



## Anagarika Dharmapala: The Early Revivalist of Modern India

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### Abstract

*"Anagarika Dharmapala was a prominent Buddhist revivalist of modern India. He was born in Sri Lanka and completed his life journey in India as a Buddhist monk and activist. He was influenced with Theravada movement in Ceylon and joined Theosophical Society. He read to Edwin Arnold's 'Light of Asia' and decided to go to Bodh Gaya. When he saw the ruined condition of Buddhist sites at then he had to decide to revive Buddhist sites. He established Maha Bodhi Society as the main official institution of Buddhists. He collected resources and support for the Bodh Gaya temple and to encourage different Asian countries to make a representation of Buddhists. He traveled to different places of India to aware people about Buddhism and also to help poor villagers. In this paper I used historical research methodology which is based on collection of data from secondary sources.*

*Keywords - Theosophicals, Mahabodhi Society, Maha Bodhi temple, Renewal of Indian Buddhist places.*

### Introduction

Anagarika Dharmapala was born at 17th September, 1864 in Ceylon or Sri Lanka. He was the hero of Sinhalese Buddhists movement. His childhood name was Don David Hewavitarne. His name Dharmapala means the 'Protector of the *Dhamma*' or 'Defender of the Faith' and 'Anagarika means 'the innovation'; in Pali it means 'homeless'. Dharmapala was a real *Bodhisattva* of modern period. His ancestors were belongs to *Gogama*<sup>1</sup> community. He was influenced by the struggle of Sri Lankan Buddhists with those rules which were created by British government for superiority of Christianity in all over the island. The people of Ceylon were afraid to show themselves as Buddhist due to European imperialism dictatorship. In Ceylon Buddhist reform of Theravada tradition was started in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lots of Buddhists from different countries undertook Buddhist education in Sri Lanka and devoted their life to promoting Buddhist revival movement. He traveled and worked for Buddhism and spends his life as homeless wanderer and finally took *Pabbajja* or lower ordination at 13th July 1931 from Ven. Boruggamuwe Rewatha Thero and received the name Bhikkhu as Devamitta Dhammapala.

After the foundation of Theosophical Society in New York in 1875, H. S. Olcott and H. P. Blavatsky they were embraced in Buddhism in May, 1880 in Galle. Anagarika Dharmapala became Theosophist at early age and very much influenced with Mime. Blavatsky. After some time Dharmapala came to Adyar (Madras) with the intention of studying of Occultism, and then Meme. Blavatsky motivated him to study of Pali for the good of humanity, and she gave him her blessings<sup>2</sup>. He returned to Colombo and began faithfully carrying out his oath and after some time he leaves his home to become a *Brahmachari*.

### Journey to revival of Buddhism

Anagarika Dharmapala took oath for re-establishing and promoting Buddhism as a world religion. The question of Maha Bodhi Temple was a religious matter and the British Indian government was always avoiding such kind of issues after mutiny of 1857. Dharmapala was very much concern about imperialistic thoughts and their intentions. So he wanted to collect sympathy and attention of World on this matter. He also wanted to secure financially for legal issues. He wanted to unite Buddhist world for revival of most sacred place of Buddhists at Bodhgaya. He conducted his journey to Japan, Korea, China were with the objectives



of collection of finance and support for Bodhgaya temple and other Buddhist sacred sites.

America and European countries

Anagarika Dharmapala visited America to participate World Religious Congress as a representative of Buddhists. He returned to Colombo via Europe. He also went to London and met to Edwin Arnold and established Pali Text Society in London.

Japan

He traveled to Japan and appreciated great diversity of Japanese Buddhism and self developing nature of Japan as a model of Asian civilization. The objective was to take his attention toward Bodhgaya matter. His visit to Japan in different years (1889, 1893, 1902 and 1913) has systematic objectives and challenges also. Richard Jaffe gives detail description of Japanese who traveled during this period and by the efforts of Anagarika Dharmapala<sup>3</sup>. In 1889 he visited to Japan with Theophist C. Olcott as a Theosophist but in this journey he was hospitalized and could not do anything. During his second visit (1893) he tried to raise fund traveled by train one place to another place in Japan delivered lectures and meetings to peoples. He wanted to spread awareness of sacred Buddhist Places in India and their poor conditions. He tried again and again and also take a Bodhgaya status with him to Japan for their realization that India is not a Mythical place (as they understand) and it deserved to be treated all Buddhist as sacred<sup>4</sup>. During his visit to Japan he also criticized to different habits of the Japanese monks. He also explained about the Japanese monks who took liquor. He was impressed with Japanese progress and their religious prosperity but he frittered over the way the Japanese practiced Buddhism. He says, "They have made Buddhism to suit their own taste and convenience"<sup>5</sup>

*During his third visit to Japan in 1902 He planned to business with in Japan and Ceylon and urge to his father for it for earning of sufficient money to propagate*

*Dhamma and revival of Bodhgaya temple<sup>6</sup>. He also has a problem that he did not want to be a sectarian and Japanese Buddhism divided in to particular eight sects. So he have faced quite difficulty. During his last visit to Japan he called for delivering lecture on Anti-Westernization. He was master on that. After this he became famous in Japan. His last visit to Japan in 1913 was less influenced with religious aspect but for society oppressed by colonial power<sup>7</sup>. Japanese author Kazushige Yamakawa presents detail account of his visit to Japan<sup>8</sup>.*

Revival of Buddhism in India

In 1887 Anagarika read articles written by Edwin Arnold which were published in *Telegraph* newspaper of London, explain about the miserable condition of Maha Bodhi Shrine. He also read 'The Light of Asia (1889)' written by Edwin Arnold on Buddha's life as an epic poem. It was translated into Japanese with the name 'The Sun Rises' or 'Sun Rises comes' also<sup>9</sup>. He had decided to go to Bodhgaya. Anagarika Dharmapala's family followed Buddhism very intensely and he found the same seeds. His visit to America and meet with Mme. Marry Foster in Honolulu. The meeting was very rewarding. He found a big fund (10 lacks) for revival of Buddhism because he helped her husband to go out from depression by the treatment of Buddhist meditation. Later Anagarika Dharmapala visited Indian Buddhist place with a Japanese priest Kozen Gunaratana. On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1891, he reached at Bodhgaya. Babu Upendranath Basu drove him over to Sarnath, where the Lord Buddha had preached his First Sermon and very disappointed to see that there was no one to preserve Buddhist sacred place<sup>10</sup>. After entering in Maha Bodhi temple he feels divine. He explains the condition of Maha Bodhi Temple with a lot of emotions and takes oath to take care of sacred place. After seeing of sacred site he had to decide to start work for revival of Buddhism and its sites in India. Early period he went to Calcutta and started his work here. He



associated with Sharat Chandra Das, who was famous for his travels in Tibet, and for his knowledge of the language and religious literature of that country. During this visit he met to Narendra Nath Sen. Who was the editor of the *Indian Mirror* and also a Theosophist. Narendra Nath Sen was sympathetic with Buddhism his *Indian Mirror* worked as a vehicle to popularization of Buddhism with the concept of fusion of Hinduism and Buddhism. There was not a large number of Buddhists in Calcutta that time except of few Arakanese and Chinese Buddhists. Anagarika Dharmapala delivered his first lecture at Albert Hall Calcutta titled 'Buddhism in its relations with Hinduism' under the presidency of Narendra Nath Sen. He says that, by religion, race, traditions, literature Sinhalese are the related to the Aryans of Gangetic valley. He says that "our Buddha was born in India and future Buddha Maitreya is expected to take birth not in London but in Banaras"<sup>11</sup>. He advised to Sinhalese to attend the Indian national congress<sup>12</sup>. He also connected to Sinhalese with Indians economically also. On 28th of June 1916 the Anagarika Dharmapala was ordered of imprisonment and he was not allowed to leave Calcutta. During later period he lived in Sarnath and traveled to different places for revival of Buddhism.

### The Mahabodhi Society

Anagarika Dharmapala started his struggle for revival of Buddhism and founded Maha Bodhi Society in Colombo on May 31st 1891, presided by Ven Hikkaduwe Sumaṅgala Nayaka Maha Thero, for the purpose of restoration of Buddhist sacred sites and collection of supports. The Mahabodhi Society was the first official Buddhist Society to be established in modern India<sup>13</sup>. The Mahabodhi journal was started in 1892, October under Maha Bodhi Society. The efforts of Anagarika were really appreciated by the intellectuals. Benoy Kumar Sarkar emphasis Anagarika Dharmapala (Devamitta Dhammapala) as the 'maker of young Asia' and also says, "The Maha Bodhi Society was a great

*institution enriching the cultural life of the Bangladeshi and its founder justly deserved the gratitude and esteem of the whole province"*<sup>14</sup>. Later period the Mahabodhi Society organized a world Buddhist Congress at Calcutta University on 15th and 16th January, 1949.

The establishment of 'The Maha Bodhi Society and an United Buddhist World' and an English news paper in 1911 were for drawing Buddhists in to a pan-Asian community linked to the supporter of Buddhism from European and American Countries. The Maha Bodhi Society was also celebrated Buddha festivals like *Dhammacakka festival* or the Anniversary of the "Turning of the Wheel of Law" at Sarnath on the full moon day of July. According to Steven Kemper, "To make United Buddhist World he was connected with western civilization like British imperium, Theosophy and Christianity"<sup>15</sup>. He also says that Anagarika Dharmapala's religious movement was influenced by Western thinker and he learns a lot from the texts of western thinker's like Ernest Eitel, Edwin Arnold etc before World Religious Conference<sup>16</sup>. Dharmapala used his journal for shaping of Buddhism in India and worldwide. Other western scholars were also connected with his journals and it was as a vehicle of his Dhamma preaching and also for putting the weight of the World Buddhists behind recovering Bodhgaya the Buddha's attainment place<sup>17</sup>. He also established 'The International Buddhist University Association'. The objectives of the University Association is to trained young men for doing research work in Buddhism with good linguistic equipment of Sinhalese, Burmese, Chinese and Tibetan Language classes. Anagarika Dharmapala and his Mahabodhi Society did many efforts for the revival and popularity of Buddhism. Following are few other important works done by Anagarika Dharmapala and Maha Bodhi Society in India-

Three holy places of Buddhist pilgrimage, Viz., Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kusinara



In 1900 the Mahabodhi Society appealed the District Board of Gaya to sanction construction of a Rest House of Bodhgaya for the Buddhist pilgrims. This proposal was accepted by Magistrate and other board members

Anagarika Dharmapala went to the Buddhist countries to collect the funds for the construction of building

A plot of land was purchased by the Mahabodhi Society at Sarnath in 1901 with cooperation of the Anagarika Dharmapala's mother Srimati Mallika Hewavitane

Anagarika Dharmapala and his Mahabodhi society founded the Benaras (Banaras) school of Arts and Agriculture in the Dhammasala (non-sectarian school, for the training of young children in such a way as to develop their latent individuality by means of natural education). Its maintenance charges were born by Mrs. Foster (an American lady whose husband practiced Meditation from Dharmapala and cure his depression).

One Dharamsala was erected at Kusinara under the supervision of Bhikkhu Mahavira and one degree college also was started by Dharmapala at Kusinara.

He also established a newspaper in 1906 '*Sinhala Bauddhaya*'.

Dharmarajika Chaitya Vihara was founded by Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta (1918-20), but the original first vihara which was built by the Mahabodhi Society of India when Mahabodhi society got permission from British government for relics of Buddha which discovered from Taxila and Bhattiprolu on the agreement that society will build Viharas in Calcutta, Sarnath, and Taxila for their enshrinement. On the opening procession there were many Burmese, Sinhalese, Chinese, Japanese and Siamese Buddhist monks and a thousand Hindu and Buddhist men. After that relics were enshrined in the stupa<sup>18</sup>. The vihara was head quarter of the M. B. S. has over a number of years become of symbol of the Buddhist revival movement in India<sup>19</sup>.

The Mahabodhi society also established the Buddha Society of Bombay in 1922.

Re-construction of Mulagandha Kuti-Vihara (Sarnath) built as Buddha's residence. At another place the same places called Gandh-kuti or Shanti. But at Sarnath it's called Mulagandha Kuti because it was the place where the Buddha spent his first varshavas (rainy season).

The Mahabodhi Society also established the Mahabodhi School, Degree College and the Library named Mulagandha Kuti Vihara Library at Sarnath<sup>20</sup>.

In 1939 Mahabodhi Society founded a Buddha vihara in New Delhi.

New Chethiyagiri Vihara in Sanchi was also constructed by Mahabodhi Society in the memory of Sariputta and Maha Moggallana, the great disciples of the Buddha. The relics were discovered by Alexander Cunningham in 1851. The relics were returned from Britain and enshrined in this Vihara in 1952.<sup>21</sup>

After the project of renewable and rehabilitation project of Nava Nalanda Mahavihara started by Bihar and Indian Government in 1956 Mahabodhi Society has taken the responsibility of publication and translation of Buddhist sculpture into Indian language.

**Anagarika Dharmapala and Protestant Buddhism**

Anagarika Dharmapala worked with Theosophists for long period and was much closed with H.S. Olcott and H.P. Blavatsky. He influenced with Theosophists with the reference of Ven. Gunananda. He showed respect for the Buddhist relics-remains of the Buddha's body and also live a religious life with meditation and other Buddhist rituals. He took Buddhists vow in 1881. When he visited to villages of Sri Lanka with C. Olcott and C.W. Lead beater for rising the religious fund then he met to Buddhist monks lived in different places of Sri Lanka. During this tour he understood problems with traditional sangha order. After some time he began the process that modernized Buddhism, creating what Obeyesekere has called 'Protestant



Buddhism' a new way of practicing, an previous religion marked by this-worldly asceticism, a code of ethics for lay people and an emphasis on the doctrine coupled with contempt for the intercession of gods and demons<sup>22</sup>. He was a great Nationalist who also attacked on British culture and greeds for resources of Colonies. He said to Sinhalese that the long term solution is for the British to return to their own island; the short term solution is for Sinhala's to return to their own religion. According to him the remedy was to increase public baths, *dagobas* (Sinhala: relic mounds) establish more libraries, monasteries, rest houses, hospitals for man and animal, schools, tanks, seven-storied mansions, water works and beautifying the city of Anuradhapura. He says that "*Sinhala's does not have the intelligence to give the English anything worldly. The only wealth the Sinhala does can give the English is the noble dhamma*"<sup>23</sup>. The only challenged in front him was nationalism vs. universalism. His new form of religion follows both ideals with the practical need of Modern Sinhalese.

## Conclusion

Anagarika Dharmapala was a person who came as a big revivalist for Buddhism in India especially for the renovation of the Buddhist sacred site and to established institutional base for Indian Buddhists community. Buddhism is not only as the religion of a particular population but it represents a big part of Indian cultural history. After Pala dynasty of Bengal Buddhism misplaced from the centre of the state religion. It disperse to different areas of the countryside like Kashmir and Ladakh, Bengal, Tibet, and Nepal and other Asian countries. In British India peoples forgot the name of the Buddha and many Buddhist sites were ruined and many were converted as the pilgrimage of other religions. Dharmapala was worked hard for Buddhism and collected international support on the matter of Bodh Gaya temple.

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