

## CEYLON LECTURES

by

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B. M. Barua's "*Ceylon Lectures*" had been one of the most popular books on Theravāda Buddhism and Sri Lankan History very specially, among the Sri Lankan Orientalists. It was in fact one of the pioneering works in these fields. The book is a collection of lectures delivered by Barua when he visited Sri Lanka in 1944. In this connection, it is more appropriate to quote what Barua has observed in his preface to *Ceylon Lectures*: It was on a joint invitation from Mr. Ranasinha, the public Trustee acting on behalf of the Dona Alpina Ratnayaka Trust, and prof. G. P. Malalasekera acting on behalf of the Buddhist Brotherhood of the University of Ceylon, to deliver two public Lectures on Buddhism that I decided to go across to Ceylon last year in the second week of March. There could be no inducement from any material gains, since no such prospects were held out to me by either. My object was purely cultural. I hit upon a plan for at least six lectures, three in History and three in Religion series so that I might adequately express my thoughts about the people and civilization of the island. Accordingly, I communicated my wishes to prof. Malalasekera, prof. H. C. Ray and Rev. Rahula and here to Sir baron Jayatilake, all of whom were sincerely interested in the matter. Subsequent correspondence revealed that I had acted wisely, as I was required by other societies and institutions, including the University of Ceylon, to deliver lectures under their auspices".

The book actually presents eight lectures, three in History Series and five in Religion Series. Lectures in the History Series touch on the topics (1) India and Ceylon (2) A Bird's eye view and problems of ancient history of Ceylon and (3) Ceylon's contributions to Buddhism while the lectures in the Religion Series deal with (1) Buddha's greatness and role (2) Buddhism as Buddha's personal religion (3) Buddhism as a institutional religion (4) Buddhism and Early Vedānta and (5) Buddhism - its modern appeal. When we glance at the topics which Barua has selected, we could imagine how interesting they would have been to an audience assembled almost half century ago in colonial Sri Lanka. As Barua himself points out in his preface, some lectures "had provoked a good deal of discussion" and others "had been discussed at some length". The following remark of the author further proves that his lectures had stirred and excited Sri Lankan audience. "Some persons professing to be staunch followers of Buddhism are very touchy when a modern critical scholar proposes to consider the philosophical position of Buddhism in the historical context of the Upanisads or the Great Epic. But, what better contexts can really there be suggested? Buddhism as a system of thought, or of ethics, or as a faith, stands or falls only when its position is