroniclers. Neither at the time of the writing of the Dīpavamsa, nor during the one or two centuries prior to it, did Sri Lanka experience South Indian invasions; Sinhala and Tamil communities living in the island seem to have existed as best as they could without conflict. This may explain in part the brief and dispassionate nature of the narration of events regarding Elara and Dutthagamani by the author of the Dīpavamsa.

However, the picture appears to have changed completely in the period prior to the writing of the Mahāvamsa. The Mahāvamsa is thought to have been written by a monk named Mahanama of the Mahavihara fraternity in the early years of the sixth century A.D., perhaps during the reign of

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3. University History of Ceylon, Editor in Chief H.C.Ray, Vol.I, Pt.I, 1959, p.48.
  4. DV. XVIII, 47-54.
  5. DV. I, 1: IX, 1.



Moggallana I (491-508).<sup>6</sup> It was compiled "for the serene joy and emotion of the pious" and was more a national epic of the Sinhala Buddhists of the Orthodox Theravada sector than a dynastic history of the island. A few decades before the writing of this chronicle, the country witnessed the rule of six Tamils; Panḍu, Paṛinda, Khudda Paṛinda, Tirīṭara, Dāṭhiya and Piṭhiya (428-455). The exact place of origin of these Tamils is uncertain. The name Panḍu of the first of these rulers, has given rise to the view that they came from the Pandya country. The Sinhala sources, the Pujāvali and the Rajāvali refer to them as being Tamils from the Cola country. The period in South Indian history from about the fourth century A.D. to about the middle of the sixth century is usually referred to as the Kalabhra interregnum and according to Tamil tradition, the Kalabhras kept the Colas and Pandyas in subjection. Perhaps the incursion of Tamils into Sri Lanka in the fifth century, which brought the island under foreign rule for a little over a quarter of a century, was not unconnected with the disturbed conditions that prevailed in South India at the time. The Culavamsa expressly states that Tamil rule did not extend to the southern part of the island, namely Rohana, where the Sinhala nobles had sought refuge. But epigraphic evidence suggests that the rule of at least some of the Tamil kings extended beyond the limits to which the chronicler confines their authority.

Thus it seems that when the Mahāvamsa was written, the element of conflict in the relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils had crystallized. The political threat posed by the Tamil feudal chiefs would have been fresh in the minds of the Sinhalese, and this background would have had some influence on bhikku Mahanama, the Sinhala-Buddhist author of the Mahāvamsa. He was alive and sensitive to the occasional threats posed by Tamil chiefs on Sinhala sovereignty, and by heretical believers to the Mahavihara tradition. For him, not merely non-Buddhists but even those who supported heterodox Buddhist establishments opposed to the orthodox Mahavihara

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6. U.H.C. Vol. I, Pt. I, p.49.

7. Ibid., pp. 292-293.



were heretics.<sup>8</sup> A dominant purification theme that suggests Sri Lanka should be free from all heretics is found throughout in the Mahāvamsa. It is no wonder then, that the author selected Dutthagamani, who unified the whole island under one banner for the first time in history and patronized the Mahavihara establishment tremendously, as the ideal king.

Gamani is first introduced in the Mahāvamsa at the point of his death in his former life. A meritorious Samanera (a novice) concedes at his death-bed to the pleas of Viharadevi, the barren Queen of Kakavanna Tissa of Magama, to be reborn as her son.<sup>9</sup> Thus, entering life with a pre-established record of meritorious action, Gamani is born. In this saga the Mahāvamsa chronicler has portrayed a substantive image of Gamani as an up-and-coming religio-nationalist leader. When Gamani is twelve years old, his full potential for ideal kingship is evinced in a gesture precipitated by his father's request that he should never fight against the Tamils. It is narrated that when the young prince, enraged and frustrated, lay crouched upon his bed, his mother questioned him as to why he lay so; whereupon he replied comparing his bed to the island, "Over there beyond the river are the Tamils; here on this side is the sea; how can I lie with outstretched limbs?"<sup>10</sup>

It is important to examine whether the Mahāvamsa rhetoric provides a clear picture of the historical situation. According to the Mahāvamsa, the Tamils were represented by Elara of noble descent (as opposed to kshatriya descent in the Dīpavamsa) who arrived here from the Coła country.<sup>11</sup> There is no evidence as to the composition of his garrisons and the strength of his army. However, unless Elara had some support in Sri Lanka, it may not have been easy for him to occupy the throne at Anuradhapura for such a long period. As subsequent

8. See e.g. MV XXXVII, 10-11.

9. MV, XXII, 33-40.

10. MV, XVII 78 86

11. MV, XXI, 13.



history shows, most of the foreigners who succeeded in wresting the throne and ruling the country for any considerable length of time have had some indigenous support or had been backed by a foreign power. Unfortunately the chroniclers do not reveal much about this aspect of Elara's rule. Here is yet another instance of what Wilhelm Geiger observed when he stated that "not what is said but what is left unsaid is the besetting difficulty of Sinhalese history."<sup>12</sup>

However, reading between the lines in the Mahāvamsa account, one gets the impression that both Elara and Duddhagamani were participants in a feudal power game and not in a racial war fought between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The Mahāvamsa states that when Elara was on his way to the Cetiya Mountain in a chariot to invite the bhikkhus the nub of the yoke of his chariot struck a dagoba, thereby causing damage to the monument. On this occasion it is said that Elara's ministers told him "Oh king ! our thupa has been damaged by you."<sup>13</sup> This clearly indicates that the ministers of Elara considered the thupa to be theirs, which means that at least the ministers who accompanied Elara in this mission were Buddhists, perhaps also Sinhalese. We also find that one of the generals of Elara was Mitta<sup>14</sup> who was a Sinhalese. His sister's son<sup>15</sup> was Nandimitta, one of Dutthagamani's ten commanders, to whom superhuman exploits have been ascribed in the Mahāvamsa.

Dutthagamani's march northwards in his campaign against Elara was along the right bank of the Mahaveli river. In the process Dutthagamani had defeated Elara's generals known as

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12. Wilhelm Geiger, Cūlavamsa, Eng. Tr. Pt. I, London 1929, P.V.
13. "Deva thupo no tayā bhinno", MV, XXIII, 24; "Deviyani apage saya teme oba visin bindina laday kivuha", Mahāvamsa, Sinh. Tr. Batuvantudawe Devarakshita, Colombo, B.E. 2485, pp.23-24; Geiger's English translation of the original Pali stanza is inaccurate.
14. MV, XXIII, 4.
15. MV, XXIII, 4-15



Chatta, Titthamba, Mahakottha, Gavara, Issariya, Nālika, Dighābhaya, Kapisisa, Kota, Halavabhanaka, Vahitttha, Gamani, Kumbha, Nandika, Khanu, Tamba, Unna and Jambu.<sup>16</sup> The Mahāvamsa states that all these were Tamils but evidence for verification is limited. In the above list at least two names, Gamani and Dighābhaya, seem to be essentially Sinhala-Buddhist names. Dighābhaya was the step brother of Dutthagamani who had been sent to Kaccakatittha along the river Mahavali by Kakavanna Tissa to guard the frontier buffer zone between Rajarata and southern Sri Lanka.<sup>17</sup> It seems he subsequently went over to Elara's camp. For this reason even he is called a damila, surely in a derogatory sense, by the chroniclers.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the name of one of the ten paladins of Dutthagamani, i.e. Velu, sounds like a Tamil name. However, a detailed etymological study of the names and a further examination of historical situations are necessary before arriving at a conclusion. In this connection it is relevant and significant to mention that at one stage in the battle the Sinhalese are said to have killed their compatriots because they had not been able to identify their foe.<sup>19</sup> Such a situation could have occurred only if there had been a substantial number of Sinhalese in Elara's army. The name Bhalluka, which is given to the general who is said to have arrived from South India after Elara's death to fight Dutthagamani, bespeaks a non-Tamil origin. The Dravidian or Tamil equivalent of Bhalluka would have been Phalluka. The Buddhist suttas mention a thera named Bhailuka and it is also interesting to note that two merchants Trapussa and Vallika (Tapassu and Bhalluka) are considered as the founders of the Girihandu

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16. MV, XXV, 7-15.

17. MV, XXIII, 16-17.

18. The word 'damila' is frequently used in the chronicles of Sri Lanka as a general term for inhabitants of the Peninsular Indian Kingdoms South of the Vindhya-Sathpura range.

19. MV, XXV, 16-17.



Dagoba, a later Mahayana shrine in Sri Lanka.<sup>20</sup>

Both the Dīpavamsa and Mahāvamsa refer to the killing of thirty-two kings by the son of Kakavanna Tissa.<sup>21</sup> The two references differ only in detail and the latter states that these thirty-two kings were Tamils. On the basis of this evidence it seems reasonable to assume that there were several semi-independent chiefs in the area north of Rohana when Elara was the foremost ruler in Rajarata and Dutthagamani in Rohana; perhaps Dutthagamani before striking the final blow at Elara's capital, subjugated these semi-independent chiefs in his attempt to unify the island.

In the final battle, Elara fell, pierced by his rival's dart, and subsequently Dutthagamani united Sri Lanka under one royal umbrella. He had funeral rites performed for his defeated enemy. Marking the site of his cremation for posterity he decreed that no one, not even the princes of the land, should pass by the monument without doing honour to the dead king. The Mahāvamsa noted that "even to this day princess of Lanka, when they draw near to this place, are wont to silence their music because of this honour."<sup>22</sup> But time has dealt harshly with Elara's monument. It has disappeared and perhaps the back garden of a government medical officer's residence now contains all that is left of it.

The Mahāvamsa account states that Dutthagamani's campaign against Elara assumed the character of a holy war, the sole objective of which was the perpetuation and glorification of Buddhism. It further states that a band of five hundred bhikkhus from Tissamaharama monastery accompanied the army and that Viharadevi accompanied her son and shared the perils and hardships of the campaign together with the

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20. Epigraphia Zeylanica, IV, pp.153 ff; also see: A.D.T.E.  
 20. Perera, "The Lineage of Elara, King of Anuradhapura and his Possible Relationship With the Aryan Predecessors of the Ruling House of Ceylon", Vidyodaya Journal of Arts, Science and Letters, Vol.III, No.2, July 1970, p.128.  
 21. DV, XVIII, 53-54; MV, XXV, 75.  
 22. MV, XXV, 73-74.



ordinary soldiers.<sup>23</sup> If the Mahāvamsa statement represents a historical event, by allowing five hundred ascetics to accompany Dutthagamani to war, the brotherhood responded in blatant contradiction to Buddha's measure forbidding monks to witness army parades and reviews. Not merely do they witness here, but actually participate in the very activity of war.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the bhikkhu participation in war may have been an innovation by the Mahāvamsa author or the creators of the Mahavihara historical tradition once the political alliance between the Mahavihara fraternity and the king was forged. One of the guiding principles of the Buddhist chronicles of Sri Lanka was the exemplification of the means by which dhammadīpa, or the sanctuary of true religion (Theravada Buddhism) is to be maintained and edified. Accordingly the chroniclers were far less concerned with the historicity of an event than with its significance. In their eyes, Dutthagamani's war was for the protection and promotion of the dhamma to vindicate the Mahavihara and to purify the dhammadīpa. As Bardwell Smith has emphasised; in the Sinhala-Buddhist chronicles, "bare fact was always less important than what the fact signified."<sup>25</sup>

The whole Dutthagamani-Elara episode of the Mahāvamsa signifies the fact that Dutthagamani, having unified the island, established Buddhism on a very secure material basis, through tremendous royal patronage, by building monasteries and shrines of great magnitude in the Mahavihara complex. The Mahāvamsa author, who belonged to the Mahavihara fraternity, glorified the heroic and 'ideal' aspect of Dutthagamani and was far less concerned with the historicity of certain events and situations than with their significance. In a historical sense no evidence is found in the Mahāvamsa to suggest that Buddhists were persecuted under Elara. On the contrary, the chronicle itself states that Elara was a pious and just king and that, though himself a non-Buddhist, he had patronized Buddhism. Elara's invitation to the bhikkhus of the Cetiya

23. MV, XXV, 1-4; 55-56.

24. Bardwell L. Smith (Ed.) Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka, Chambersburg, 1978, p.18.

25. Bardwell L. Smith (Ed.) The Two Wheels of Dhamma, Chambersburg, 1972, p.32.



mountain, referred to in the Mahāvamsa, may have been for an alms-giving, for some form of religious function, or to seek advice or to solicit support. Unfortunately the purpose of this invitation is not given in the chronicle. But Elara's love of justice, even in the eyes of the chronicler, was stronger than the natural affection for his own son.<sup>26</sup> Ironically, Dathasena, one of the warriors of Dutthagamani Abhaya, later entered the Buddhist order after crossing over to South India, the homeland<sup>27</sup> of the Tamils and found peace in the monasteries there.

According to the Mahāvamsa, Dutthagamani having unified Sri Lanka for the greater glory of Buddhism, lamented that he had been compelled to kill a countless number of human beings<sup>28</sup> in order to achieve this great purpose. Here the Mahāvamsa author has been faced with a dilemma and, in his predicament he has improvised a convenient<sup>29</sup> solution. It is said in the Mahāvamsa that when the arhats<sup>29</sup> in Piyangudipa knew the king's thoughts they sent eight arhats to comfort him. And they, coming in the middle watch of the night, alighted at the palacegate.<sup>30</sup> These arhats are said to have assuaged the king's feelings and categorically asserted that all the killings of human beings caused by Dutthagamani in no way hindered his path to heaven.<sup>31</sup> Their argument was that, among the enemies of Dutthagamani who lost their lives in his war against Elara, there was only one person who had taken the Three Refuges and one who had observed the Five Precepts

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26. MV, XXI, 13-33.

27. Saddharmāṅkārāya, (Ed.), Kirielle Gnanawimala, Colombo, 1954, pp. 544-555.

28. MV, XXV, 103-104.

29. arhat is a being no longer subject to rebirth; 'worthy one' in a literal sense.

30. MV, XXV, 105-106.

31. Sagga in Pali and svarga in Sinhala. The concept of heaven is found both in popular and canonical Buddhism. But heaven in Buddhism is not a permanent abode or the ultimate goal as in christianity.



in addition. The rest were "unbelievers<sup>32</sup> and men of evil life ... not more to be esteemed than beasts."

Killing a human being on the grounds of his beastly character cannot be justified in terms of classical Buddhism. But the chronicles are not texts of classical dhamma and to expect classical Buddhism or realization of it in them confounds doctrinal and historiographical aspects. Historiographically, the legitimization of Dutthagamani's actions by the arhats rests on two points: those destroyed by the king were non-Buddhists and their destruction was caused for the glorification of the dhamma. As Regina T. Clifford has shown, the first point indicates a powerful Sinhala-Buddhist sentiment in emergence. Lanka must be free of all culturally heterodox, i.e. impure elements, before the dhamma can flourish. The second point reflects the justification of the warrior aspect because the conquests and acts of violence are committed for the sake of the glory of the Sāsana and therefore incur no evil. The full-blown institutionalization of the sangha is also reflected in this stance; in keeping with the concept of dhammadipa, the brotherhood provides the power of the king with legitimate authority.<sup>33</sup>

It is notable that the author of the thirteenth century Thūpavamsa, who drew most of his material from various earlier sources with the bulk of Dutthagamani-saga from the Mahāvamsa account, chose to edit out the content of the message of solace given to Dutthagamani by the arhats. According to the Thūpavamsa, the arhats assuaged the king's sorrow by stating that he need not lament because he had acquired sufficient merit through a countless number of previous births for him to be reborn for the last time as<sup>34</sup> the righthand disciple of the future Maithreya Buddha.

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32. MV, XXV, 110-111.

33. Regina T. Clifford, "The Dhammadipa Tradition of Sri Lanka: Three Models within the Sinhalese Chronicles" in Bardwell L. Smith (Ed.) Religion and Legitimation of Power, p.43.

34. Thūpavamsa, (Ed.) Denipitiye Jinaratana, Colombo, 1937, p.697.



In order to glorify the achievements of Dutthagamani, as befitting an epic, the author of the Mahavamsa not only introduced religious and racial tones to it but has also portrayed Gamani's father Kakavanna Tissa and brother Tissa as weak and cowardly characters. According to the chronicler, Gamani at the age of sixteen made known his intention of waging war against Tamils, but was thrice prevented by Kakavanna Tissa. Gamani, by his insulting retort, by sending women's ornaments to his father and by his self imposed exile in the central mountain region (Malaya)<sup>35</sup> earns the epithet 'duttha' (the enraged one).<sup>36</sup> The story may be a creation of a later age, perhaps by the author of the Mahavamsa himself, but it signifies the fact that the relations between Kakavanna Tissa and Dutthagamani were strained when the latter was still a youth. Kakavanna Tissa was neither weak nor cowardly. In fact it was he, able ruler that he was, who welded the various kinglets of Rohana into one unit. He brought the Kalani kingdom under his influence by giving his sister Somadevi in<sup>37</sup> marriage to Prince Abhaya who was the ruler in that area. Kakavanna Tissa also very tactfully made the kinglets of Seru and Soma accept his suzerainty in Rohana. As Paranavitana has pointed out, it was Kakavanna Tissa who raised an army from among the able-bodied men of Rohana and had it trained. He established workshops for the manufacture of the weapons with which he equipped his soldiers. He had garrisons posted at strategic points along the Mahavali river. He sent his younger son Tissa to Dighavapi and a son, named Dighabhaya (who subsequently went over to Elara's camp) from

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35. The Rajavaliya written in the eighteenth century specifically mentions Kotmale as the place of exile of Dutthagamani. (see Rajavaliya, Ed. Watuwatte Pemananda, Colombo, 1959, p.37) The Myths and legends woven around his stay at Kotmale are analysed in Marguerite S. Robinson, "'The House of the Mighty Hero' or the 'House of Enough Paddy' Some Implications of a Sinhalese Myth", Dialectic in Practical Religion. (Ed.) E.R. Leach, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 122-152.

36. MV, XXIV, 1-7.

37. Dhatuvamsa, (Ed.) Munidasa Cumaratunga, Colombo, B.C.2483, p.30.



a consort other than Viharadevi, was entrusted with the task of guarding the frontier against possible inroads from the ruler of Rajarata. But unfortunately Kakavanna Tissa, like many other fathers with famous sons, suffered by comparison. 38 Perhaps this was felt by some of the monks in mediaeval times and that may explain the importance and detailed treatment given to Kakavanna Tissa and his religious activities by bhikkhu Kakusanda, the author of the thirteenth century Dhatuvamsa.

Tissa, the younger brother of Gamani, though depicted as an insignificant prince by the author of the Mahāvamsa defeated Gamani in their first encounter which took place at Yudaganava near Buttala, immediately after the death of Kakavanna Tissa. The warriors of the dead king did not participate in this battle, and this gives rise to the belief that though the elder Gamani was the legitimate heir to the throne, Tissa was also acceptable, perhaps on account of Gamani's rash behaviour. Dutthagamani had to flee accompanied only by one faithful follower. But in the second encounter Gamani was victorious after heavy fighting. Here the chronicler ridicules Tissa when he states that after the defeat, the latter sought refuge in the cell of the chief monk of a Vihara, hid under the bed and was later carried out of the Vihara in the guise of a dead monk. 39 According to the Mahāvamsa, the Buddhist sangha subsequently intervened and brought about a reconciliation and Tissa submitted to Dutthagamani who was now free to wage war against Elara.

The attitude adopted towards the Dutthagamani-Elara conflict by Mayurapada therā, the Sinhala author of the thirteenth century work Pujavali, has been discussed by Liyanagamage in an excellent essay entitled "A Forgotten Aspect of Sinhala-Tamil Relations". 40 Mayurapada therā was a

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38. U.H.C.I, Pt. I, pp.150-151.

39. MV, XXIV, 37-40.

40. A Liyanagamage, "A Forgotten Aspect of the Relations Between the Sinhalese and the Tamils; The Upasakajanalan-kara: A re-examination of its date and authorship and its significance in the History of South India and Ceylon" Ceylon Historical Journal, XXV, nos.1-4; October 1978, p.141.



contemporary of the Indian invader Māgha (1215-1255). Writing with the memory of Māgha's misdeeds fresh in his mind, the author has ascribed similar characteristics to earlier invasions and speaks of them too in an angry and embittered tone. The good words said of Elara are not only absent in Mayurapada's Pujavali but he is branded as an unrighteous ruler who destroyed monasteries and the Buddhist order.<sup>41</sup> The Pujavali states further that Dutthagamani, having been consecrated after killing one million thirty four thousand Tamils, ruled in accordance with the ten kingly qualities (dasarajadharama).<sup>42</sup> This text refers to Māgha's reign as demala arajitaya<sup>43</sup> (period of Tamil dominance without a king) conveying the sentiment that Māgha was not a legitimate ruler. Equally, by Sinhala Buddhist historiographical standards, Elara was not fit to be the king of Sri Lanka, that he must be removed from office was an irrefutable imperative. The Pujavali states "This island of Lanka belongs to the Buddha himself; it is like a treasury filled with the Three Gems. Therefore, the residence of wrong-believers in this island will never be permanent; just as the residence of the Yaksas of ancient past was not permanent. Even if a non-Buddhist ruled Sri Lanka by force for a while the special influence of the Buddha saw to it that his line would never be established. As Lanka is suitable only for Buddhist kings their lines only will be established."<sup>44</sup>

Whatever the ideal position the Buddhist historiographers adopted, many outstanding and pious kings like Amandagamani Abhaya (19-29 A.D.) Voharika Tissa (209-231) Siri Sanghabodhi (247-249) Dhatusena (455-473) and Kittisirimegha (551-569) were killed owing to conspiracies and manoeuvrings for political power among the Buddhist princes and chiefs. In dynastic wars, kings such as Dathopatissa I (639-650) and his rival Kassapa even plundered treasures from monasteries and dagobas to carry on their campaigns.<sup>45</sup> One king warring against another,

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41. Pujavali (Ed) Denipitiye Jinaratana, Colombo, 1937, p.697.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., p.709.

44. Ibid., p.676.

45. CV, XLIV, 131-142.



the decline of the power of one ruler and the emergence of that of another and feuds between clans are nothing new in ancient history. Furthermore, between the rival Buddhist sects of the Mahayanists of the Abhayagirivihara and the ultimately victorious Hinayanists of the Mahavihara, a bitter struggle was waged involving kings and counsellors and adding another complication to a period of strife. In the circumstances the fact that the ruler of Rajarata during Dutthagamani's early phase happened to be a Tamil should not lead one to interpret the Dutthagamani-Elara saga as one of serious rivalry and conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. From the semi-mythical Vijaya down to Sri Vikrama Rajasingha, the last Kandyan king, the legitimate kings of the island at various periods established feudal matrimonial ties with Tamil families of South India. Candamukhasiva (43-52 A.D.) and Mahanama (406-428) had Tamil consorts and Queen Anula (B.C.48-44), who was notorious for changing husbands, married Tamil chiefs twice.<sup>46</sup> There have been Sinhala chiefs who had supported Tamil rulers<sup>47</sup> and Tamils who had supported Sinhala kings.<sup>48</sup> Kings like Aggabodhi IV (667-683) satisfied the Tamils in the island by appointing some of them to high office in the State. A few of them, such as Potthakutṭha, Potthasāta, and Mahakanda appear as benefactors of the Saṅgha. Aggabodhi IV (unlike Dutthagamani) was not a king who was idealized or glorified by the chroniclers; even so they record the fact that he was held in such high esteem by his subjects that when he died they all mourned for him even preserving the ashes of his pyre in the belief that the remains from the cremation of such a good man had curative properties. Potthakutṭha, appointed to high office by Aggabodhi, became a king maker after the death of his benefactor.<sup>49</sup> Besides, in feudal rivalries among Sinhala princes, some of them such as Iṅga (33-43) Abhayanāga (231-240), Jetthatissa II (328-337), Aggabodhi III (628); Dathopatissa II (659-667) and Manavamma (684-718).<sup>50</sup> sought the assistance of South India to secure the throne.

46. MV, XXXIV, 15-27.

47. CV, XXXVIII, 38-39.

48. Pūjāvali, op.cit., p.711.

49. CV, XLVI, 1-147.

50. MV, XXXV, 27; XXXVI, 42-50; CV XXXIX 20-21; XLIV, 72-73.



Thus, the balance of forces on the Indian mainland often influenced the turn of events in Sri Lanka. In fact in ancient politics; feudal chieftains, royal princes and religious organisations, which were also part of the feudal structure, played a more important role than ethnic groups. It is interesting to note here that Dutthagamani's warrior, Dathasena, who went to South India and entered the Buddhist Order, did so because Dutthagamani had (it is said) given an order to kill him. According to the story, some favourite warriors of Dutthagamani had poisoned the mind of the king against Dathasena, saying that the latter posed a threat to his royal authority.<sup>51</sup> Yet what receives most emphasis in the Sinhala Buddhist records regarding non-Sinhala non-Buddhist chieftains and princes are the accounts of the harm caused by them, more particularly to Buddhism and Buddhist institutions. The chroniclers have painted a general picture of Tamils as the inveterate enemies of the Sinhala people and their religion.

The treatment of the Dutthagamani-Elara saga in the three important texts, the Dipavamsa, the Mahāvamsa, and the Pujavali, differs from one another and throws light not only on the development of historiography in Sri Lanka, but also on prejudices that have entered into historical records. The views of the authors of these texts which have had a wide influence on the shaping of contemporary attitudes (both Sinhala and Tamil) have to be re-examined in the context of the circumstances under which each work was written. Special cognizance has to be taken of the purpose of the author, and of the climate of thought prevailing at the time of writing.

## II

These three chronicles, particularly the Mahāvamsa and the Pujavali have had a profound influence as source-books for the reconstruction of the history of the island. Historians such as Codrington, Mendis and Paranavitana<sup>52</sup> have treated

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51. Saddharmāṅkārāya, op.cit., pp.544-555.

52. see E.g. H.W.Codrington, A Short History of Ceylon, Revised Edition, London 1947; G.C.Mendis, Problems of Ceylon History, Colombo, 1966; S.Paranavitana and C.W. Nicholas, A Concise History of Ceylon, Colombo, 1961.



these sources with a certain amount of caution before extracting historical facts from them. But none of them have viewed the Dutthagāmani-Elāra Saga outside the racial or ethnic framework in which it was set by the chroniclers. The only admirable exception to the traditional approach is found in the Story of Ceylon written by Ludowyk.<sup>53</sup> Ludowyk states that his work is a narration of events, but in his narration he has made an exemplary attempt to examine the 'Vijayan myth' and the Dutthagāmani saga with critical acumen, and he has also made a brief study of the social formations in early Sri Lanka.

The religious background used to glorify Dutthagāmani has been examined in brief; by several scholars, including Paranavitana and, in detail, by Alice Greenwald, Regina Clifford and R.A.L.H.Gunawardena.<sup>54</sup> Of these, Alice Greenwald has gone to extremes in overemphasising contradictions between the ideals of canonical Buddhism and the practical politics of a king at war. Nevertheless these studies have greatly contributed to a better understanding of the nature of the historiography of Sri Lanka.

Most of the history text-books used in schools until recently, related the Dutthagāmani saga in accordance with the Māhavamsa-Pūjāvali tradition. Ceylon and World History by David Hussey; Vimarshana Sahita Lankā Itihāsaya by Hāndupēlpola Punnaratana; Ceylon and Indian History by Ratnasabapathi and Horace Perera; Lankā Itihāsaya by N.K.Sirisena, Purāna Lankāva by Ranawaka and Lokuliyana; Alut Itihāsa Kiyaweem Pota and Lankā Hā Loka Itihāsaya by S.F.De Silva; Lankāva Hā Lōkaya by Somarātna Wijesinghe, and several versions of Lankāva Hā Tadāsanna Rajyayō prescribed for the G.C.E. Ordinary level examination could be cited as examples of texts falling into

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53. E.F.C.Ludowyk, The Story of Ceylon, London, 1967, pp.31-36.

54. All in Bardwell L.Smith (Ed.) Religion and Legitimation of Power.



this category.<sup>55</sup> Some of these texts have even accepted in toto the legend concerning Dutthagāmani's birth found in the Mahāvamsa while others, in their treatment of the subject, have depicted the Tamils as the ancient enemies of the Sinhalese.

Outside scholarly historical works and writings of a text-book nature, some quasi-historical or semi religio-political writings have contributed considerably to the propagation of the Mahāvamsa version of the Dutthagāmani story. Of these, the book titled The Revolt in the Temple, and the writings of Anagarika Dharmapala stand out. The Revolt in the Temple was written to commemorate 2500 years of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and the author closely follows the Mahāvamsa tradition in interpreting history. In the prologue he states, "The history of Lanka is the history of the Sinhalese race. Neither of the two stories has any extent or significance apart from the other." According to him, "Dutugemunu found his people helpless and dejected with little or no courage and, as was thought, with no future. In a few years he left the country full of fire and full of spirit. He projected his own personality into the brain and arm of every Sinhalese from Ruhuna to Rajarata. He fired the country with a new spirit and made the Sinhalese once more conscious of themselves and their destiny." The author goes back to his feudalistic, religio-cultural roots when he states "If Gemunu had no other claim to fame in this Island, he would have it in the memorable answer he gave to his mother, to the

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55. David Hussey, Ceylon and World History, Book I, Colombo, 1934; Handupelpola Punnaratana, Vimarsana Sahita Lankā Itihāsaya, Colombo, 1964; L.H.Horace Perera and M. Ratnasabapathi, Ceylon and Indian History, Colombo, 1964; N.K.Sirisena, Lankā Itihāsaya, Colombo, 1963; Ranawaka and Lokuliyana, Purāna Lankāva, Colombo, 1959; S.F.De Silva, Alut Itihāsa Kiyaweem Pota, Grade III, 1955; S.F.De Silva, Lankā Hā Loka Itihāsaya, Grade VI, Colombo, 1968, Somaratna Wijesingha, Lankāva Hā Lōkaya, Grade VI, Colombo 1968; Newton Pintu Moragoda, Lankāva Hā Loka Itihāsaya, (Colombo, 1967); Diviyagaha yasassi, Lankāva Hā Āsanna Rājyayo, Colombo 1966; Newton Pintu Moragoda, Lankāva Hā Tadāsanna Rājyayo, Colombo 1966.



question why he "lay curled up in bed". That simple answer has been our problem from the dawn of our civilization to the present day."<sup>56</sup>

Anagarika Dharmapala, the well-known social and religious reformer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century cited the exploits of Dutthagāmani to instil Sinhala sentiments among his followers, as befitting his slogan "Sinhalese ! Awake". In a message to the young men of Sri Lanka he stated "we have to ransack the literature of the science of patriotism to learn to act as patriots should for the preservation of our nation, our literature, our land and our most glorious religion at whose source our fore-fathers drank deep for nearly seventy generations, which has preserved their vitality to fight against foes since the time of our heroic and patriot king, the righteous Dutthagāmani, who with the help of his mother and his patriotic followers, and blessed by the association of the Bhikkhu sangha reinvigorated and revitalized the nation..." In the same message to the young people he has admonished them thus: "Enter into the realm of our King Dutugemunu in spirit and try to identify yourself with the thoughts of that great King who rescued Buddhism and our nationalism from oblivion."<sup>57</sup>

The Sinhala-Chauvinist aspects of the Dutthagamani saga as portrayed in the Mahavamsa have been given prominence not only in history texts and quasi-historical and religio-political writings, but also in the language texts used in schools in the recent past. The Siksha Margaya Series written by Munidasa Cumaratunga; Kiyaweem Rajaya series by J. Francis Fernando; Siyabasmaga series by K.I. Karunaratna; Maybasa or the Sinhala Mother Tongue Series by A.D. Kaluarachchi, Gemunu

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56. D.C. Wijewardene, Dharmavijaya (Triumph of Righteousness) or The Revolt in the Temple, Sinha Publications, Popular Edition, Colombo, 1953, p.25; p.58.
57. Anagarika Dharmapala, Return to Righteousness, A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of Anagarika Dharmapala, Ananda Guruge (Ed.), Colombo, 1965, p.501-510.



reader series<sup>58</sup> by T.S.Dharmabandu and Situmina series by H.M.Somarathna are a few notable language texts which could be mentioned in this connection. In the language exercises in some of these texts the Sinhala child's mind was biased against Tamils through questions such as "Who was Elara? What were the hardships faced by the Sinhalese during his reign?"<sup>59</sup>

Similarly kavmina, an anthology of poems by S.Mahinda approved as a text for standards VI, VII, VIII contain several poems which kindle 'Sinhala nationalist' feelings.<sup>60</sup> Even in some of the text-books used to teach Buddhism as a subject, Sinhala chauvinistic sentiments have been aroused by simplyfying the Dutthagamani episode of the Mahāvamsa. A notable example of this is found in a Grade III Buddhism text titled Pāthasāliya Buddhacaritaya.<sup>61</sup> However, it must be stated that with the introduction of the educational reforms of 1972, greater attention has been paid to curriculum planning and the Government has taken over the responsibility for text-book writing. As a result, some improvement in the treatment of such sensitive topics as the Dutthagamani saga could be seen in the school texts. But there is a need for deep and balanced thinking in that direction, in the interest of the nation as a whole.

The Dutthagamani-Elara episode has been recreated by creative artists too, by faithfully adhering to the Mahāvamsa-Pūjāvali tradition. The Tower Hall playwrights Charles Dias, Stephen Lal Pathirana and L.D.A.Ratnayaka have

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58. e.g. see: Sikshā Mārgaya, Reader II and III; Kiyaweem Rajaya, Step III; Siyabasmaga, second and fourth standard Readers; Mavbasa for Grade VI, Gemunu Reader Series III, IV, V; Situmina Reader IV.
59. Sikshā Mārgaya, Second Standard Reader, 1951, p.58.
60. S.Mahinda, Kavmina, Colombo, undated.
61. Veragoda Amaramoli, Pāthasāliya Buddha Caritaya, Grade III, Colombo, undated; Lessons 19 and 20.



dramatized it;<sup>62</sup> while Rapiel Tennokone and S.Mahinda have recreated it in Sinhala verse.<sup>63</sup> Henpitagedara Gnanasiha has elaborated on the Mahāvamsa story in his Pali poetical work Gamani Gīta which was honoured with a literary award by the Government in 1968.<sup>64</sup> Besides, the anti-Tamil exploits of Dutthagamani, as glorified in the Mahāvamsa have been quoted at length by Piyadasa Sirisena<sup>65</sup> to stimulate the religious-cultural sentiments of the Sinhalese.

Thus, it is clear that the Mahāvamsa-Pūjāvali account of the Dutthagamani-Elara conflict has helped considerably to bring about 'Sinhala consciousness'. Similarly, myths and prejudices prevalent, among Tamils have contributed towards 'Tamil consciousness' among the Tamils of Sri Lanka.<sup>66</sup> A scientific understanding of the early history of both Sinhala and Tamil communities and the separation of myths from history would undoubtedly help in the study of history as a social process and initiate a closer dialogue between the society of today and that of yesterday.

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62. L.D.A.Ratnayake, The History of the Tower Hall Dramas, Colombo, 1972, p.150; p.166; p.228; p.279.
63. Rapiel Tennakone, Sinhala Vamsaya, Maharagama, 1956, S.Mahinda, Lanka Mātā: Jātika Kāvya, Colombo, 1962; Ratnamāli Kāvya, Colombo, 1965.
64. Henpitagedara Gnanasiha, Gamani Gītā, Colombo, 1968.
65. Piyadasa Sirisena, Mahesvari 3rd edition, 1959, p.10, p.18, p.99; Jayatissa Saha Rosalin, 1961 edition, pp.169-172; Ishta Deviyā, 3rd edition, 1957, p.51, pp.114-115; Dingirimanika, 7th edition, 1961, p.6; Asṭhalōka Dharma Cakraya, fifth edition, 1963, p.247.
66. e.g. see: C.Rasanayagam, Ancient Jaffna: Being a Research into the History of Jaffna, Madras, 1926; C.Sivaratnam, The Tamils in Early Ceylon, Colombo, 1968.