

Aligning Modern *Dansal* with the Middle Path: Developing a Framework for Sustainable, Ethical, and Mindful Almsgiving

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Introduction

Dansal, which is traditionally described as free public almsgiving, has long been a fundamental pillar of communal life and spiritual practice in Sri Lanka. It is deeply founded in the Buddhist paradigm of *Dāna* (generosity). In the past, these deeds were simple displays of generosity meant to foster spiritual virtue while easing the receivers' immediate suffering. However, Dansal's modern expressions in Sri Lanka have seen a significant metamorphosis, moving away from humble spiritual devotion and toward showy public spectacles, hyper-consumerism, and an entitlement mentality.

This modern world frequently contradicts fundamental Buddhist teachings, especially those of the Middle Path. Performative giving is a common feature of modern almsgiving, when the need for public approval and social status eclipses true spiritual impulses, thereby creating social strife rather than concord. This work critically analyses the development of contemporary Dansal in order to rectify this aberration and bring the practice back into line with fundamental ideas like *Hiri-Ottappa* (moral consciousness) and *Sati* (mindfulness). The ultimate goal of this research is to restore Dansal as a sustainable, thoughtful, and genuine expression of compassion by establishing a thorough ethical framework for both organisers and recipients.

Objective

The fundamental purpose of this work is to provide a critical examination of the evolution of Dansal within the context of current Sri Lankan society. The study pinpoints the exact lines of departure that have caused the current spiritual deterioration by comparing the performative excess reality of today with the fundamental principles of Buddhist philosophy. In particular, the study seeks to:

- Deconstruct the motivations behind modern large-scale almsgivings.
- Evaluate the impact of “ego-driven” generosity on community cohesion.
- Formulate a robust, evidence-based ethical framework rooted in the

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Middle Path to guide future organizers toward a model of intentional, mindful, and sustainable almsgiving.

Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to guarantee a thorough comprehension of this intricate societal topic. By combining historical philosophy, theological understanding, and actual social facts, this technique enables the development of a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena.

The research consists of two primary pillars:

Qualitative Inquiry: In-depth interviews were conducted with prominent Buddhist scholars, senior monks, and experienced Dansal organizers. These conversations provided essential context regarding the “spirit” of *Dāna* versus the “form” of modern Dansal, offering deep insights into the psychological and religious dimensions of the practice.

Quantitative Analysis: A structured survey was administered to a cross-section of participants at various almsgiving sites. This data focused on measuring attitudes, identifying perceptions of “merit,” and gauging the level of “entertainment” vs. “spirituality” that participants associate with the event.

The study goes beyond anecdotal findings by combining these two data streams, giving the suggested ethical framework a statistically significant and culturally based basis.

Results

The study’s findings demonstrate a significant structural difference between traditional Buddhist *Dāna* and modern Dansal practices. According to quantitative results, 78% of respondents saw these gatherings more as social entertainment or cultural festivals than as authentic spiritual practices. Additionally, the magnitude of a Dansal is positively correlated with social friction, according to empirical data. The mood changes from peaceful giving to impatience and competitiveness as events prioritise competitive displays, such as record-breaking numbers or intricate, high-profile arrangements. These observations support the idea that contemporary “fun-seeking” practices deviate from the Middle Path by emphasising external spectacle above the giver’s inward disposition.

Discussion

The study's findings highlight a systematic deviation from the Dhamma. Dāna has lost its ability to promote spiritual development due to its commercialisation as an ego-driven pastime. Giving is no longer a worthy act of selflessness when it is motivated by a desire for social prestige or public attention; rather, it becomes a vehicle for the "I" or the "self."

This study makes the case that Dansal culture today is a type of spiritual deterioration. Organisers and participants are unintentionally fuelling social unrest by putting volume and visibility ahead of mindfulness (Sati) and moral shame (Ottappa). The observed "competitive generosity" stands in stark contrast to the Buddhist focus on detachment and humility.

Conclusion

This study has important ramifications that give religious leaders and social organisers a practical, empirically supported course of action. Using a suggested framework of silent, intentional generosity to change the paradigm away from public presentation, the study shows that a culture transformation is both required and desirable. This study effectively returns Dansal to its original function as a true expression of spiritual development that fosters both the individual soul and the community by connecting historical philosophy with modern social behaviour. The ability of society to recognise the subtle, deep effects of thoughtful giving in the midst of a culture of outward spectacle will ultimately determine the future course of this tradition.

Keywords - Dansal Culture, Dāna (Almsgiving), Middle Path, Buddhist Ethics, Mindful Generosity

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