

**The Unforgettable Dharmapala:
A Miscellany on the Life and
Achievements of the Anagarika
Dharmapala (1864-1933) of Sri
Lanka**

**By Ananda W.P. Guruge
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The present work, *The Unforgettable Dharmapala*, written by Dr. Ananda W.P. Guruge, a well known scholar, is a compendium of information about Anagarika Dharmapala, the greatest Sri Lankan humanitarian of nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dr. Guruge's previous work on the same subject, *Return to Righteousness*, a collection of speeches, essays and letters of Anagarika Dharmapala, was published twice in 1965 and 1991. *The Unforgettable Dharmapala* is based on *Return to Righteousness*.

The Introduction: "The Emergence of a Leader" is a short description of Baddegama Buddhist Christian controversy, Buddhist uprising and birth of Dharmapala. In part one a diarial account of Anagarika's visits to India in the wake of Buddhist activities is chronologically given. In this section we find the information regarding his association with theosophists Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky.

The section, "Contemporary Assessments," is a brief description of how Americans evaluated Anagarika's presentation at the Chicago Congress. And also we read in this section some of Anagarika's reflections regarding Christian missionaries working in Sri Lanka. His opinion was that the Christian priests should have the same qualities Jesus Christ had. And also they should learn all the religions.

Author mentions that due to Anagarika Dharmapala's lashing tongue he made enemies rather than friends. British rulers in Sri Lanka considered him as militant

nationalist and a religious fanatic. From the book we learn that he was not discouraged by any of these.

The mission of Dharmapala is an elucidation of his activities carried out for the country, religion, culture and the Sinhala people. For this cause he gave up all comforts and became an Anagarika (homeless). He was very much contented and decided to live on bare necessities.

The author mentions that the Anagarika was very much inspired by Ven. Gunānanda and Ven. Sumaṅgala and also by Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky. A series of events in his early career made him follow a wider program of activities like Buddhist research and missionary propaganda, social services and political agitation. According to the author, he understood that the root-cause of Sri Lanka's national problem was the loss of independence. He was very much worried about the alien rule in the country and well aware of the evils of western imperialism.

As the book indicates, the Anagarika showed the quality of a national leader from his younger days. The British government in Sri Lanka called him a "mob-leader" as he was very critical of the British rule in the island. Anagarika's philosophy, according to the author, was based on Buddha's teaching and nationalism. In his campaign against the British rule he had two approaches, one was for ordinary less educated people and the other for intellectuals.

Anagarika was against the western way of thinking and practices and criticized missionary education which produced a class of people who was not concerned with Sri Lankan culture and nationalism. He saw very clearly that Christian priests were converting Sinhala people through education and spreading the Christian culture in the island. According to the author, the Anagarika was concerned with Buddhism, Ārya Sinhala values and customs. He criticized vehemently

Sinhalese who embraced the western culture and way of living.

A notable feature of this book is that the author has quoted from Anagarika Dharmapala's speeches and writings to illustrate his way of thinking and action. This gives a chance to readers to have a direct access to Dharmapala's own language and tone of speech.

Dharmapala not only talked about Sri Lanka. He was an advocate for India too. The author has quoted in this book some of his speeches made regarding India. He mentioned India as the land of gods, Brahmins and Buddhas, and also as the land of great righteous monarchs like Aśoka, Sīlāditya. Later he was very much involved in re-introducing Buddhism into its birth land.

"Mahabodhi Society: The Embodiment of the Anagarika Dharmapala's Hopes and Aspirations" gives a vivid description of his activities in India. The information in this section is based on Anagarika's diary notes. The establishment of Mahabodhi Society on May 31, 1891 and the publication of Mahabodhi Journal in the following year were great achievements of Dharmapala's life. The author points out that the establishment of the society had two-fold objectives: restoring the sacred Buddhist shrines of India to the Buddhists and to bring back to India the greatest spiritual and cultural heritage of Buddhism.

In this venture of reintroduction of Buddhism into India the birth place of Buddhism, Anagarika was given necessary encouragement and support by Sir Edwin Arnold, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, the American Theosophist, by raising funds to open the head quarters in Calcutta.

Part II of the book is entitled "The Firebrand in Action: From the Eyes of a Historical Novelist." This whole section has been taken from the novel written by the author himself. "From Theosophy to Buddhist Cause" explains the Anagarika's involvement in theosophy under the

guidance of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott. "The Age of Doubt" briefly explains how the Anagarika was moving from theosophy and concentrating on Buddhism and Buddhist activities. He was of the opinion that Buddhism was losing ground to Hinduism in the headquarters of theosophical society. "How to Win India for Buddhism" is a description of the Anagarika's preparatory steps to reintroduce Buddhism into India and restoration of Buddhist shrines there.

Part III of the book is "Anagarika Dharmapala! Thou shouldst be Living at This Hour." This section begins with the remarks "I do wish that the Anagarika Dharmapala could be with us today." What the author has implied in this section is that the people of the country through their dedicated action respect and venerate him. The readers come across some useful comments made by Professors E.F.C. Ludowyk and K.M. de Silva in appreciation of Dharmapala's relentless effort in resurrecting independence, nationalism, Buddhist values and so on. This section is a short description of his educational thought and practice, the rehabilitation of Buddhist shrines in India and Sri Lanka, taking Buddhism back to India and its propagation in the world, denunciation of colonialism and agitation for independence, guidelines for national economy and the control of immigrants and groundwork in the formation of national leadership.

The book, even though small, includes valuable information regarding Dharmapala's philosophy and the course of action initiated to resurrect Buddhist values and nationalism. Most Sri Lankans today have forgotten this great figure. The present work can be regarded an enlightening piece of work.

– Kottegoda S. Warnasuriya