

Renaissance of Pali Literature in Modern Era (After 19th Century)

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In 15th February 1798, our country became a colony. As a result of this colonization and the careers of Portuguese and Dutch, Christianity diffused in Sri Lanka. The foreign governors who were appointed by those nations were not frank enough towards Sinhalese people and they vehemently attempted to disseminate their own religion. Therefore our nation, religion, culture, education and literature etc. went to regress day-by-day. However, with the help of governors and foreign followers, Christians continued their missionary programmers such as sharing handouts, lectures, newspapers, hand books and so on. They destroyed Buddhist temples, schools and rebuilt churches and Christian schools. Not only those partial activities but also they threw money to the poor to admit them into their religion. At the beginning, Englishmen, who knew that the power of Buddhists is the closest association of monks and devotees, contrived to break down it. Under these types of circumstances the Buddhists were helpless, poor and immensely weak. It was a threat to become member of Buddhist religious society and especially, to get the ordination as a Buddhist monk. Therefore, Pāli literature and Buddhism had a dark period. Without a sustainable social, economic and political background, it is hard to believe an enrichment of a good literature. However, after years the outstanding role of venerable Weliviṭṭa Saraṇāṅkara Thero who was born from Upcountry was exceedingly instrumental for the reestablishment of Sri Lankan Buddhist monastic life, Buddhist scriptural studies and Pāli literature. Remarkably, many people from Southern province helped his praiseworthy commitment such as Katuwane Disanayake, Sāli Ele Maṇiratana, Karathoṭa Dammārāma, Mihiripana Dhammaratana, Thomas Mohandiram etc. Then in 1842, Walane Siddhārtha Thero started a school for Buddhists (Dhammacethiya Pirivena at Rathmalāna). Consequently, Buddhists were able to restart to learn Sinhala, Pāli, Sanskrit, Buddhism, Buddhist culture, Science and Literature. In 1862, he started the first Buddhist newspaper 'Lakmiṇi Pahana'. Then they proceeded to start a new press for Buddhist called 'Lankopakara Press.' Buddhists continued their actions against the missionaries. 'Pañca-mahāvāda' took a great place on it. And also, many societies like Royal Asiatic Society, Pāli Text Society, Oriental Studies Society, Mahābodhi Society were thoroughly contributory for the renaissance of Pāli literature. Not only scholars in Sri Lanka but also foreigners facilitated for the development of Pāli literature. Rhys Davis, Robert Childers, Sir William Jones, Henri Steal Alcott are some of them. Significantly, they all made a strong foundation for Pāli literature in Modern Era. However, the modern Buddhist scholarship seems to pay a less interest to this explored aspect. Accordingly, the aim of this research paper is to examine how the renaissance of Pāli literature in modern era (after 19th century).

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