

## Who shall claim the legacy of ven. Gangodawila Soma Thera?

*by Surendra Ajith Rupasinghe*

The demise of the Most Venerable Soma Thera has robbed the Sinhala-Buddhist nation of one of its foremost representatives. The Ven Soma Hamuduruwo was the pre-eminent conscience and voice of the oppressed Sinhala-Buddhist nation. He provoked the mind of the Sinhala-Buddhists to reclaim the Dharma and to take it as a measure for evaluating the prevailing social order and system of institutionalized Buddhist practice.



He did so as a way of calling for a historic resurgence of the oppressed Sinhala-Buddhist nation. Soma Hamuduruwo possessed the rare ability to communicate the issues of our age in the language and style of the oppressed masses. It can be said that Soma Hamuduruwo rescued the Buddhist doctrine from the gilded towers of the high priests and brought it down to the masses so they may themselves reason and decide. He was a humble servant of the people who took on the burning political questions of the day with a sense of intellectual openness, philosophical commitment and respect for rational discourse.

Soma Hamuduruwo alerted the Sinhala-Buddhist nation to the real threat it faces. He located that threat primarily in the internal contamination of the Dharma and the Sangha caused by the proliferation of alienating rituals and self-serving practices which stood against the method of rational-critical discursive methodology of Buddhism. His greatest contribution lies in guiding the Sinhala-Buddhist nation to look deep within the self and examine all truths and their authorities in the light of the Dharma.

He shot his ideological arrows in sheer disgust at the centres of political and religious authority he considered to be represented by imposters and pretenders. It is no wonder that the state even proscribed him by denying him access to the state media at one time. Soma Hamuduruwo experienced the threat to the Sinhala-Buddhist nation as no other. He set out to systematically purge the accumulated distortions of the Damma and the Sangha as a means of an ideological purification and reawakening. He led the masses into a deep self-critical examination and to engage in a purge of conscience of the self and of the nation to set it on a path of enlightened liberation.

The elemental truth that informed the social consciousness of Soma Hamuduruwo is the historical desecration of the Land, the Language and the Doctrine, which he understood as one indivisible unity. This felt historical collective experience of being encircled and threatened is deeply entrenched in the popular consciousness of the Sinhala nation. The Sinhala-Buddhist nation has been encircled, attacked and subjugated through nearly five hundred years of Western-Christian colonial domination.

The reign of conquest enforced by the colonial power to undermine the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage and identity and subjugate the country remains in the minds of the oppressed people, as it did in the heart of Soma Hamuduruwo. So does the immortal struggle and heroic sacrifice of the patriotic people of this country to free themselves of foreign domination. The depredations of colonialism are real, only because they are being perpetrated today with even more cruelty and vengeance.

The past takes its toll upon the living. It will take its toll until these depredations are redressed through asserting a united, free, independent and prosperous Lanka standing equal to the nations of the world. The truth is that the oppressed Sinhala people, just as the oppressed Tamil and Moslem people - the

oppressed people of Lanka-continue to be subjugated by a modern system of colonial domination. The land of Lanka has been turned into a beggar colony been more fleeced to death than before.

The Land of the Triple Gem has been turned into the killing fields of Asia. The social order is decaying and disintegrating rapidly. All that is sacred has been profaned. All this, because this country survives by feeding the needs and compulsions of imperialist powers who enforce a modern system of global domination to preserve and expand their empires of profit and plunder. A system that has brought universal degradation, slavery and WAR in the midst of infinite abundance and prosperity. A system that has pitted us all against each other as enemies. A system that is driving us steadily and rapidly towards our self-destruction.

The Sinhala Buddhist nation and its glorious heritage has been sold, along with the whole of the country, to foreign imperialism and its international financial agencies for fat commissions. We are ruled today not by the precepts of the Dhamma, but by the putrid culture of Coca-Cola, Macdonalds and Levis. What we have today is not a Sinhala-Buddhist state, nor a state of the people, but a state that represents the interests of marauding multinationals and their local commission agents. We are all dominated politically, economically and culturally by world imperialism. The only sovereignty the people possess is to abide by the rules and fall in line, or face the consequences. The whole political process gets embroiled in a state of perpetual, organic, self-destructive crisis. All living beings get caught up in a spiral of barbaric terror and violence. All doctrines of Eternal Truth and Universal Compassion are drowned in pools of blood among our own nations. We feel our existence as a civilised human community mortally threatened and fatally abused.

These are agonizing times and Soma Hamuduruwo agonized over these burning issues with a sense of deep concern and honesty. In his erudite and engaged discourses you could feel him applying the principles of the Dharma towards understanding the crisis of civilization that has visited us. The people to which Soma Hamuduruwo spoke live this crisis and this slavery daily and therefore share his aspiration as one. He did not address the parasitic, privileged hierarchies that prop up the system-though they may attempt to profit from him. He spoke to the oppressed Sinhala Buddhist masses who do feel threatened and betrayed by the system. Soma Hamuduruwo realized that overcoming colonial domination, and the degeneration of the self compelled by it, would have to be confronted with a national resurgence based on mobilizing the oppressed masses.

Only the oppressed masses had the spiritual power to regenerate the nation. Only the oppressed masses have the need to assert their pride and dignity and win their independence and freedom. Soma Hamuduruwo wished that the Sinhala Buddhist nation would rise to claim its rightful glory, but only by reclaiming and practising the true Dharma. It is this sharing of a profound aspiration for dignity, security, independence and freedom in a common sense of community of the oppressed Sinhala-Buddhist nation that brought forth the truly spectacular outpouring of mass grief at his demise.

However, it is to be recognized that Soma Hamuduruwo, in asserting the rightful place of the Sinhala Buddhist majority nation and in striving to redress genuine historical grievances and injustices against it, centred his attack also on other oppressed nationalities and communities as opposed to targeting the system of world imperialism and the neo-colonial state.

The Tamil national liberation struggle also has to share the blame for its own version of narrow bourgeois nationalism which places the liberation of the Tamil nation above the liberation of the country and the people. These two versions of

bourgeois nationalism are polarities which reinforce each other and together serve to perpetuate the system.

The truth of the matter is that the Sinhala-Buddhist nation and its distinctive historical heritage occupies an undisputed pre-eminence in the Land of Lanka. Precisely because of this pre-eminence, the Sinhala-Buddhist nation can and must accord equality and dignity to all other oppressed nations, nationalities and communities of Lanka. This is the way to honour that great heritage in accordance with the teachings of the Dhamma and the universal principles of civilised coexistence. All other nations, nationalities and communities must be given their pride of place as equal partners joined in voluntary union in a common quest for independence and freedom. This is the only path for the liberation of the people of Lanka, based on the simple truth that either we shall all be free or no one shall.

Soma Hamuduruwo did not apply his vision and his wisdom positively towards grappling with the political-constitutional issues involved in radically restructuring a feudal-colonial state in the context of a modern, multinational, multi-ethnic pluralist society. He too suffered under the delusion that what exists is a Sinhala-Buddhist state that had to be protected at all costs. He did not fully grasp that it is this defunct state that constitutes the mortal threat to the survival of all the nations and peoples of Lanka.

It is this state and none other that has brought us to this most perilous crisis in our history. You can invoke the gods, slaughter the sacrificial lambs and beat the war drums if you will, but we will all have to face this truth.

Yet, with the tide threatening to drown us all in an orgy of primeval violence, death and destruction, the rulers of this blessed Land will not cooperate in facing and overcoming this crisis that they themselves have produced. Whether Green, Blue, Red or Yellow, the players at the masters table can only grab each other's plates and throats, and manipulate the masses, for the sake of exercising absolute power.

They can only plunge us all further down the precipice in some low-life craving for power, while selling out the country to their preferred foreign masters for fat commissions. History has passed its verdict on this defunct state and its ruling class.

It is either to be radically restructured to accommodate the dignity, security, democratic freedom, autonomy and prosperity of all its nations, nationalities and communities or perish in the rot of its own contradictions. Either we give up claims to exclusive rights, learn to share collective rights and struggle to win our freedom OR we can devour each other in the gloom of our petrified, atomized, introverted cell. This is the burning issue of the moment. We all have to decide and take a stand.

Soma Hamuduruwo is to be valued for having strived to rescue the Dharma and to place it on the plane of popular rational-critical discourse.

It is tragic that tribalist political forces, with their remote controls operated by patrons living in the imperialist citadels, are trying to plunder his legacy for narrow political gain by trying to whip up an anti-Christian, anti-Tamil fundamentalist campaign. The organised conspiracy by Western Christian centres of global imperialist power that are working deliberately and systematically to undermine the Buddhist heritage and identity should be confronted ideologically and constitutionally by reaching informed popular consensus.

These conspiracies are NOT a reason to incite hatred against all Christians and

Tamils and others and call for religious war.

They are a reason to unite all progressive, democratic forces of all nations and communities -and religions - to join in a common struggle to free ourselves of all forms of domination and achieve our independence and freedom - as the people of Lanka. Soma Hamuduruwo tried to be an exemplary bhikku who served to enlighten the masses with the liberating essence of the Dharma.

The legacy of Soma Hamuduruwo will not be claimed by marauding fascist goons raising the sword of racial hatred and religious war! It is up to all of us to preserve the rational-critical-humanist aspects of the legacy of the late Soma Hamuduruwo and save it from being ravaged by racist political forces and their fossilized ideologues.