

Anagarika Dharmapala's Central Message Falsified and Distorted

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In contrast to the many hagiographies on Dharmapala and of the past of his Maha Bodhi Society, there is a counter narrative in academia as well as in recent developments of the Maha Bodhi Society. Through primarily published literature these two perspectives are discussed. Anagarika's role has to be seen within Sri Lanka's Buddhist revival after centuries of colonial repression. The 19th century saw: the debates with the Christians, the establishment of Vidyalankara and Vidyodaya Pirivenas and the global links of scholar monks. Within this, Dharmapala, well-read in both Buddhist and Western sources, broke through colonial restraints. His contributions included: struggling to regain the Maha Bodhi, the first Dalit movement, asking Sinhalese to learn from "Aryans" like Madras Tamils and Bengalese, wanting to restore the Bhikkhuni order and promoting industrialization. He was in several ways a contrast to Gandhi and nearer Ambedkar. Internalizing a colonial mindset, recent anthropology writers who have not adequately read the literature as well as the context have distorted both Dharmapala and the Buddhist revival. Further, the current Maha Bodhi Society, in contrast to its founder Dharmapala is following a partial Hindu agenda. The paper illustrates these tendencies and points out the need to highlight the original thrust of Dharmapala, especially at a time when Buddhist thought is gaining ground globally while the counter narrative is creating recolonized minds. As a parallel conclusion the need for disciplines to interact with each other is emphasized including in the universities that succeeded Vidyalankara and Vidyodaya.

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Colonization, recolonized minds