

DHAMMA - APARADIGA SASTRAJÑA SAHA  
SIMHALA BAUDDHA ARTHAKATHANA  
AAGAMIKA SANKALPAYAK PILIBAÑDA  
ADHYAYANAYAK

by

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Dhamma — Western Academic and Sinhalese Buddhist Interpretations

A Study of a Religious Concept by the American scholar John Ross Carter was first published almost a decade ago. It embodies the results of a thorough, comprehensive and painstaking research into the various interpretations of *Dhamma* in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. In six well-planned chapters Ross Carter skillfully conducts the reader through a labyrinth of ideas, interpretations and definitions of this all-important term *Dhamma*, which is so central to the Buddha's teaching, firstly in the Western academic tradition beginning with Eugene Burnouf (1844) through the writings of the Geigers, - husband and wife, prof. Rhys Davids, Mrs Caroline Rhys Davids, Oldenberg and others to lesser known scholars such as R. L. Slater and W. L. King continuing thereafter with a survey of the subject as in the Pali Suttas and Commentaries in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, in Classical Sinhala texts such as the *Dharmapradipikā*, *Daham Sarana*, *Daham Sonda kava*, and finally ending with the interpretations of *Dhamma* in the writings of more recent Sinhala Buddhist scholars such as *Vaskaḍuvē Subhūti* and *Rerukaane Chandavimala* theras. In these pages, Carter has discussed almost every interpretation of this term which is of any importance, in historical perspective. He has shown how 'scholars in the West, upon meeting the term *Dhamma*, soon became restless in trying to find a suitable equivalent in western languages.' To followers of the Theravada, on the other hand, the concept does not seem to have posed any problems. With them, *Dhamma* was (and is still, today) a living force and 'living *Dhamma* was the way to salvation.' Carter has shown how amongst the western academics, Mrs Rhys Davids in sensing a moral aspect in *Dhamma* that 'seemed to her to be at the basis of religious life,' moved very close to the attitude of Sinhala Buddhists'.