

Is it Possible to Use Licchavi's Seven Factors of Non-decline in the Democratic Political Context of Sri Lanka?

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In the current context of democracy in Sri Lanka, this paper discusses whether the Seven Factors of Non-decline (Saptha Aparihana Dharma) could be followed as an ideal method in the contemporary political milieu. It is said that these Seven Factors were taught by the Buddha himself to the Vajjins in ancient India. In addition to these factors, there are many other teachings of the Buddha specifically for kings: namely, ten-fold royal principles (Dasa Raja Dhamma), ten moral duties of a universal monarch (Dasa Sakwithi wath), and four cardinal principles (Sathara Sangraha Wasthu). These virtues specifically meant for autocratic rulers are equally applicable to democratic systems that are being followed today. What Sri Lanka had before the British took over the country was an autocratic system. In ancient India, King Ajasath was such an autocratic ruler whereas the Licchavis are considered to have followed a republican form of government. The Buddhist texts say that the Licchavi's royal government was a republican union which could not be defeated by any ruler during that time. King Ajasath wanted to invade the Licchavi's kingdoms and the *Maha Parinibbana Sutta* records that the Licchavis were so strong in their unity that no one was able to defeat them, not even the powerful Ajasath. In the end, however, King Ajasath managed to invade the Licchavi's kingdom and take control using certain strategies: he weakened the strength of their union by spreading malicious rumours and falsehoods which compromised the strength of these kings. The end result was that the Licchavis lost their kingdom to Ajasath. This suggests that ultimately, a republican form of government cannot resist the influence of autocratic rule and will finally succumb to such powers. In conclusion, this historical event is presented as a case suggesting that the Seven Factors of Non-decline, though they may seem ideal, are not applicable in the context of modern democracy.

Keywords: Republic governance, Autocratic rule, Licchavi, Democracy, Kingship.