

# Sri Lanka's contribution to the development of Buddhist studies in the West

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## Abstract

*The study examines the contribution made by Buddhist Scholar monks of Sri Lanka to the propagation of Buddhist studies in the West. The publication of the Mahawansa in English by George Turner in 1839 marked the beginning of Western interest in Buddhist studies. The opening of Buddhist centers of learning and Pirivenas heralded the Buddhist revival that took place in the latter part of 19th century. The first international centre for Buddhist studies in the world was also established in Sri Lanka and the British civil servants who studied Pali and Buddhism became the key actors in the propagation of Buddhism in the West. Many of the translators and writers of books on South Asia and Buddhism depended for their works on Sinhala scholar monks. The ridiculing of Buddhism by Christian preachers in the West culminated in the Panadura debate. After the arrival of Steele Olcott, the Buddhist revival made great advances and a great Buddhist leader, Anagarika Dharmapala came to the fore. Scholar monks of this period sent their books to Western scholars and there was an international academic exchange. A second generation of Western scholars inspired by Sri Lankan monks arose and Lord Robert Chalmers who was governor of Ceylon from 1913 to 1916 was one of them. The Sri Lankan scholars and laymen linked themselves to the West and to Asia. The Scholar monks were involved in cultural transfer to the West of key Buddhist texts. They also helped European scholars to establish contacts with scholars of other Asian countries.*

## Introduction

Although the German philosopher Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was the first to awaken an interest in Buddhism in the West with references to Buddhism in his books, the first study of Buddhism, began with the publication in 1826 of the *Essai sur le Pali*, by Eugène Burnouf (1801-1852). He was Professor of Sanskrit at the College de France, and his book was written in collaboration with the German scholar Christian Lassen. Burnouf's next book, *Observations Grammaticales sur quelques Passages de l'Essai sur le Pali*, was published in the following year (Guruge, *Opcit*, 1984).

But it was England that eventually rendered the greatest service to the knowledge of Buddhism in the West. The publication of the *Mahavamsa* (Great Chronicle of Ceylon) by George Turnour in 1837, described by Rhys Davids as "the foundation of all Pali scholarship" marked the beginning of Western interest in Buddhist Studies (Davids, 1896). Davids referred to the unparalleled breakthrough for the early history in India through the identification of the King Devanam Piyadasi of the Indian inscriptions with the Emperor Asoka as described in the *Mahavamsa*. This resolved a problem that had long confronted the British archaeologist in India, James Prinsep.

The publication of the *Mahavamsa* translation also spurred the Colonial Office in Westminster to evince an interest in the ruined cities of Sri Lanka which led to further investigation in Buddhist civilisations. Only the first part of the *Mahavamsa* was translated by Turnour, the rest was edited by Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thera and D. A. de S. Batuwantudawe in 1877 and translated into English by L. C. Wijesinghe in 1889. And so in 1868, the Governor of Ceylon, Sir Hercules Robinson, appointed a commission to make a record of all rock inscriptions, Buddhist monuments and irrigation works which eventually led to the formation of the Sri Lanka Archaeological Department and recording of the existing Buddhist monuments.

### **First international Buddhist centres in the world**

The interest in Buddhist studies has to be seen in the context of several centuries of European colonizers (Portuguese, Dutch and British) which did considerable destruction to Buddhism. The Portuguese in their occupation of the Western coast burnt all the Buddhist temples and chased all monks away. It was only in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Buddhist temples were allowed to come up again in the Western coast. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist renaissance began to revive the Buddhist interest.

Ven. Valane Sri Siddhartha Maha Thera established in 1841, a monastic college Parama Dhamma Cetiya at Ratmalana, a Colombo suburb which gradually became the major Centre of Buddhist learning. Of those who studied there, Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thera (1826-1911), became the doyen of scholar monks and established in 1873, the Vidyodaya Pirivena (Buddhist college) at Maligakanda, Colombo. He was the most renowned Buddhist monk during his time known for his profound scholarship, not only in Sri Lanka, but also in India, Siam, Burma and Cambodia. He attracted to his Buddhist colleges, monks and lay persons from India, Thailand, Burma, Nepal, Cambodia and other Buddhist countries to learn Buddhism and oriental languages. Among them were Satish Chandra Vidyabhushana and Kosambi Dharmananda, two well known Indian Buddhist scholars who studied at the Vidyodaya Pirivena (Prajnananda, 1947).

Another monk who studied at the first monastic college Parama Dhamma Cetiya, Ven. Ratmalane Sri Dhammaloka Maha Thera went on to establish in 1875, the Vidyalankara Pirivena at Peliyagoda near Colombo. This too became a key centre. And in the renewed cultural transactions, among Asian countries, Sri Lanka now took the lead in the spread and revival of Buddhism in the modern era. For example, Maha Chulalankorn Monks' College of Thailand, Thailand's leading Buddhist University today was modelled after these two monastic colleges.

Meanwhile in the south of Sri Lanka, by 1861, monk, the Venerable Subhuti's temple Abhinavaramaya in Ambalangoda had turned itself into the first international

centre for Buddhist studies in the world. In addition to monk students from all parts of Sri Lanka, foreign monk students from Burma, Cambodia, Thailand and China came there for short periods. In addition, officers of the Ceylon Civil Service such as Robert Caesar Childers, L.E. Lee and A.S. Fagden studied Sinhala, Pali and learnt the Buddhist doctrine from the monk. Visiting scholars from various parts of the world consulted him for advice and guidance.

By early 1860s, Sailabimbaramaya, Dodanduwa, again in the South which came to be known as 'Saraswati Mandapa' was established by Piyaratana Tissa Mahanayaka Thera (1826-1907). It also became known as another pre-eminent seat of Buddhist learning in southern Sri Lanka. Piyaratana Tissa was the author of the *Vinayanitiya*, a treatise on the discipline of monks, and editor of the *Kankhavitarani*, the commentary on the *Patimokka*. He excelled most in the *Vinaya* (monks' rules) as evident from the fact that he was chosen to address the inauguration of the Pelmadulla *Tripitaka* Revision in 1865.

Piyaratana Tissa's pupil Alutgama Seelakkhandha Nayaka Thera together with his teacher converted the Sailabimbaramaya to another international Buddhist Centre frequented by foreign scholars. Piyaratana Tissa excelled in both scholarship and oratory. Like Subhuti Thera, he kept in close touch with oriental scholars such as Rhys Davids, Sri Taranath Tarkavacaspati and Sri Jivananda Vidyasagara of Calcutta. He also maintained close contact with both the Sangha as well as the kings of Burma and Thailand. Colonel Olcott, the President of the Theosophical movement based in New York, had through correspondence, developed a great admiration for Piyaratana Tissa who had become in the meantime familiar with the Theosophical movement and even had requested for a copy of Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* published in 1877. The Theosophical Society elected him as a Fellow of the Society in 1878. (Two other reformist monks, Hikkaduwe Sumangala and Migettuwatte Gunananda were already associated with the Society). Piyaratana Tissa sent in 1880, an article in Pali to be published in the journal *Theosophist* for which Olcott could not find a translator.

The credit for establishing the first non-temple based school for Buddhist children in 1869 also goes to Piyaratana Tissa. This was a time when Christian missionary schools and the government authorities were doing everything possible to suppress Buddhism.

Aggaramaya in Ambalangoda was established by Mirisse Dhammananda Mahanayaka Thera (1799-1876). He had received higher ordination in Burma at the Kalyani Sima like his predecessor Kataluwe Gunaratana Tissa Thera, the founder of the Amarapura Kalyanivamsa sect in 1810. The Kalyani Sima had been established in Burma in 1476 after the return of a group of Burmese monks who received higher ordination on the Kalyani river in Sri Lanka (Bode, 1897). Mirisse Dhammananda Thera's disciple, Dhammadhara Thera (1858-1936) through his close association with Burma, excelled in the Abhidhamma and was honoured in 1895 in Burma with the title of *Maharajaguru* (great royal teacher). He eventually served as the first Professor of Buddhism and Pali in Vishvabharati, Shantiniketan, India for five years from 1917 to 1922 and was held in high esteem by Ravindranath Tagore for his erudition in the *Tripitaka*. Later, Nityananda Vinoda Goswami, Professor of Sanskrit of Vishvabharati, Shantiniketan came to Sri Lanka and studied Abhidhamma under Dhammananda.

Polwatte Sri Buddhadatta Thera (1887-1962) was the third incumbent of Aggaramaya, and inherited a deep interest for Buddhist Studies in Burma. Buddhadatta had gone to Burma as a novice at the age of 15, and before he was 21 years, he had completed composing several works in Burmese such as First Steps in Pali Conversation, an English and Burmese edition of *Abhidhanappadipika* and an edition of *Buddhaghosuppatti* with a Burmese commentary. He edited a large number of Pali texts for the Pali Text Society. By 1956, now nearly 70 years old, he was considered a major *Tripitaka* scholar par excellence as indicated by the Sri Lanka Government's selecting him as the leader of the Sri Lanka team of scholars to assist in the revision of the Sixth *Tripitaka* Council held in Yangon in 1956. He addressed this gathering in Burmese. His meticulous scrutiny of Pali texts was well known, for example he pointed out errors in Geiger's translation of

Sri Lanka chronicles, and I.B. Horner's translation of the *Vinaya Pitaka* (Guruge, *Opcit*, lxi).

### **British civil servants turned first Western Buddhist scholars**

The Ceylon Civil Service was established by the British in 1798 (the oldest in the East). With the intention of ruling the country more effectively, it was now stipulated that British Civil Servants should study the local language, history, religion and customs. And in 1863, they were given an allowance, called the 'Pandit Allowance' to engage the services of a teacher, and were required to sit for monthly examinations in Sinhala classics. Consequently the erudite scholar monks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became the teachers of the British Civil Servants in Sinhala, Pali and Buddhism. And so began also a fruitful inter-civilisational relationship. After their retirement, several of this band of British Civil Servants dedicated their lives to Buddhist studies. Thus civil servant, Turnour who in 1837 translated the *Mahavamsa* was one such pioneering Western Buddhist scholar.

Robert Caesar Childers (1838-1876) who joined the Ceylon Civil Service in 1860 studied under Yatramulle Sri Dhammarama Thera (1828-1872) of Bentota Vanavasa Vihara. On his return to England in 1864, he compiled a Pali-English Dictionary (1872-1875) in two volumes which gave a great impetus to the study of Pali in the West (*Truebner's Record* 1872). Until the compilation of Childers' dictionary, Waskaduwe Subhuti Thera's *Abhidhanappadipika* which was published by the Government Press on the orders of Governor Sir Charles Justin McCarthy in 1865 served as a Pali dictionary, especially for Pali students in Europe. Subhuti's *Namamala* or *Namavarane-gilla* served as a Pali grammar. In compiling his dictionary, Childers arranged alphabetically all the words found in the *Abhidhanappadipika*, a Pali vocabulary of 1,203 verses, which had been edited by Subhuti Thera. Childers added references and also other words taken from already published texts. The assistance given by Subhuti had been indispensable in the preparation of this first Pali Dictionary published in 1874 (Wijesekara 1970, p.3.) Letters written in three languages – Pali, Sinhala and English by Childers to both the Venerables Yatramulle and Subhuti indicate the numerous questions on Pali words, grammatical forms and Buddhist doctrines, posed to the monks

by them and answered. Childers was appointed in 1872 as Professor of Pali and Buddhist Literature at University College, London indicating that formal interest in Pali studies had begun in centres of higher learning in England.

Among the other British civil servants who studied under Sri Lankan monks was T.W. Rhys Davids (1843-1922), who joined the Ceylon Civil Service in 1864. After eight years of studying Pali under Sri Lankan scholar monks, he returned to England in 1872, and began to work with other Orientalists in Europe. He was the first to present to the West the Pali Canon and went on to found in 1881, the Pali Text Society in London. During this period (1882-1904), he was also Professor of Pali and Buddhist Literature in the University of London. Rhys Davids further encouraged the cause of oriental learning through the Royal Asiatic Society where he became the Secretary and urged the British government to establish an Oriental School in London University. He pointed out that a knowledge of Eastern language, literature and history would be helpful for the better administration of the British Raj. Consequently an independent Oriental School was established in 1908 in London University (In 1916, this became the School of Oriental Studies and in 1938, it was named the School of Oriental and African Studies and remains to date a major centre of Buddhist studies in the UK.)

By 1922, when T. W. Rhys Davids died, the *Pali Text Society* had issued 64 separate texts in 94 volumes extending to over 26,000 pages. Subsequently, Rhys David's wife Mrs. Carolina Augusta Foley Rhys Davids and Mrs. I.B. Hörner became Presidents of the Society. These Pali Text Society publications facilitated greatly the study of Buddhist literature, promoting the cause of Buddhism and Buddhist studies in the West. The British civil servants who studied Buddhism and Pali while serving in Sri Lanka, thus became key actors in the propagation of Buddhism in the West.

### **Sri Lankan Monks' support for pioneering Western Orientalists**

Letters written by many of the leading translators and writers of books on South Asia and Buddhism, such as Robert Caesar Childers, Viggo Fausböll, Rhys Davids, Herman Oldenberg, Rheinhold Rost, Max Mueller, D.P. Minayeff, the

Russian Orientalist, Thomas Spencer Hardy, Henry C. Warren, Wilhelm Geiger, Charles Lanman, Sir Edwin Arnold and Paul Carus have been brought together in a volume by Ananda W. P. Guruge (*From the Living Fountains of Buddhism: Sri Lankan Support to Pioneering Western Orientalists*, Colombo 1984). These letters indicate the extent to which these Western writers depended for their work on Sinhalese scholar monks. Guruge has termed the period 1861-1942 a golden age of Buddhist and Oriental scholarship in Sri Lanka. The debt of these Western scholars to Sinhalese monks and their intellectual heritage is exemplified by Viggo Fausböll, the great Danish Pali scholar in a letter to Venerable Waskaduwe Subhuti where he said, "We, Europeans, must, of course, stand in need of such help as we are so far from the living fountains of Buddhism [meaning scholar monks] and so scantily furnished with materials" (Guruge, *Opcit*, p. i).

Ven. Subhuti became the prime source of information on Buddhism and allied subjects to many foreign scholars, either through face to face interactions or by mail. Requests that came from them were varied. For example, those scholars who wanted manuscripts for editing and publication, requested information on manuscripts. Rheinhold Rost (1822-1896) the Superintendent of India Office Library London, worked as an intermediary to provide Subhuti's assistance to a large number of scholars who approached the India Office Library in London. Subhuti had on his part, engaged copyists to make paper transcripts of various palm-leaf manuscripts that were scattered in temples all over the country. Subhuti's "assistance to Childers in the preparation of his Pali Dictionary, to Fausböll in the edition of his *Jātakas*, to Oldenberg and Geiger in their early studies on Sri Lanka Chronicles and to Warren in his studies" were notable (Guruge, *Opcit*, p. xxii)

The scholar monks revised and corrected translations done by the Europeans, pointing out where necessary, their errors. Some Western scholars wanted Subhuti's help in collating manuscripts. For this purpose, the Subhuti had to read and compare Sinhala, Burmese, Thai and Cambodian scripts. Other scholars wanted to gain from his profound knowledge of Buddhist literature. Some needed references and quotations. Childers himself asked hundreds of questions, ranging from Pali grammatical forms and constructions to Buddhist philosophy, cosmology and



history. Childer's questions to Ven. Subhuti were neatly numbered and one of his letters had 146 questions.

This contact between Rheinhold Rost and Subhuti paved the way for the latter to provide assistance to a new generation of Western scholars. For example, Herman Oldenberg (1854-1920) who was to later edit and publish the *Dipavamsa*, received a manuscript of the *Dipavamsa*. Pischel received a manuscript of *Therigatha Atthakatha*. Richard Morris obtained manuscripts of *Theragatha*, *Therigatha* and *Apadana*. And Subhuti even made corrections in the text of the *Anguttara Nikaya* prepared by Morris. Rheinhold Rost obtained manuscripts for the Copenhagen library and Pali books on Niti for himself. Some manuscripts were received on an exchange basis, some were gifts, some were lent and safely returned through the Colonial Secretary. Rost often gratefully acknowledged Subhuti's assistance, for example, once referring to Subhuti's "great learning and the valuable and unselfish help rendered to Pali scholars all over the world".

Other western scholars who had close literary connection with Waskaduwe Subhuti were Sir Alexander Cunningham, the Director of Archaeology India, Prof. Minayef, a Russian scholar in Buddhist philosophy and Wilhelm Ludwig Geiger (1856-1945) who translated the *Mahvamsa* into English. This scholar monk helped Geiger in his translation of the *Mahavamsa*. Subhuti authored the Pali *Nighantu* (glossary), titled *Abhidhanappadipika* and another work comparing *sannas* (commentaries) with *Nighantus* giving English words for Pali terms. This work was printed at the Government Press, Colombo through a request by Rheinhold Rost and Hermann Oldenberg.

### **Encouragement by Sri Lankan monks to Westerners to write in Pali**

After the colonial domination by the Portuguese, Dutch and the British, Sri Lanka had become again by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although still being under the British, the leader in the study and teaching of Pali, the *lingua franca* of Theravada Buddhist countries. Ven. Bentara Atthadassi Thera (? -186) of the Vanavasi Vihara of Bentota

was one of the earliest Pali scholars (Malalgoda p. 128). He is known for writing a long letter in Pali of 150 stanzas addressed to the King of Thailand in 1845. Others included Ven. Yatramulle Dhammarama (1828-1872), Ven. Weligama Sri Sumangala, Ven. Ambagahawatte Saranankara, Indasabhavara Nanasami Mahanayaka Thera, the founder of the Ramanna Nikaya and Ven. Potuvila Indajoti who was a leader of the Buddhist Revival Movement. It was from Ven. Yatramulle that the officers of the Ceylon Civil Service, such as Childers and Rhys Davids studied Sinhala and Pali.

Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala who is known for making metrical compositions in Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit, wrote letters in Pali to the leading monks in Burma, Thailand and Cambodia.

Childers in his replies to Subhuti's letters written in Pali, wrote at least a few sentences in Pali initially. By 1870, Childers had mastered Pali to such an extent that he translated into Pali verse, XIII<sup>th</sup> Chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians. (Guruge, *Opcit*, cxvi). The extant letters written by Yatramulle to Childers give replies to the latter's numerous questions on Pali words, grammatical forms and Buddhist doctrines in the course of his preparation of the Pali dictionary. Childer's later letters were often trilingual, written in Pali, Sinhala and English.

### **Sri Lankan Monks' contribution to the founding of Pali Text Society**

Rhys Davids on his return to England in 1872, continued his interest in Sri Lankan and Buddhist studies. In 1877, he published a book *Ancient Coins and Measures in Ceylon* and in 1878, he wrote for the London Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, the book, *Buddha* on the life and teachings of the Buddha which by 1914, had gone into 23 editions. Later, he joined hands with Max Mueller and Herman Oldenberg in the publication of the *Sacred Books of the East* and the *Sacred Books of the Buddhists* series. His greatest contribution to Pali Buddhist studies was the establishment of the Pali Text Society in 1881. (In the United States, the Harvard Oriental Series, designed to bring about 'mutual understanding and good-will between East and West' was founded in 1891)

The first major organ in the promotion of Theravada Buddhism in the West was thus the Pali Text Society founded in 1880 by Rhys Davids. The founder of the Society was undoubtedly inspired by his Sinhalese monk teachers and mentors in the study of Pali and Buddhist studies such as Yatramulle Sri Dhammarama, Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala, Waskaduwe Sri Subhuti, Dodanduwe Sri Piyaratana Tissa, Ratgama Sri Saddhhananda, Gintota Pannananda and Bulatgama Sri Sumanatissa. These monks provided not only the scholarly assistance and the supply of manuscripts, but also the initial advance for the cost of printing. Of the 96 persons listed as 'subscribers in advance' of the Pali Text Society publication, 74 were scholar monks. The original intention of including Jain and uncanonical Sanskrit texts in the publication series had changed in the very first year of the existence of the Society. This, however, was not due to any pressure from the monks. A Society Report of 1882 by Rhys Davids relates, "Since nearly half of the number of our subscribers are now Bhikkhus it is only fair to them that this intention should be so far modified that we should devote our funds more immediately and continually to the publication of those texts in which they are principally interested ... But the Buddhist Bhikkhus themselves are by no means desirous that our efforts should be directed either entirely or immediately to the publication of the Pali *Pitakas* alone ..." (Guruge, *Opcit*, p. cxxxvi). This policy is in force up to date.

Davids announced the birth of the new society when he gave his celebrated Hibbert Lectures in 1881. In doing so, he declared: "The Sacred Books of the early Buddhists have preserved to us the sole record of the only religious movement in the world's history which bears any close resemblance to Christianity; and it is not too much to say that the publication of this unique literature will be no less important for the study of history and especially of religious history than the publication of the Vedas has already been."

Rhys Davids with the assistance and collaboration of his wife Caroline, went on to publish almost the whole of the Pali canon and a considerable number of commentaries and English translations. He himself edited and translated numerous texts. With this love and devotion he served the Society for forty one years.

## Sri Lankan Monks' influence on Western Popularisers of Buddhism

The impact of Sinhalese scholar monks on the West was not limited to Western scholars. It extended to those who popularised Buddhism in the West.

Colonel Henry Steele Olcott (1832-1906), an American Civil War officer contributed a great deal to the spread of Buddhism in the West. By 1866, the ridiculing of Buddhism by Christian preachers through books and pamphlets had reached such a climax that in Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks made an open challenge to the Christians to come to a public debate. Three debates were held, and the last was the famous Panadura debate that gave the final defeat to the Christians. A visitor to Sri Lanka during this time, Dr. James Martin Peebles, a scholar and world traveller took to America the English translation of the Panadura debate published in the English language newspaper *Ceylon Times* in 1873. He published it in America with an introduction and comments of his own. The reports of the debate then reached English, French, Russian and American audiences (Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 6 volumes, Madras, 1928-35).

This book attracted the Theosophists, the movement in New York interested in Eastern ideas. The leaders of this group, Madame Petrovna Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott welcomed the Christian defeat by Buddhists in the debates. They soon began to correspond with the key figures of the debate, Hikkaduwe Sumangala and Mohottiwatte Gunananda. When the journal *Theosophist* was started in July 1879, Col. Olcott invited them to contribute articles to it. Olcott's correspondence from New York with Ven Piyaratana Tissa reveals the esteem with which Olcott held Sri Lankan Buddhist monks as seen in the following quote from Olcott's writing in 1879.

"I pass among ignorant Western people as a thoroughly well informed man, but in comparison with the learning possessed by my Brothers in the oriental priesthoods, I am as ignorant as the last of their neophytes ... To you as you must we turn, and say, : Fathers, brothers, the Western world is dying ... come and help, rescue it. Come as missionaries, as teachers, as disputants, preachers ... Persuade good,

pure, learned, eloquent Buddhists to come here and preach, you will sweep the country before ...” (Quoted in Guruge, *Opcit*, p. 338-9).

By the time Olcott and other Theosophists arrived in Sri Lanka in 1880, the Buddhist revival had made great advances with a new life given to the monastic education. Several “modern” Buddhist schools outside the earlier temple schools had also been established. With the Buddhists establishing their own printing presses, the Buddhist revival gained a new impetus with an ability to reach Buddhists all over the country. Although the 19<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist revival had been on for decades, some observers were later to falsely claim the beginning of the Buddhist revival to be the arrival of Olcott in 1880 (Malalgoda, p. 256). The arrival of Olcott, however, gave a major fillip to the burgeoning Buddhist revival, especially to the establishment of a large number of “modern” Buddhist schools in major towns in Sri Lanka.

One of the young men who came under Olcott’s influence was David Hewavitharne, who later became a great Buddhist leader under the name Anagarika Dharmapala. He founded the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891, and initiated the Buddhist revival movement in India (Guruge, 1965).

Sir Edwin Arnold (1832-1904) from England was another eminent populariser of Buddhism. *The Light of Asia*, the epic poem on the life of the Buddha, published in 1879 by Arnold became an instant best seller. It saw over sixty editions in England and over a hundred in America. Arnold held Weligama Sumangala Thera in high esteem, referring to him as “my dear and wise friend”. They maintained through correspondence, a long friendship with common interests in Sanskrit and Buddhist shrines in India. Sir Edwin eventually came to Sri Lanka in 1886 to visit the Thera in Panadura when a gathering of around 3,000 honoured him with speeches made in Pali and Sinhala to which he had replied in Sanskrit (Arnold, 1886).

The idea that Bodhi Gaya be managed by a representative committee of Buddhist nations was first mooted by Arnold at Panadura (*India Revisited and East and West*, 1887). Anagarika Dharmapala pursued this idea and devoted almost his

entire life to the revival of Buddhism in India under the guidance of Sumangala Thera. Arnold also gave the initial background support of convincing the British authorities in Sri Lanka and India for the Bodh Gaya project. Dharmapala later formed the Maha Bodhi Society and enlisted the cooperation of Buddhist leaders from Burma, Thailand and Japan. He established a monastery at Bodh Gaya in order to facilitate pilgrims from Japan, China, Tibet, Nepal, Thailand, Burma and Arakan to perform their religious observances at the sacred Bodhi tree.

Paul Carus (1852-1919), an American philosopher, born and educated in Germany was the editor of the influential periodical *Monist* and the *Open Court*, both of which were important clearing houses of ideas of East and West. Carus corresponded with Subhuti Thera and Seelakkhandha Thera. He published his best known book, *The Gospel of Buddhism*, published in 1894 which became so popular that it went into thirteen editions between 1894 and 1919. Another book by him was *The Dharma* which was used by Colonel Olcott to produce his *Buddhist Catechism* for the benefit of Sri Lankans.

Dharmapala returned to America in 1896 at the invitation of Paul Carus' father-in-law E.C. Hegeler, the founder of the Open Court Publishing House, and lectured across America enthusing audiences all the way. The coming together of Paul Carus with Soyen Shaku, a Zen monk (who had led a strict life of a monk for three years in Sri Lanka) and Dharmapala made a significant mark in the promotion of Buddhism in the West. All three shared the view that Buddhism "was more fitted than Christianity to heal the breach that had opened between science and religion, since it did not depend on miracles and faith" (Fields, 1992, p. 128). Another major contribution to Buddhism by Carus was the patronage and assistance given by him to D.T. Suzuki, a protégé of Soyen Shaku, who later became the pioneering writer on Zen Buddhism in the US.

Henry Clarke Warren (1854-1899) after graduating in History of Philosophy at Harvard in 1879, studied Sanskrit at John Hopkins University. On meeting with Rhys Davids in 1884, he pursued his interest in Buddhist studies. His book *Buddhism in Translations* (1896), gained wide circulation in America, Europe and

the East, primarily because in 1910, the President of Harvard University included the last 200 pages of the book in the fifty-volume series of the Harvard Classics (Lanman 1920). Warren's correspondence with Sri Subhuti and Seelakkhandha Theras reveals that they were a source of encouragement and of great service in his studies on the *Visuddhimagga*,

### Scholar Monks' international academic exchange

Subhuti sent his books for distribution among Western scholars to Childers first, and after the latter's death, to Rheinhold Rost who diligently distributed them among reputed Western scholars who were assisted by Subhuti, as well as among others including E. Kuhn, Professor of Sanskrit of Munich University. In return, Barth kept Subhuti informed of new publications in Europe that would be of interest to the latter, He also recommended him book sellers in Calcutta or Bombay who could send Western books by post.

Seelakkhandha had sent to Barth with whom he shared an interest in Sanskrit studies, the *Bhaktisataka* and the *Trikandasesa* edited by him and published in the *Journal of the Buddhist Text Society of India*. Barth acknowledged the receipt of another Sanskrit text *Vidagdhamukhamandana* edited by Seelakkhandha written in Sinhala script and informed him of the inability to read it due to his failing eyesight, but engaged in a discussion on several references to the text. Within three months, Seelakkhandha had sent to Barth three more publications, two of which were *Anuruddhasataka*, his own Sanskrit composition *Srimangalastaka* and *Jimalankara*.

The five copies of *Srimangalastaka* sent by Seelakkhandha to Barth eventually reached recognized academic institutions and scholars involved with European studies on Buddhism at the time, e.g. Institute of France, Asiatic Society of Paris, French School of Archeology, Saigon (then Cambodia), and Senart, the leading epigraphist of Asokan inscriptions fame and a Pali scholar. In return, Barth sent to Seelakkhandha the articles he had written, for example his paper on the *Pigawa* inscription in Kapilawastu which identified the Buddha's relics. Barth had

requested Seelakkhandha's comments on an inscription in Sanskrit *slokas* relating to the endowment of a hospital by King Jayavarman VII of Cambodia in 1186, newly found by Sir Alexander Cuminngam, the Commissioner of Archaeology of India at the time. In response to a question by the Thera on new archeological finds of Cambodia, Barth had recommended reading the *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient* (Also see Goonatilake, Hema, 2005).

Seelakkhandha also tried hard through Barth to get some of his books published in the West. Barth informed Seelakkhandha that the publication of critical editions of Sanskrit texts with commentaries based on authoritative manuscripts available in India and Europe were being done by the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna, Austria and added that the Academy's approach was different from that of scholar monks which was rather a practical approach. He suggested to Seelakkhandha, however, to send his *Trikandasesa* to the Secretary of the Academy for publication. Later in a letter written by Barth to Seelakkhandha indicating the reason for not accepting Seelakkhandha's edition for publication, he emphasized the absence in Seelakkhandha's approach of the "historico-critical" standpoint adopted by contemporary Western philologists "with a copious apparatus of manuscripts, furnished with exhaustive indices and historical inquiries." It appears that later Seelakkhandha continued his effort to get the *Trikandasesa* published with the help of Lanman in the US.

During the scholarly exchange between the monks and their Western counterparts, sometimes, the monks received heavily critical comments on their non-Western approaches. Barth praised Seelakkhandha's *Bhaktisataka* saying, "Your commentary seems to be very well done and useful, and this separate edition is so much the more welcome ..." Barth then criticized the *Trikandasesa* for not reaching Western standards of textual criticism and referred to the use of synonyms in oriental literature as "the malicious propensity of your writers to use proper nouns as a malleable matter", "thus serving up mere puzzle instead of poetry."

In the same way, Barth criticized Seelakkhandha's own Sanskrit composition *Srimangalastaka* as, "I find in it the same blemishes as in the most part of recent



Sanskrit verse”, and that “there is a very conspicuous lack of propriety.” He added that he spoke frankly as with a friend. With regard to the Seelakkhandha’s *Jinalankara*, Barth gratefully acknowledged the contribution rendered by him in clearing a grave confusion on the date of *Jinalankara*, created by an earlier edition published in London by James Gray, Professor of Pali, Rangoon College in Burma.

Several of these scholar monks also had the academic curiosity to request for information on international conferences taking place in the West even though they never expected to attend. (Polwatte Buddhaddatta Thera was the only one who visited the West, i.e. Britain and Switzerland.) It appears that Barth had kept Seelakkhandha Thera informed of such gatherings, for example, he had sent circulars about the Oriental Congress to be held in Hanoi. Seelakkhandha had also inquired from Barth whether there were elected members to the Congress of History of Religions.

Apart from academic societies such as the Pali Text Society and the Buddhist Text Society of Calcutta, the scholar monks were in touch with the first Buddhist societies that came up in Europe. For example, Seelakkhandha corresponded with Major E.R. Rost, the founder General Secretary of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland and with Francis J. Payne who succeeded as General Secretary and Editor. The special feature of these Buddhist societies was that the members had embraced Buddhism as their new faith.

### **A second generation of Western Scholars inspired by Sri Lankan Monks**

Lord Robert Chalmers who was to become Governor of Ceylon, became a pupil of Rhys Davids, and a member of the Pali Text Society. He had written to Subhuti from London in 1891 at the suggestion of Rhys Davids seeking his assistance to trace the parables contained in the story of Prince Joasaph made up by a Christian priest out of the story of Bodhisat. At the Paris Congress in 1897, Chalmers gave a learned address on the Pali term *Tathagata* which evoked much interest.

Chalmers arrived in Ceylon in 1913, and served as Governor until 1916. Before his arrival, he was well known as the author of the translation of the *Majjkima Nikaya* in 1888, and *Jātakas* in 1895 which he completed under the guidance of Rhys Davids Malalasekera, (1994). One of his first public engagements was to preside over the prize-giving at Vidyodaya Monastic College, Colombo. As he had studied Pali in Roman script, the monks thought he could not correctly pronounce Pali words, and they arranged an interpreter to render his English speech into Sinhalese. But, he replied to their elaborate Pali address of welcome in an extempore speech in flawless Pali. He concluded his half-hour address with the wish: "May this noble Pali language ever flourish in Lanka!".

On his return to England, Lord Chalmers produced his last work of scholarship in 1931 – a metrical translation of the *Sutta Nipata*, the earliest teachings of the Buddha in Pali verse. This translation "is more remarkable for its style than its precise literary accuracy. He showed literary skill in his translations, sought out good English equivalents for technical terms of Buddhism, cut short the remorseless repetitions."

A key pivot in East-West encounters and in creating a global Buddhist discourse was also Anagarika Dharmapala. He was well read in the philosophical, scientific and scholarly literature of both East and West. He was read in the history and the different thought systems of South Asia, of the Arab countries and the classical Greek tradition, as well as in post-Renaissance Western philosophy. He discussed knowingly about Western classical writers, such as Antiochus, Antigonas, Aristotle, Democritus, Diogenes, Plato, Ptolemy, Pythagoras and Socrates. He also spoke with facility on scientific figures such as Galileo, Einstein, Darwin and Huxley, as well as on philosophers such as Machiavelli, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, William James, Herbert Spencer, Spinoza, Schopenhauer and Mill. He was especially enameled of Darwin, referring to him no less than fifteen times in his published writings. His own philosophical position is seen in his view of Buddhism which he said had no place for "metaphysics, logic, dialectics, loathsome ascetic habits, magic, bacchanalian revelry, priestly formulas, destructive rituals etc" (Goonatilake, S., Bloomington, 2001).

His international friends and deepest views were in keeping with this broad enlightened thrust. Among Dharmapala's friends was Sir Edwin Arnold the author of *The Light of Asia* who considered him "my excellent friend". Among the Indian national leaders that befriended him were Sarat Chandra Das, Rajendra Prasad (who later became India's President), Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

## Conclusion

To sum up, Sri Lanka scholar monks and laymen linked themselves to the West (US, UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Russia, Austria etc) and to Asia (Burma, Cambodia, China, Japan, India, Thailand). They were involved in cultural transfer to the West of key Buddhist texts, for example, almost all the Pali and some Sanskrit texts. They either wrote to the journals or those who were in touch with the journals like *The Open Court* and *the Monist*, two respectable journals in the West. These monks kept abreast of progress of Western based oriental studies having books from Europe and America sent to them including those on other Asian countries. They also helped European scholars to establish contacts with scholars of other Asian countries like for example, Siam. They revised and corrected translations done by the Europeans, pointing out where necessary, their errors<sup>b</sup>.

Those whom they helped read like a Who's Who of early Western orientalist. Thus, Viggo Fausböll in the edition of *Jātakas*, Childers (Pali dictionary), Rhys Davids (founder Pali Text Society), Hermann Oldenberg (first authoritative German text on Buddhism), Max Muller (leading German Pali and Sanskrit Scholar), Wilhelm Geiger (in his early studies on Sri Lanka chronicles *Mahavamsa* and *Dipavamsa*), Clarke Warren in his studies on the *Visuddhimagga*, Sir Edwin Arnold (*Light of Asia*), Paul Carus (editor *The Open Court* and *The Monist*), Rheinhold Rost, D.P. Minayeff, Thomas Spencer Hardy, Henry Clark Warren, Charles Lanman and several other Western scholars.

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