

Hewavitarne Industrial School

Many people remember Anagarika Dharmapala for his religious zeal. But there was another aspect to this national figure - his practical vision regarding the alleviation of poverty. The Hewavitarna School, though neglected now, remains a testament to this vision.

Few associate the Hewavitarne School, a rather nondescript building in Rajagiriya with one of Sri Lanka's foremost religious figures, Anagarika Dharmapala. Today, though neglected, the school remains a testament to the Anagarika's pragmatic vision, an aspect of this great man often overshadowed by his religious zeal.

In an era when the Sinhalese were succumbing to the pressures of the British Raj, and nothing was being done to overcome their lethargy and passive submission, rose the voice of Anagarika Dharmapala who waged a historical struggle for freedom and to gain the rights over Buddhagaya, the revered birth place of Gauthama Buddha.

The rot had already set in, when Dharmapala came with a sledge hammer of effective speech to awaken the slumbering Sinhalese. When people sat content, not questioning the British rule and not thinking beyond the comfortable agrarian society, Dharmapala saw the need to revolutionize the system.

He realized that the changing world would demand that Sri Lankan society change accordingly. His belief was that spiritual elevation itself was inadequate if the society was poverty stricken. He began speaking of the importance of a firm educational and economic foundation if the struggle for freedom was to succeed, and poverty be alleviated.

"We allow our cow to die of starvation in our own field, while we feed the cow in distant Switzerland or Denmark. We are the custodians of our property, and must look to the future to protect the interest of the coming generations," he said. He had a vision of a newly emerging Sri Lanka which could effectively link up with other countries and forge ahead.

Born to a privileged family in 1864, Dharmapala, from the outset had different, fresh thinking. At 21, he renounced worldly pleasures and became a Buddhist lay preacher (Anagarika) committed to propagating Buddhism. When scholar Ananda Coomaraswamy was leaving our shores to settle in England, his bungalow and several acres of land were bought by Dharmapala. The bungalow known as "Obeyesekara Walauwa" was used by the Anagarika, and part of the land subsequently was given to house the shelterless and slum dwellers. This area is known today as "Obeyesekerapura". This was the era when the missionaries exercised great control over Ceylon, and loyalties were bought over the counter.

Many converted to Christianity for material gain, and this also became a status symbol for some. Dharmapala urged the people to cherish and look after their heritage instead of succumbing to pressure.

According to Ven. Thalagala Gnanaratana, chief priest of the Sudharmarama Purana Viharaya in Rajagiriya, Anagarika Dharmapala had been aware that a missionary school was to be set up in Welikada (now Rajagiriya) way back in 1888. So he promptly put up a cadjan hut and roamed the area seeking young people who could be enrolled as students. Aththiligoda Nanayakara Gamage Mangonona was the first student of the institution. With twelve students, Dharmapala commenced conducting classes just the night before the missionary school was to come into operation. The church eventually abandoned the idea of starting a school there. In 1912, this was expanded and it became the first industrial training school in the country.

The Hewavitarne Industrial Centre though founded by Anagarika Dharmapala and Walisinha Harischandra as an act of rebellion, offered a variety of courses which only few institutions could provide. In addition to the normal courses of study there was weaving, pottery, sewing and similar arts and crafts.

"This great institution was the first industrial training school in the country, and it is believed that the idea was to provide academic education coupled with necessary technical training.

"In time to come, it would have been upgraded to the level of a university of unique standing if not for the neglect which followed," said the chief priest.

Dharmapala having visited several industrial schools in the United States, London, Liverpool, Italy and Denmark was inspired by the progress achieved by other countries. In 1904, he commenced an industrial training school in Saranath, India. According to the records maintained, Dharmapala had personally financed the entire training of U.B. Dolapihilla and sent him for industrial training in Japan. Mr. Dolapihilla subsequently became the Principal of the same institution.

Anagarika Dharmapala's visionary act was not well received by the British Empire. The authorities viewed him with suspicion, and called him "an instigator of a scheme for sending young Sinhalese to Japan for technical education in the belief that the students would return with anti-British views....". Yet, he continued his work and strengthened the Centre.

A century later, what has become of this legendary Hewavitarne Industrial Centre? When we visited this historical place there was no industrial training centre, the only signs of its former existence being the small weaving room housed inside a crumbling old building within the Hewavitarne Maha Vidyalaya school premises.

The foremost school in the area a century ago, Hewavitarne Maha Vidyalaya is a backward school today, devoid of its past prestige.

A mixed school with a student population of 1400, the school needs much attention and support if the legend and the services rendered by the late Anagarika Dharmapala is to be perpetuated.

However, some philanthropists and students have built a monument in memory of the late freedom fighter, which takes pride of place within the school premises. The school hall is also named after him.

As the incumbent Principal S. Garusinghe explained, little has been done by the authorities to preserve the good work of the dedicated founder.

Sheer neglect has led to the closure of many departments which existed then. Only the weaving and handicraft sections function today, that too in a small way. All these years, the centre has continuously produced weaving instructors and teachers. Administered by the Department of Handloom Textiles now, each batch comprises 25 students who undergo two years training. They are paid a small allowance and provided a uniform. The certificate is accepted by universities and technical schools.

Mr. Garusinghe believes that the late Dharmapala has been portrayed in a communal light by some sections. "He was a true radical whose role has never been properly assessed or understood."

To perpetuate the memory of a man who selflessly committed himself to the political and economic freedom of his country, he has proposed the establishment of a small museum.

(Source: Article by Dilrukshi Handunetti in The Sunday Times)

Anagarika Dharmapala

It was on April 29, 1933 that Anagarika Dharmapala died at Saranath at the age of 69 gazing at the Mulagandakuti Vihara, where he spent his last days, wishing that he be "reborn again twenty-five times to spread Lord Buddha's Dhamma".

He was born to a wealthy and influential Buddhist family on September 17, 1864 renowned for their piety and generosity. Named Don David in conformity with the fashion in vogue he was sent to St. Thomas' College, a missionary school where he pursued his studies with diligence.

His mother, Mrs. Mallika Hewavitarne exerted a salutary influence in fashioning his attitude to the Buddhist way of life; he also came under the benign influence of two of the greatest Buddhist savants of the day, Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thera and Ven. Migettuwatte Sri Gunananda Thera.

As a boy of 16, he met Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky in 1880 and began to take an interest in Theosophy as expounded by them. When Colonel Olcott and Mr. C.W. Leadbeater arrived in Sri Lanka in 1886 to collect funds for the

Buddhist Educational Fund, Don David Hewavitarne gave up his job in Government Service and toured the island with Colonel Olcott in their campaign for Buddhist schools.

This was the beginning of the unique career of the Anagarika Dharmapala. He had by this time prepared himself for the great task which lay ahead of him by acquiring a sound knowledge of Sinhala and English and of the Pali language and Buddhist scriptures.

His tour of Sri Lanka was an eye opener. He saw the increasing degeneracy of his people and his spirit rebelled within him. He was seized with a patriotic fervour which galvanized him to launch a crusade to regenerate the race and to revive its religion. He gave up his alien name Don David and adopted instead the national and Buddhist appellation of Dharmapala meaning "Protector of the Dhamma".

Dharmapala was convinced that any movement for the emancipation of the people would have to go hand in hand with the revival of the national culture, traditionally Buddhist. In the firm faith of his convictions he started his campaign with the object of infusing into the habits and thoughts of his countrymen his ideals of a national renaissance.

It even included a reform of dress. He deplored the use of foreign names. He exposed the shortcomings of the Sangha of his day.

He carried his message from town to town shaking his rebellious fist even in the face of the then mighty British Raj. It was indeed a very brave thing to have done in those times. Seeing the havoc brought on the country and its manhood by the encouragement by the colonial government of the production and sale of liquor, Dharmapala threw himself into the Temperance Movement, which was then engaging the attention of the national leaders.

The revival of Buddhism in his island home was but a prelude to his dedication to missionary endeavour. He created a great impression at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. It led Mr. C.T. Strauss of New York, a life-long student of philosophy and comparative religion to become a Buddhist.

At a simple ceremony this gentleman took the Five Precepts administered to him by Dharmapala. He was the first to be admitted to the Buddhist fold on American soil.

Dharmapala was no longer thinking in terms of his own country and his people alone. Within the compass of his vision appeared India, the birthplace of his faith, Honolulu, Japan, America, Europe and the British Isles.

His work in India is undoubtedly the greatest not only because of the results achieved but also because of its significance to the future of the world. When the Anagarika visited India in 1891 for the first time, he found not a single Buddhist in such sacred places as Buddhagaya, Saranath, Kusinara and Lumbini hallowed

by the feet of the Blessed One. Even the name of the Buddha was completely forgotten.

The inspiration to work for the revival of Buddhism in India came to him at Buddhagaya. He had gone there as a pilgrim, but when he saw the neglected condition of the place, his sensitive nature brought tears to his eyes. Then and there, he made a vow that he would not leave the place but work for the restoration of as holy a place as Buddhagaya where the Lord Buddha had attained Supreme Wisdom.

The first thing that he had to address his mind to was the question of the Buddhagaya Temple which was in the hands of the Saivite Mahant of Buddhagaya whose predecessors had usurped it some centuries earlier when the Buddhists had been compelled to abandon the place due to the Muslim invasion. Friendly overtures to the Mahant having failed, he had to resort to court when some of the Monks he has stationed at the place were assaulted. This case became famous all over the world as it helped to open the eyes of the Buddhists to the holiest of holy shrines.

He established in Calcutta, the then capital of India, the headquarters of the Maha Bodhi Society from where he started the English monthly 'Maha Bodhi'. Edited by Anagarika Dharmapala it became an important vehicle for the dissemination of the Dhamma throughout the world.

The Anagarika's attention was next drawn to Saranath where the Buddha preached his first sermon. The place was stinking with refuse and dirt as it was utilized by the community for breeding pigs. He bought a plot of land and built a rest house, established a school and stationed a monk. After many years of effort in 1931, he was successful in completing the magnificent Mulagandakuti Vihara. In July 1931 the Anagarika was ordained as a Bhikkhu with the name of Sri Devamitta Dharmapala. The Buddhists of Sri Lanka remember him with veneration and profound gratitude as an ardent nationalist, a social reformer and above all, as a Buddhist missionary who took back to India the Light of the Dhamma which the Arahat Mahinda brought to Sri Lanka over 2000 years ago.

Sir Baron Jayatillaka paying tribute to the Anagarika Dharmapala when his ashes were brought to Colombo from India said "Without doubt it was the Anagarika Dharmapala who brought about the national regeneration of Ceylon. He showed the way and others followed. Indeed it may be said that there has not been in Ceylon in the last two or three centuries a national leader who served his people and his religion with such self sacrifice, singleness of purpose and altruism as the Anagarika Dharmapala".

London Buddhist Vihara: (Article by M.P. Amarasuriya)

Impetus and Consolidation: 1925-28

Both the London Buddhist Vihara and the British Mahabodhi Society, which administered it up to the end of 1985, owe their existence to the untiring efforts of one man: the Anagarika Dharmapala of Sri Lanka.

Born as David Hewavitarne in 1864, he came under the influence of Col. H.S. Olcott and Mme H.P. Blavatsky, the founders of The Theosophical Society. Later he renounced the householder's life and spent his remaining years in reviving Buddhism in India and Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was known until 1972), and making it known and appreciated in the West, particularly in Great Britain and the USA.

Due to his efforts, The Mahabodhi Society was formally established on 31 May 1891 in Calcutta with the specific purpose of restoring Bodh-Gaya (the *Buddhagaya* of history) to Buddhist hands from which it had passed seven hundred years previously. Much later, in July 1925, whilst convalescing at a Swiss nursing home, he conceived the idea of *Dhamma* assistance to Britain: "It is too bad that although Ceylon Buddhists have been friends of England, yet no attempt has been made to enlighten them (English people) regarding the *Dhamma*."

Corresponding with Christmas Humphreys, the Founder-President of The Buddhist Lodge, he arranged to pay a visit to England – the first for a Buddhist 'missionary' since Ananda Metteyya (the late C H A Bennett) in 1908. A special meeting was organized by the Lodge at 23 Bedford Square (London WC1) on 28 September 1925 at which Dharmapala heard the President outline the current position of Buddhism in Britain. Nothing, however, was settled, and after staying a week, Dharmapala sailed for the USA on 4 October to fulfill prior engagements.

In spite of his absence, however, he clearly perceived that a *Vihara* was the prime need for any permanent centre of Buddhism "where we could have our preaching hall, library and residential quarters." The following year, having canvassed sufficient support, he returned to England and, having failed to secure a suitable property in Central London, finally bought a house at 86 Madeley Road, Ealing (London W5) for £2,500. On 24 July 1926, 'Foster House' (named in honour of Dharmapala's American benefactress, Mary E. Foster) was ceremonially opened in the presence of some fifty people. On this occasion also was born the British Mahabodhi Society, which had for its objects "the extension of the knowledge of the tenets of Buddhism, the establishment of a *Vihara* in London and the promotion of the cause of Buddhism in the West."

The Society gained the support of such leading English Buddhists as Mrs. E.E. Grant and Messrs. Francis J. Payne, B.L. Broughton, J.F. McKechnie (ex-*Bhikkhu Silacara*), A.H. Perkins, Bayard Elton and Lt-Col. E.R. Rost. Mr. Payne had been extremely active during the last days of the old Buddhist Society of Great Britain & Ireland (1907-26) and was to prove a pillar of strength in the new Society, a doughty champion of *Theravada* Buddhism no less. The Patrons of the Society were, until their deaths in 1933 and 1930 respectively, Dharmapala and Mrs. Foster, together with the Thai ambassador of the day.

During October of the same year, the final meeting of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain & Ireland was held, at which the books, magazines and records were formally transferred to the British Mahabodhi Society, thus establishing a spiritual, lineal succession. Shortly afterwards, the earlier Society was officially dissolved.

Dharmapala returned to Ceylon for a few months on 30 October for family reasons, but not before appointing his nephew, Daya Hewavitarne, to manage affairs and launching of the Society's own monthly journal, *The British Buddhist*.

Early in 1927, Dharmapala returned and a search for suitable premises, which could be converted into a *Vihara*, was begun in earnest. His youngest brother, Dr. C A Hewavitarne, headed negotiations on behalf of a special committee formed for the purpose in Ceylon. An account was opened with the National Bank of India in Colombo bearing the name, 'London Buddhist *Vihara* Fund.'

The efforts of Dharmapala even at this early stage had not gone unrecognized. At a general meeting of The Mahabodhi Society of India (Calcutta) on 19 March the following record of appreciation was recorded: "That this meeting of The Mahabodhi Society of India desires to place on record its high appreciation of the work started by the Anagarika Dharmapala for the enlightenment of the people of England and the propagation of Aryan culture, which will be the means for true union between England and India, and pledges itself to support the work by all means in its power.

"This meeting expresses its hearty thanks to all friends, sympathizers and supporters in England who have extended ungrudging assistance to the Anagarika Dharmapala and ensured in a great way the success of his mission."

Heartening words indeed, if somewhat optimistic! As was to be shown, 'success' was always in the balance and not easily 'ensured' either.

A Mr. and Mrs. Nugent Head donated a Buddha image to the Society's shrine room in July and on the 14th a Buddhist funeral was conducted for Capt. Rolleston; lectures were held every Sunday at 4.00 pm. On the occasion of the first anniversary, it was proposed to acquire a site at Clapham Park (South London) and also to obtain rooms close by in order to carry on activities until the work of conversion had been completed. The following office-bearers were elected for the forthcoming year: Director-General – Dharmapala, President – Broughton, Hon. Secretary – de Zoysa, Hon. Treasurer – Perkins, Hon. Adviser – Payne.

In November, however, the plans were changed and negotiations commenced to purchase a Georgian mansion at 41 Gloucester Road, Regent's Park (London NW1). It was expected to cost £10,000, including the costs of conversion, but this figure had to be whittled down to half the estimate 'considering the general apathy of the subscribers'. In the event £5,000 was gifted by Mrs. Foster and the house was duly converted into a *Vihara* by the architect appointed by the Society, Ernest Bates, ARIBA. It was officially opened on 5 February 1928.

Meanwhile, in Ceylon, plans were already afoot to find suitable teachers who could take up residence. At a meeting in March of both *bhikkhus* and laity in the *Vidyodaya Pirivena*, the leading monastic college in the Island, under its principal, Ven. Kahawe Ratanasara, it was announced that Dharmapala would take three *bhikkhus* to London. At the same convention, W E Bastian, the Treasurer of the London *Vihara* Committee, enumerated the sums collected for the purpose from Ceylon and Australia together with pledges towards the cost and maintenance of the *Vihara*.

On 24 June the party from Ceylon duly arrived in England and on 8 July – on the occasion of both the second anniversary of The Buddhist Mission's foundation and *Dhammacakka* Day – a formal welcome was held to those whose presence ensured the transition from lay mission to *Vihara*.

In 1993, the Founder of the London Buddhist *Vihara*, the Anagarika Dharmapala passed away in India, aged 68 – exhausted by a lifetime's service to the *Dhamma*. A memorial service was held on May 6 at the *Vihara* with Christmas Humphreys speaking first, followed by several others. It was stated that the best memorial to the memory of the deceased would be to carry on with greater vigour, and not allow to perish, the various activities he had set on foot during his lifetime, and to carry on unimpaired the Mission to present Buddhism to the people of England.

The *Vihara* had established greater affiliation with several other Buddhist organizations that had begun in the rest of Europe over the years. In September

of 1934, Daya Hewavitarne, nephew of the Anagarika, was appointed Organising Secretary of the European Buddhist Congress, and the British Mahabodhi Society can justly claim the credit for hosting what must have been the largest gathering of Buddhists in the West to date.

The Mahabodhi Society itself opened new branches in Italy (Bologna), Netherlands (Amsterdam), Germany (Berlin), Austria (Vienna) – and even in the United States of America (New York).

The War Years: 1939-1945

Just as a pan-European Buddhist Movement was taking shape, hostilities commenced in Europe on 1 September 1938, and Buddhist activities everywhere were consequently disrupted. The 13th and final Annual General Meeting of the British Mahabodhi Society was held on 5 November.

The premises at 41 Gloucester Road were closed and compulsorily purchased by the municipal authority, although weekly meetings continued to be held in rented halls. Severely damaged by bombing in the summer of 1941, the last links with No. 41 were only severed as late as 1965 when Camden Borough Council sold the building back to the Mahabodhi Society of Ceylon. This transaction was made to offset the cost of the new *Vihara* in Chiswick, which had already been acquired the previous year upon the expiration of the lease at 10 Ovington Gardens, Knightsbridge.

The darkness lightened after the war was over in 1945. During the war years, three *Theravada* organizations somehow kept aloft the torch of the original teachings of the Buddha, the most significant being The Buddhist Circle.

The New London Buddhist Vihara:

The First Decade 1954-64

Early in January 1954, vacant possession of the premises of 10 Ovington Gardens, Knightsbridge, was taken and preparations made for the formal opening ceremony to be performed on *Vesakha* Day, 17 May. On 16 April, Ven. Narada (1898-1983) and Ven. Vinita, accompanied by their lay attendant, Chandra Kuruppu, arrived in England. Narada was duly installed as the *Vihara's* first Head. The Buddhist *Vihara* Society turned over to the *Vihara* three marble/alabaster Burmese Buddha images, the relic of the Buddha presented to the Society by Narada on his first visit in 1949, their reference library of some 140 books and a few items of furniture.

On *Vesakha* Day, the new London *Vihara* was formally opened by the then Thai ambassador who unfurled the Buddhist flag. At the public meeting in the

evening, the lecture hall was full and after the chanting of *paritta*, Ven. Narada gave an impressive discourse. Other speakers included Sir Claude Corea (the new, albeit non-Buddhist, High Commissioner for Ceylon), Maung Maung Ji, Meddegoda, Lt-Col. Payne, C Humphreys, G Glounsbury and John Garrie (representing the Buddha-*Dhamma* Association, Manchester).

Favourable publicity was given in the national broadsheets. The general feeling of euphoria at this happy event was marred by the tragic loss of one of the main pillars of the English *Theravada* Movement: Francis J. Payne. On 22 May that year, he passed away peacefully at the ripe age of 85 – a life completely devoted to Buddhism since reading the anthology, *Lotus Blossoms*, in 1907 and whose children (son and daughter) were probably the first in Britain to take the Five Precepts, from Ananda Metteyya in 1908.

In the *Vihara* itself, a multitude of activities was arranged: elementary and advanced classes in *Abhidhamma*, elementary *Dhamma*, meditation and *Dhammapada* classes, public lectures given by Ven. Narada, Vinita and at least one during this early period by the well-established scholar, Edward Conze (1904-79). Ven. Pannananda, a *thera* from Thailand, 'unexpectedly arrived here' to stay for some time. A monthly *dana* list was quickly organized, subscribed to by both Sinhalese and English Buddhists. On 15 July W.E. Rajakaruna presented a relic of the Buddha, which had been sent from Ceylon to London by his father.

The first diplomatic function at the *Vihara* occurred when Sir John Kotelawala, Prime Minister of Ceylon, paid a visit. In the course of his address he said: "This *Vihara*... is the symbol of our great desire to make a contribution to the national life of the British people to whom we owe so much for their contributions to us in political, social and economic affairs. What can we give in return? Of gold and silver we have none, but what we have, we will give. We will give things spiritual the ultimate truths – the doctrine of our Master, Lord Buddha".

Decline and Resurrection: 1964-81

The news of the termination of the ten-year lease on 10 Ovington Gardens followed hard on the difficult transitional period of new management. Whilst there were obvious disadvantages (a centre in the heart of London) – the peculiar nature of a *Vihara* necessitated a locality far from the madding crowd. Many would think it incongruous for a centre exhorting renunciation to be situated so close to one of the capital's leading departmental stores, such as Harrods, but nevertheless one clear advantage was accessibility, which

facilitated large attendances at the regular activities. The appearance of prosperity proved illusory: from a material point of view the *Vihara* was in a deplorable condition following years of neglect. Both the library and the central heating system had ceased functioning; no redecoration had ever been undertaken and the existing paintwork, both inside and out, was beginning to peel. Many in this Sinhalese community were using the *Vihara* purely as a 'place of convenience' – leaving prams, etc., whilst shopping in the neighbourhood.

However, once the lease came to an end there was no viable alternative but to seek new quarters. Lalit Hewavitarne, the General Secretary of The Mahabodhi Society of Ceylon, arrived in London to head negotiations for acquiring a new property. His stay was limited and perhaps this factor more than any other determined his decision, regardless of any possibly damaging long-term results. A freehold, detached house was finally bought in Heathfield Gardens, Chiswick for the (then absurdly high) sum of £10,000. Although this amount was available from the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust and was partly offset by the sale of the (derequisitioned) house at 41 Gloucester Road in 1965 (which had been taken over by Holborn and St. Pancras Borough Council in 1940), nevertheless it is clear that someone was 'conned' somewhere along the line. A further £3,000 was expended on a complete renovation, which included generous sums from Mr. & Mrs. Broughton, I.B. Horner and Mrs. Quittner.

By the spring of 1964 the renovation was completed and, on 23 April, the physical move from Knightsbridge was effected. The formal opening took place on Sunday, 24 May, amidst a vast concourse of supporters and sympathizers, the High Commissioner for Ceylon, Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, hoisted the Buddhist flag; the traditional milk-boiling ceremony was performed by Mrs. Mallika Perera, the President of the London Buddhist Association; the oil lamp was lit by Mrs. Quittner and Maurice Walshe, the Chairman of the English *Sangha* Trust; and the casket of Buddha-relics was carried into the new *Vihara* by Mr. and Mrs. Broughton.

At the Public Meeting, presided over by Ven. H. Saddhatissa, then Head Monk at the *Vihara*, and including as a guest the Mayor of Brentford and Chiswick, Cllr. G.E. Henniker,

Ven. Saddhatissa, Ananda Bodhi, Miss Horner and Dr. Malalasekera addressed the large gathering and the ceremonies were terminated with a two-hour chanting of *paritta*.

The same day was used to celebrate *Vesakha* and about twenty-five devotees observed the Eight Precepts. In the morning a German, Heinrich Knote, was

ordained *Samanera Saddhaloka* by Ven. Saddhatissa. A *Sanghika-dana* was given to nine *bhikkhus* including the *Phra Maha Rajasiddhimuni*, the Director of the Vipassana Meditation Centre, Bangkok.

On the occasion of the 2511th Buddha Jayanti and 76th Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Jayanti, jointly celebrated under the auspices of the Indian Buddhist Society of the UK, the 'Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Committee' was formed at the *Vihara*. The office bearers nominated were: President, Ven. Saddhatissa, General Secretary, S.S. Gaikawad, and Hon. Treasurer, S.D. Khobragade. A committee was formed after the meeting to collect funds with a view to establishing a 'Dr. Ambedkar Bhavan' – a students' hostel with a Buddhist shrine room for the use of Indian Buddhist students whilst in this country. However, as with some of the previous projects, of a similar nature, this well-intentioned plan failed to materialise.

In August 1967, a new *bhikkhu* took up residence who was to prove extremely dynamic in many fields of activity, Ven. Medagama Vajiragnana *Thera* (b. 1928) who had held the positions of Principal of Paramadhammacetiya Pirivena (Mount Lavinia), Lecturer at the *Bhikkhu* Teacher Training College (Ratmalana), Founder-Principal of Bellanwila College, and Incumbent of the Hippola Purana *Vihara* (near Kandy) and Dalukgolla Rajamaha *Vihara* (Ampitiya). Shortly before embarking for London, the Malwatta Chapter of the Siyam *Nikaya* conferred on him the honour of *Kammacariya* with the title of *Vidyakirti*.

A sad event occurred on 10 September with the sudden death of a temporary resident *bhikkhu*: Ven. H. Punnaratana *Nayake Thera*. A scholar and historian, he had been studying in London for three months and was preparing to go on to the USA. His body was flown back to Ceylon for cremation.

In October, Ven Saddhatissa also returned to Ceylon. Both the meditation and Pali classes were suspended (the latter following Dhammaloka's departure to complete his studies elsewhere). Ven. Vajiragnana and Ven. Mahanama took over the Sunday talks and the former continued a fortnightly series of talks, which had been started at The Buddhist Society. Ven. Mahanama also ably represented the *Vihara* at The Buddhist Society's Summer School in August.

At the beginning and end of 1967 two sincere attempts were made to bring the *Theravadin bhikkhus* resident in the United Kingdom and the *Vihara* they occupied closer together. The first move was to re-establish the Sangha Sabha, which had lain dormant since it was created almost three years earlier.

In response to a letter sent out by the Ven. Chao Khun Phra Sobhana Dhammasudhi, a meeting of *bhikkhus* was held on 8 January at The

Buddhapadipa Temple, to form a British *Sangha Sabha*. This term means a committee of monks set up to act as monastic parliament and spiritual advisory council for the benefit of the *Sangha* and of the Buddhist lay organizations in this country. Those attending the meeting were from the London Buddhist *Vihara* in Chiswick, Ven. Dhammaloka, who acted as Chairman of the meeting, Ven. Dhammavisuddhi and Ven. Sumanashanta; from the Hampstead Buddhist *Vihara*, Ven. Phra Maha Prasit Bodhivaddhano; and representing The Buddhapadipa Temple, Ven Chao Khun Phra Sobhana Dhammasudhi, who acted as secretary of the meeting.

The second move was to co-ordinate policy and activities between the three *Viharas* in London (The Hampstead *Vihara*, London Buddhist *Vihara* and the Buddhapadipa Temple). Although a Central Committee for the Advancement of Buddhism was formed, neither it nor the *Sangha Sabha* achieved very much as each *bhikkhu* reserved his traditional right to freedom of action and the *Viharas* were too well-established to accept overlordship from an 'umbrella' body.

The only other event of note in 1983 affecting the *Vihara* was the visit in October of Gamani Jayasuriya (1924-98), President of the Mahabodhi Society of Sri Lanka and Minister of Agricultural Development and Research and Food and Co-operative Undertakings. On 20 November he addressed supporters on the subject of the proposed new premises in Barrowgate Road and discussion ensued over raising additional funds through overdrafts on the British Mahabodhi Society's accounts, mortgages on both properties and/or a further donation from the Dharmapala Trust or other sources, enhanced by a new appeal to be launched in this country and abroad in the New Year. In the meantime, acknowledgement was made of the many donations received, especially the extremely generous gift of £1,000 from The Buddhist Society which had been facilitated by a friend on their Council, Peter Sharp.

The Downward Path: 1982-85

Subsequent developments at the *Vihara* suggested that it had 'lost its way' insofar as the original and prime purpose of the Centre was concerned. Misgivings in the mind of Russell Webb, the Hon. Secretary led him to compile a confidential report as early as 20.7.1980. Since this is now part of history, there is no sound reason why it should not be finally divulged. The main points which it contained are as follows:

- (a) Anagarika Dharmapala founded the British Mahabodhi Society in 1926 and the "Buddhist Mission" (precursor of the London Buddhist *Vihara*) in 1928 with the express purpose of offering Buddhism to the indigenous population,

i.e., it was specifically intended as a *Dhammaduta* centre. Other religious or pastoral activities were to be regarded as sub-ordinate to the primary aim.

- (b) The success of a *Dhammaduta* centre will depend on having: (i) convincing, dedicated and inspiring teachers, (ii) teachers who can present the *Dhamma* in an appealing and acceptable manner, and (iii) a centre suitable for such teachings.
- (c) With the notable exceptions of Ven. Dr. Saddhatissa, Ven. Piyatissa and Ven. Vajiragnana, no resident *bhikkhu* during the preceding 20 years had made a lasting impression on the Buddhist scene.
- (d) Full-length, structured courses have been largely lacking.
- (e) Too much attention has been paid to rites and customs expected by the Asian community.
- (f) There were too few English supporters attending the *Vihara* - this at a time when there had been an upsurge of interest in Buddhism from Westerners.

Similar criticisms were made in a hard-hitting statement from Mr. Webb at the Annual General Meeting on 28.11.82. This was followed by a letter from Mr. Webb, Mrs. Irene Quittner and Mrs. Joan Hamze to Ven. Dr. Saddhatissa dated 18.2.84, in which they deplored what they considered to be the deterioration in standards and services at the *Vihara*. In particular, they mentioned the lack of young people among the *Vihara's* supporters, the lack of resident *bhikkhus* who could speak and write in English and who were enthusiastic to participate in *Dhammaduta* work, and the absence of encouragement and facilities for people to study the *Dhamma*. The letter was copied to Mr. Gamani Jayasuriya, President of the Mahabodhi Society of Sri Lanka, who replied saying it was very difficult to find "erudite *bhikkhus*, well versed in the English language, with dedication to serve abroad and capable of explaining the *Dhamma* in English."

In the summer of 1984, tragedy struck with the sudden, but peaceful, death of Mrs. Irene Quittner on 20 July. At a stroke, the *Vihara* lost one of its main cornerstones and the West one of its staunchest advocates of *Theravada* Buddhism.

The Annual General Meeting of the British Mahabodhi Society was held on 25 November 1984. Both Spiritual Advisers and both Patrons were re-elected whilst Joan Hamze was elected to occupy the vacant position of Chairman. The Hon. Secretary's role was divided into two positions, that of Administrative Secretary (Mr. Sarath Perera) and *Dhammaduta* Secretary (Mr. Russell Webb). The remaining members of the committee were re-elected except for Perera

(who was 'kicked upstairs') and Mr. Herbert Munasinghe who was replaced by Mr. Lionel Samarasekera, and Mr. John Wilson. The allocation of secretarial roles can be seen as 'clipping the wings' of Webb who was undoubtedly perceived by the Sinhalese nationalist faction as exerting undue influence on *Vihara* affairs. In his report at the Annual General Meeting on 25.11.84, Mr. Webb reported that at long last tangible progress had been made in connection with the acquisition of new premises at 85 Barrowgate Road in Chiswick. The Anagarika Dharmapala Trust made an extremely generous donation and this amount was added to the accumulated funds from the Society's No. 2 a/c. Tenders to renovate the building had been received and analysed by a sub-committee and actual work would commence in the New Year. He also noted that the enthusiasm engendered for making No. 85 serviceable should not, however, be allowed to obscure urgent concern for its long-term purpose.

The 19th Annual General Meeting of the British Mahabodhi Society was held on 24 November 1985. It was to prove traumatic for all those attending and to sound the death knell of the Society to all intents and purposes. In his Annual Report, the Administrative Secretary stated that "1984/85 has been an eventful year. Building control permission to commence renovations to 85 Barrowgate Road was at last obtained after two years of negotiations with Hounslow Council, and phase 1 work was started in June 1985. The work has progressed satisfactorily. During the course of the building operation, some items of work not previously noticed and therefore not included in the original plan had to be carried out. As a result, completion of the phase 1 work is a few weeks behind the scheduled date. However, the *Vihara* complete in all features will not be ready until the completion of phase 2, which is an entirely new extension for a large sermon hall, meditation room, office with a reception area and adequate toilet facilities for lay visitors. Therefore, building control permission to commence phase 2 works is already being sought. The new *Vihara* will have 5 bedrooms for resident monks as compared to 3 in the present one. It may be possible to spare one room exclusively for a fulltime, practicing meditation teacher to fulfill a crying need, especially for Western Buddhists and inquirers of the *Dhamma*.

"I am pleased to report that more and more people from different communities are getting interested in the activities of the *Vihara*. This is proven by substantial donations received from them; namely, £2,500 from the Cambodians who participated in the recent *Kathina* ceremony and £500 from the Hindu Community in Southall. This is a clear sign of progress and popularity of the *Vihara*. A group of well-wishers in Leicester invited the representatives of the Society and handed over a donation of £1,100 they had collected. This year we

have received more donations for the *Vihara* Building Fund. With further help from our well-wishers the entire building project can be completed within a short period of time. A detailed list of all donations will be published towards the end of the building programme.

"There have been some changes in the administration of the *Vihara*. Due to health reasons and increasing pressure of *Dhammaduta* work, Venerable Dr. Hammalawa Saddhatissa *Maha Nayake Thera* relinquished administrative responsibilities and Venerable Medagama Vajiragnana *Thera* took over as Head of the *Vihara*. The Society wishes to express their deep gratitude to the two *Theras* and the other resident *bhikkhus* for their invaluable service."

Although the three Spiritual Advisers (Ven. Vajiragnana, Ven. Saddhatissa and Ven. Revata Dhamma) were reelected, a motion was raised and pushed through reinstating Saddhatissa as both President of the Society and Head of the *Vihara*, thereby undermining the position of Ven. Vajiragnana who had been appointed in March as Head of the *Vihara*. This shock event set the tone for the subsequent conduct of the meeting, which was dominated by an aggressive minority of Sinhalese who more or less brow beat or shouted down any dissenters.

As the saying goes, it all ended in tears. A faction of the British Mahabodhi Society continued to support the reinstatement of Ven. Saddhatissa. This came to a head on 18 March when the managing Trustees of the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust gave formal notice that they 'hereby refuse access to the [*Vihara*] premises and all other Trust properties for the purpose of meetings of the British Mahabodhi Society or any section or group thereof.'

Litigation

Following the banishment of the British Mahabodhi Society from the *Vihara* premises, both defendants and plaintiffs had recourse to the law to clarify and/or justify their actions. The former relied on a freelance solicitor, J. White of London N. 3 whilst the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust retained the services of Hetty & Co. of Southall, Middlesex. Affidavits were duly completed and submitted for consideration by all the parties concerned and, unbelievably, the legal wrangling was pursued for well over five years. Finally, in the summer of 1991, the High Court delivered judgment in favour of the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust and the Public Trustee of Sri Lanka. According to the report in the Sri Lankan Sunday Observer for 1 September:

"Deputy High Court Judge Gavin Lightman QC has declared that the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust and the London Buddhist *Vihara* had undisputed title to both properties in London, namely, 5 Heathfield Gardens and 85 Barrowgate Road

and that the defendants had no title to or any beneficial interest in either properties.

"The judgment also dismissed the claims made by the late Dr. Saddhatissa *Thera* that he owned the Properties and the BMS [British Mahabodhi Society] as the *Dayaka Sabha* were entitled to manage the *Vihara* and appoint the *Viharadhipathi*.

"The Judge, in dismissing this claim, ruled in effect that if every Altar Boy, Church Helper or Church Support Group, who collected or handled monies to assist a place of worship claimed beneficial interest or title to property, it would be a sorry state of affairs. The BMS, being one of many *Dayaka Sabhas* of the LBV, provided assistance to the Head of the *Vihara* to carry out a few administration functions, one of which was to bank the monies donated to the *Vihara* in bank accounts. This was purely done in observing the Buddhist customs prevalent in Sri Lanka, that a monk is not allowed to handle monies and instead a *Dayaka* or *Dayaka Sabha* assisting in such functions.

"The London Buddhist *Vihara* monies were banked in such a manner and held in trust for the exclusive use of the *Vihara*, in the designated bank accounts set up for this purpose. Since the bank accounts were operated by the *Viharadhipathi* and a member of the BMS under joint signature bank mandate, the BMS made claims to these monies as their monies, operated the bank accounts when clearly all monies donated by the public were donated for the exclusive use of the *Vihara* and not for use by the BMS.

"Judge Lightman's ruling has established that just because the BMS assisted the *Vihara* in the *ad hoc* capacity of a *Dayaka Sabha*, it did not thereby become entitled to any beneficial rights or acquire any proprietary rights. The BMS operated under a gratuitous licence extended by the ADT to carry out their religious objectives like any other devotee of the *Vihara*, and when their objectives suddenly changed from being a Temple Support Group to declaring themselves as beneficiaries, then the ADT rightfully and correctly terminated their licence on the 1st of December 1985.

"These legal proceedings which began in March 1986 ended in favour for the ADT and the Public Trustee of Sri Lanka on the 25th of July 1991, a period of over five years where nearly 39 applications and Motions were argued in courts which consisted of voluminous affidavits sworn and presented to court and had the involvement of the English Charity Commissioners, the Attorney General and the Treasury Solicitors."

Aftermath

Following this debacle, the BMS effectively disappeared from sight, an ignominious and underserved fate for a lay support group that, since its founding

by the Anagarika Dharmapala, had held a high profile position in England. All the sincere, unselfish and untiring efforts exerted by the office-bearers from its resurrection in 1966 had, in the space of a few months, been betrayed.

Ven. Saddhatissa, his reputation tarnished, was nonetheless allowed to remain in residence at Heathfield Gardens although he took no part in any *Vihara* activity. Indeed, he regularly absented himself during the day by reading in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies. A bhikkhu, Galyaye Piyadassi, was instrumental in locating and opening a *Vihara* in Kenton, Middlesex, and persuaded Ven. Saddhatissa to become its honorary head. He had managed to keep his diabetic condition under control by strict dieting but complications had set in and, after a short spell in the main hospital in Hounslow, he died on 13 February 1990 aged 75. Recriminations were set aside, however, and a top capacity crowd of 500 attended his cremation at Golders Green in a ceremony conducted by virtually every *Theravadin bhikkhu* resident in the UK.

It would be churlish not to acknowledge his many qualities and the undoubted good influence he exerted on those with whom he came into contact both in the UK and abroad. The author of this chronicle took all this into consideration when composing the obituary which appeared in the Daily Telegraph on 20 March, from which the following extracts are taken:

"His [Saddhatissa's] breadth of vision, based on a profound understanding of Buddhist texts, helped establish the *Vihara* as an international centre and home for Buddhists of all schools. A broad-minded and inspirational figure, Ven. Saddhatissa travelled widely, taking a sincere interest in other peoples and cultures and making every effort to increase inter-religious dialogue and understanding. In his prolific writings in both English and Sinhalese, Ven. Saddhatissa touched on most aspects of Buddhist thought and practice. He had a particular skill for interpreting Buddhist philosophy clearly and simply..."

Soon after his demise, the Kenton *Vihara* moved to its present address in Kingsbury, London NW9, and changed its name to the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre. Two years later, it published a splendid memorial volume entitled *Buddhist Essays: A Miscellany*.

Ven. Saddhatissa's last public act took place on 28 July 1988. At the initiation of the late English Buddhist nun, Ayya Rocana (Pat Stoll), a memorial plaque was unveiled at the former home of the Rhys Davids in Chipstead, Surrey. This read: 'Professor Thomas William Rhys Davids, Historian, Linguist and Buddhist Scholar, Founder of the Pali Text Society, lived here from 1917 until his death in 1922. Caroline Augusta, his wife and fellow scholar, lived here from 1917-1942.' Richard Gombrich (Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford and then Secretary of the PTS) did the honours, followed by Ven. Saddhatissa who recited appropriate Pali stanzas.

Resurgence

It fell to the confirmed Head of the *Vihara*, Ven. M. Vajiragnana, to pick up the pieces and rebuild the infrastructure, at the same time to restore the good name of the institution and attract the confidence of supporters if it was to survive and prosper. His authority was enhanced by his appointment (at the end of 1990) as *Sangha Nayake* of Great Britain and thereafter, he hand-picked conscientious and reliable *bhikkhus* from Sri Lanka to assist in the efficient functioning of the *Vihara*.¹

In the early years of the London Buddhist *Vihara*, a problem often felt by the English Buddhist was the absence of a set programme of activities. Ven. Vajiragnana responded to this by instituting a weekly programme of activities, which was open to anyone who had no prior knowledge or qualifications. He revived and expanded this programme which is continuing to flourish in its revised format. In order to assist him, the number of other resident *bhikkhus* was increased to four, in addition to himself. Initially, he was joined by Ven. Keenagoda Chandawimala, then Venerables Tawalama Bandula, Rukmale Dhammavijita and Nepali Seevali. Some of these have now been replaced and the current *sangha* comprises Venerables Bogoda Seelawimala, Tawalama Bandula, Wiloye Wimalajothi and Boralesgamuwe Pamaratana, who are all kept busy attending to the needs of the constant stream of visitors, conducting classes, and visiting other institutions to give talks.

Interest in Buddhism was growing among native British people. Since they had not been born as Buddhists, they have a desire to learn about the Buddha's life, his teachings, and techniques of meditation. The *Vihara's* second source of support has been the growing Sri Lanka community in Britain. The political situation in Sri Lanka was becoming increasingly serious and the war with the Tamil separatists forced some people to seek their livelihoods in other countries, including the United Kingdom. The resulting surge in immigration meant increasing numbers of supporters coming to the *Vihara*. These people had been born as Buddhists so did not feel the need to attend classes, but they came for *pujjas*, blessings, etc. Festivals such as *Vesakha* were particularly popular with several hundred people trying to squash into the small house in Chiswick. It gradually became apparent that the *Vihara* needed to move to larger premises. Not only were the public areas at 5, Heathfield Gardens too small to contain the large number of visitors, but also the monk's living quarters were very cramped. The five resident *bhikkhus* needed accommodation, and a shrine room, lecture and meditation hall, library, bookstall and kitchen all had to be squeezed into a small house.

It was Ven.Vajiragnana *Nayake Thera* who found the present, spacious premises for the London Buddhist *Vihara*, and arranged for the provision of all the necessary facilities for it to be correctly described as an international Buddhist centre. Planning permission had to be obtained for its change of use from a social club, and alterations had to be carried out. It was officially opened by Mr. Gamani Jayasuriya, the President of the Mahabodhi Society and Chairman of the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust. The ceremony was attended by a large gathering of religious and civic dignitaries from Asia, Europe, the Far East and America. Ven Vajiragnana's welcome address is given here:-

"It is a great privilege and honour for me as Head of the London Buddhist *Vihara* to welcome each and every one of you to celebrate this historic event, the opening of the new premises of the London Buddhist *Vihara*. Our grateful thanks go to you for your response to our invitation to grace this occasion with your distinguished presence here with us today.

"As most of you may already know, the London Buddhist *Vihara* was the very first of its kind to be established in Europe in 1926. At a time when Christian missionaries were being sent to all parts of the globe, there was one man who aspired to further the cause of peace and spiritual development by taking Buddhism to what was then the centre of world influence – to London. That was the late Anagarika Dharmapala, a great Buddhist missionary from Sri Lanka and a man of immense vision and determination. It was he who reclaimed for the benefit of Buddhists the world over the sacred grounds which the Buddha trod 2,500 years ago in North-East India. It was also he who founded the renowned Mahabodhi Society, which today is the custodian of all that is sacred and revered by Buddhists.

"In November 1926 the Anagarika Dharmapala wrote in his diary:-

Quote:

'I am old and physically feeble, yet I am working hard in the hope of doing my bit for the welfare of the English people, whose language I had learnt, and I am going to make use of that language to preach the *Dhamma* to the Britons. Brothers, let us erect a beautiful *Vihara* in some part of London, and in a spirit of love, let us serve the English people.' End Quote.

"It is in that same spirit of love and service that the London Buddhist *Vihara* has conducted its activities almost continuously for the last 68 years, barring the war years. Its association with the Borough of Ealing goes back right to its very inception. Its first location was a house in Ealing, which was purchased by the Anagarika Dharmapala with a donation from Mrs. Mary Foster Robinson of Honolulu. He named it Foster House in her honour. From there the *Vihara* moved to 41, Gloucester Road, which was later requisitioned by the British Government for military purposes during the war years, and its activities were temporarily

suspended. After the war, in 1954, the venue was shifted from Regent's Park to Ovington Gardens in Kensington. In 1962, however, these premises were compulsorily acquired by the Borough Council for a housing scheme. So in November 1963, the Trustees of the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust purchased No. 5 Heathfield Gardens here in Chiswick, where the *Vihara* functioned for just over 30 years.

"Throughout this long period of time, the *Vihara* has gone from strength to strength to become what it is today, recognized internationally as one of the world's leading institutions in the Buddhist *Theravada* tradition. Its success has been due to the untiring efforts of my predecessors in this office, together with the immense contribution which has been made by the resident monks and lay supporters, both Sri Lanka and British...."

Ven. Vajiragnana went on to say:

"... I must also mention the invaluable contribution of Mr. Ranjit Hewavitarana, the representative of the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust in London. It was he who supervised the refurbishment programme. He managed to do all this despite his many other responsibilities and he gave so generously of his time that some of his other work had to be set aside.

"I should like to say something about the function of a Buddhist *Vihara*. It is essentially a place where the Buddha *Dhamma*, or the teachings of the Buddha, can be expounded by monks to whoever seeks instruction both in the *Dhamma* and in meditation. It is a place which provides facilities for study, contemplation and meditation. It is an open house for anyone, regardless of colour, creed, nationality or belief, who is desirous of knowledge of the Buddha *Dhamma*. It is place which can fulfil an individual's every spiritual need not only in this life, but also in his journey thereafter. We aspire to continue to serve all those who come here for all these purposes and more.

"I should like to say a few words to the non-Buddhists in the audience about the role of Buddhism in the community. Friendliness is a virtue which is particularly emphasized in the teachings of the Buddha and we are counseled to develop this quality towards all living beings. The Buddha himself said that it represents the whole of the holy life. It is our earnest wish to live in peace and harmony with all beings, particularly with our neighbours in this community. We have been very encouraged by the kindness which has already been shown to us by our neighbours here, and we wish to assure them that we shall do our very best to develop and strengthen ties of friendship and goodwill with all members of the local community. This *Vihara* is open to everyone, not just committed Buddhists, and any visitor is assured of a warm welcome here.

"Thank you all once again for your distinguished presence with us today. May you all be happy and contented at all times."

Development of Buddhism in the U.K.

From 1926 to 1964 the London Buddhist *Vihara* was the only Buddhist temple in the United Kingdom. In 1966 the Thai Buddhapadipa temple was founded in Richmond, and is now established in Wimbledon, and in 1975 a Burmese temple was started in Birmingham by Ven, Rewata Dhamma. In 1966 three Tibetan monks started the Samye Ling temple in Eskdalemuir in Scotland. This is not the place to describe all the developments in detail, but in the last few decades the number of Buddhist bodies and organizations has mushroomed so that there are now estimated to be over 300 groups in the country.

Compared with 1967, the situation has changed greatly. Nowadays the vast majority of people do at least know that Buddhism exists as a religion, whereas in those days there was widespread ignorance. It was not unusual for Ven. Vajiragnana to find himself being complimented on the beautiful sari he was wearing! Monks in the street were often mistaken for Hari Krishna followers. Today there is much greater awareness and most people have at least heard of the Buddha, even if they do not know much about his teachings. Some people say it is now the fastest-growing religion in the United Kingdom. There is, however, a downside to this. The increasing popularity of Buddhism means that there has been a growing use of Buddha images for commercial purposes. Statues appear in shop windows along with a lot of other items for sale, some are even adapted as lamp stands, and pictures of monks are misused to advertise all manner of products from financial services to dog food!

In his typically broad-minded way, Ven. Vajiragnana *Nayake Thera* had made great efforts to involve British people in the *Vihara* at all levels, so that it is not just a cultural outpost of Sri Lanka transplanted to London, but a vibrant part of the community in which it is situated. In fact he had even been criticized by some Sri Lankans for favouring British people over the Sri Lankans. He rebutted his critics by reminding them of what Anagarika Dharmapala said when he founded the *Vihara*. "I am working hard in the hope of doing my bit for the welfare of the English people, whose language I had learnt, and I am going to make use of that language to preach the *Dhamma* to the Britons. Brothers, let us erect a beautiful *Vihara* in some part of London, and in a spirit of love, let us serve the English people." Ven. Vajiragnana said he was simply doing what the founder had wanted to be done, not that he was neglecting the Sri Lankans.

The InterFaith Network

Membership of the InterFaith Network for the UK has been very important for the spread of Buddhism in the United Kingdom. The world today is spoiled by a variety of crimes, conflicts and all manner of friction, which even threatens its

continued survival. Some conflicts are caused by factors like race and religion. In the United Kingdom of the present day there are many different religions, races and languages. Living and working together is not always easy. Religious matters often generate strong emotions and need to be handled with sensitivity. Most misunderstandings and hostilities are caused by the absence of mutual understanding and respect among believers of different religions. It is, therefore, essential to create better understanding, trust and respect between them. In the year 1987 Ven. Vajiragnana *Nayake Thera* was invited to become a founder member of the InterFaith Network for the U.K. Its aim is to promote and develop mutual tolerance and respect between the different faiths and philosophies followed by the varied communities living in the United Kingdom. The Network incorporates nine major religions: Bah'ai, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. It has become established at local, regional and national levels, linking together 80 organizations, including representative bodies from all these faiths. Prior to the formation of the Network there was little or no contact between the followers of these different faiths; nowadays there is much better dialogue between them.

The chief objective of the members is to utilize the Network to generate a general understanding of the teachings, traditions, customs, manners, food, dress, festivals and other activities of each other's religions. It is not a matter of trying to prove the superiority of one's own faith or imposing one's views on others, but respecting the freedom of other people to express their own beliefs and convictions, and working together to prevent disagreements or misunderstandings which might lead to conflict. The Network conducts InterFaith workshops, conferences and seminars, etc., in order to investigate, discuss and solve, as far as possible, social and religious problems that are likely to arise, working together in co-operation for the provision of information, instruction and help.²

The Recent Years: 2000-2006

Towards the last few years of the 20th Century, the *Vihara* went through a difficult time. The Trustees of the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust had appointed Ranjit Hewavitarana as the manager of the *Vihara* in recognition of the services he rendered in the litigation against some of the *Vihara* supporters who tried to make a claim for the *Vihara* and lost in court.

However, Mr. Hewavitarana ran a virtual 'one-man show' ignoring the coordinators who were also very much part of the *Vihara* activities. A badly-conceived extension project was launched by him – to add some more rooms to the *Vihara*; the project was to be financed by a special collection. The foundation stone was laid by Her Royal Highness Princess Anne during her visit

to attend the Buddhist ceremony in honour of Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The *Vihara* had been selected as the Buddhist institution to receive a royal visit to celebrate this event. Very soon thereafter, the project ran into financial difficulties. Consultation and consensus were not his style, nor did he see a necessity for them. The result was a court action by the construction company, Kobat Development Ltd., against the Managing Trustees in Sri Lanka for further payments. Kobat had already been paid a sum of £131,000 for part of the work to the extension, and was claiming an additional £95,000.

The Trustees, including the Public Trustee of Sri Lanka, challenged this claim as excessive. Mr. Hewavitarana travelled to Colombo to argue with the Trustees, and impress on them the need to pay the full sum claimed by the construction company, but the Trustees stuck to their position. Once again, it was back to lawyers to defend the *Vihara* from another court action.

Mr. Ranjith Hewavitarana was dismissed as the manager by the Trustees for exceeding his mandate, and a three-member *Vihara* Management Committee (VMC) was appointed by Colombo to defend the court action. They were also requested to see to the proper administration of the *Vihara* in the future. Matters became further compounded with the frequent hospitalization of the Ven. Vajiragnana, who contracted an illness which the doctors were finding difficult to diagnose. On 5th April 2005 Ven. Bogoda Seelawimala was appointed Deputy Head of the *Vihara* to take on the Head Monk's responsibilities during his long stays in hospital.

The VMC comprised Mr. Gamini Amarasekera, Mr. Sudanta Abeyakoon and Dr. Lakdasa Panagoda, all gentlemen of high integrity, and well-known to the co-ordinators and supporters of the *Vihara*. The Trustees had realized that Mr. Ranjith Hewavitarana had acted in breach of their trust. His backing of the Kobat claim also aroused their suspicions. The VMC was subsequently issued with a proxy by the Trustees to act on their behalf in London on all matters pertaining to the *Vihara*.

The VMC rallied all the forces that were required to challenge the court action. A British law firm, Carpenter & Co., was hired in the initial stages, and thereafter, Mr. S.H.J. Merali, Solicitor-Advocate was retained to defend the Trustees – and the *Vihara*. A Sri Lankan chartered structural engineer practicing as a partner of W.J. Marshall & Co., Mr. Kishan de Silva, did an independent assessment of the work done up-to-date, and completely debunked the Kobat claim.

After protracted pre-trial proceedings that lasted over two years, from 2004-2006, Kobat capitulated, and surrendered their claim when they found that they

could not justify it in court. They withdrew their action. The Trustees in Colombo were aggrieved that an unjustified claim had been made, and instructed Mr. Merali to file for personal costs against the sole director of Kobat, Mr. S. Curzon. The judge ruled in favour of the Trustees.

In the meantime, however, the Trustees had written on 1 January, 2004 to more than 1,000 supporters on its mailing list informing them of the case, and seeking their understanding for the lapses that had occurred. This was to try and quash many of the rumours and false reports which were circulating about the building problems. Everyone was urged to support the VMC and the *Vihara* at this difficult time. Greater transparency was assured, and confidence was slowly rebuilt. The coordinators were once again given a meaningful role in the affairs of the *Vihara*, and the situation gradually returned to normal.

The tsunami in December 2004 that devastated the coastal belt of Sri Lanka and many other countries saw the *Vihara* become a hive of activity with volunteers working day and night to send urgent medical and relief supplies to Sri Lanka. A Tsunami Relief Fund was set up whereby even British children emptied their little piggy-banks in support of the children of Sri Lanka. The Vicar of the neighbouring St. Michael and All Angels' Church offered his church space for storage, and many people in the Chiswick locality came to the *Vihara* with offers of assistance and support. Many British businessmen also came forward to help.

The British Royal Family was anxious to show its support for the relief efforts, and the *Vihara* was visited by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. He came to see for himself what work was being carried out at the *Vihara*, and to speak to and encourage the volunteers. Some of the monies collected were sent to the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust to rebuild ten *Viharas* spread from Trincomalee to Galle in Sri Lanka, which were badly damaged by the ravages of the tsunami. The Mallika Nivasa Society, begun by the Founder's Mother in 1920 in Sri Lanka, received donations from the *Vihara* Tsunami Relief Fund to construct new houses for those who lost theirs on that fateful morning of 26 December 2004.

Donations were also made to several other housing projects and school rebuilding projects. In addition to all this, a large quantity of toys, many donated by British children, was sent to the children affected by the tsunami and funding was made available to attend to their medical needs.

With the conclusion of the case in favour of the Trustees in Sri Lanka, a second letter was sent by them to those on the *Vihara's* mailing list announcing their victory in the courts. The *Vihara's* programme of activities has continued and

has now even been expanded. In 2005 an annual Founder's Day celebration was inaugurated to mark the birth anniversary of Angarika Dharmapala on September 17. There is also a yearly blood donation campaign and regular fund-raising dinners. In June, "2550 Buddha Jayanti" celebrations were held at the Ealing Town Hall in the presence of the Mayor of Ealing and the High Commissioner for Sri Lanka. One-time diplomat and civil servant. Dr. Ananda Guruge, the compiler of the Anagarika Dharmapala Diaries, was the chief guest at these celebrations which also saw an impressive cultural pageant performed by the children of the *Vihara Dhamma* School.

Although much has been achieved in the *Vihara's* first 80 years, much still remains to be done. There is widespread and growing interest in the Buddha's teachings in the United Kingdom, and the *Vihara* must redouble its efforts in the years ahead to reach an ever-wider audience. Only then will it be possible to say that it is fulfilling the original objectives of the Founder, whose dream it was":.... to preach the *Dhamma* to the Britons... and in a spirit of love, let us serve the English people."

Throughout its 80 years, despite all the setbacks and difficulties, the London Buddhist Vihara has remained a beacon of light, spreading the sublime teachings of the Buddha *Dhamma* in all the West.³

Buddham saranam gacchami/I seek refuge in the *Buddha*

Dhammam saranam gacchami/I seek refuge in the *Dhamma*

Sangham saranam gacchami/I seek refuge in the *Sangha*

Endnotes

1. Extracts from: *London Buddhist Vihara: A Chronicle* by Russell Webb. Mr. Webb was associated with the London Buddhist Vihara for over a quarter of a century, and was an office-bearer of the British Mahabodhi Society.
2. Extracts from: *Pranamalekha*, a publication to felicitate the 75th birth anniversary of Most Ven. Dr. Medagama Vajiragnana Thera.
3. Extracts from: *Notes maintained by the Vihara Management Committee, London Buddhist Vihara.*

BUDDHA GAYA

Source: 2550 Buddha Jayanti Publication; London Buddhist Vihara

Buddha Gaya or, as they say in India, 'Bodh-Gaya,' some 6 miles from Gaya in the eastern Indian State of Bihar, is one of the holiest sites for the Buddhists of the world. It is here that Gautama the Buddha, after meditating under a Bo Tree (Bodhi tree), attained 'Enlightenment' and was later to preach to the world the Noble Eight-fold path which revolutionized thinking and spread a wave of humanism throughout the world.

With the passing away of the Buddha and in the course of hundreds and hundreds of years, with Hinduism having overwhelmed Buddhism in India, the sacred site fell into a neglected condition.

The Mahavansa, the acknowledged record of ancient Sri Lankan history, does not mention it but the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-tsang and tradition has it that it was a King of Lanka, Meghavamma (AD 301-328) who was instrumental in building a Sangarama at Buddha Gaya.

Dipak K Barua, the Indian Buddhist scholar, in his book "Buddha Gaya Temple – its History", quotes freely from the Chinese pilgrim that it was during King Meghavamma's reign that the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha was brought to Sri Lanka and that the monastery built at Buddha Gaya had six halls with Observation Towers three storeys high. It is said to have been surrounded by a thirty to forty foot high security wall. The image of the Buddha in it was cast from gold and silver, decorated with gems and precious stones.

Hiuen-tsang narrated the circumstances which led to this particular monastery being built. He said that in the old days, there was a king of Sri Lanka who was 'truthful and a believer in the doctrines of the Buddha'. It so happened that a brother of this king, who had become a Buddhist monk, went to India where he was treated with disdain for being a foreigner and did not receive the hospitality expected. Able only to stammer, the monk returned to Sri Lanka and reported to his brother-king how he was treated. The king then sent an official delegation with expensive gifts to the palaces of India, requesting permission to build rest-houses for Buddhist pilgrims from Sri Lanka.

The King of Sri Lanka then built a monastery at Buddha Gaya, and a copper plate with the following Royal Proclamation which read: "To help all without distinction is the highest teaching of all the Buddhas; to exercise mercy on occasions is the illustrious doctrine of former saints. And now, I, an unworthy descendant of the Royal line, have undertaken to fund this Sangarama to enclose the sacred traces and to hand down their renown to future ages, and to spread the benefits among the people. The monks of my country will thus obtain independence and be treated as members of the fraternity of this country. Let this privilege be handed down from generation to generation without

interruption". This copper inscription exists no more, but Barua believes Hiuen-tsang would have copied it from the original when he visited Buddha Gaya centuries ago. [Dipak K Barua's "Buddha Gaya Temple - It's History" published by the Buddha Gaya Management Committee – Buddha Gaya, 1981 – P.22]

Archaeologists, Prof. S. Paranavitana (Sri Lanka), A. Cunningham and J.D. M. Beglar (British) as well as the Chinese envoy, Wang Hiuen-t'sa, have written extensively on the question of dates and about the king of Sri Lanka who could have built these monasteries at Buddha Gaya, but all the same it appears that a king of Sri Lanka built a monastery at Buddha Gaya in India hundreds and hundreds of years ago. [Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. V, P.6]

The virtual disappearance of Buddhism from the land of its birth and the advent of colonial British rule which gave prominence to a little bit of Christianity in the sub-continent known as 'Jumbudvipa', submerged not only Buddhism but also its places of worship with jungle. Buddha Gaya was swamped.

In 1885, liberal Englishman Sir Edwin Arnold, the author of the immortal poem on the life of the Buddha, "The Light of Asia", visited Buddha Gaya, then under the control of a Hindu mahant. So shocked was Sir Edwin that he wrote to the Government of British India: "It is certainly painful to one who realizes the immense significance of this spot (Buddha Gaya) in the history of Asia and of humanity, to wander around the precincts of the holy tree and to see scores and hundreds of broken sculptures lying in the jungle or on brick heaps scattered – some delicately carved with incidents of the Buddha legend, some bearing clear and precious inscriptions in early or later characters".

He wrote frequently to the British press. Among the newspapers that published his essays appealing to the British Government, was the influential 'Daily Telegraph'. In these articles he urged that the administration of Buddha Gaya be handed over to the Buddhists who, he argued, were the legitimate custodians of the venerated site.

To this noble Englishman must deservedly go the credit for stirring the conscience of the Buddhist World, and for inspiring the movement for the revival of Buddha Gaya, the holiest of holy sites for the Buddhists throughout the world. He brought the message to Sri Lanka along with some leaves from the Sacred Bo- Tree under which Gautama Buddha attained Enlightenment. From Lanka he traveled to Tokyo to whip up support among the Buddhists of Japan.

The opening paragraph of one of Sir Edwin Arnold's many articles is worthy of reproduction, if not only for its message but also its sheer beauty of construction. "I would to-day, in these columns (Daily Telegraph) respectfully invite the vast and intelligent British public to forget, for a little while, home weather and home politics, and to accompany me in fancy, to a sunny corner of their empire, where there centres a far more important question, for the future of religion and civilization, than any relating to parish councils or parish pumps. I will, by their leave, tell them of beautiful scenes under warm skies, of a temple fairer and more stately as well as more ancient, than almost any existing fare, and will also show them how the Indian Government of Her Majesty, supported by their own enlightened opinion, might, through an easy and blameless act of administrative sympathy, render four hundred millions of Asiatics for ever the friends and grateful admirers of England."

Little wonder that the English reading public continued to read the lengthy article wherein Sir Edwin Arnold goes on to refer to Buddha Gaya and say that a Maha Bodhi Society has been formed to win back its management for the Buddhists. He calls the Anagarika, his "excellent friend", whose services to the cause "can never be sufficiently praised, and the example of whose generous efforts ought to make him beloved throughout Buddhistic Asia".

Sir Edwin winds up quoting the 'Hindu' newspaper of Madras: "If there is anything in the intellectual and moral legacies of our forefathers of which we may feel proud, it is that sublime, pure and simple conception of a religious and moral system which the world owes to Buddhism to find a commanding and permanent footing once more in their midst, and live in mutually purifying amity with our Hinduism itself".

Here is indeed, concludes Sir Edwin, for an enlightened British Indian Minister, "a splendid opportunity". Render to the Buddhists what belonged to the Buddhists.

One of those whose imagination was fired by this clarion call was Don David Hewavitarne – later to be widely known as 'Anagarika Dharmapala' – already immersed in the renaissance of Buddhism as an activist in Sri Lanka.

By this time, young Dharmapala was deeply involved in the work of the Theosophical Society and was working closely with Col. Henry Steel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky in Sri Lanka. His family, the Hewavitarnes had already helped establish the Vidyodaya Pirivena (later a university) in 1873 to promote the studies of the Buddhist clergy.

If the Portuguese introduced Roman Catholicism to Sri Lanka when they arrived in the island in 1505, the Dutch set about persecuting them by

introducing Christianity. Catholic Evangelists appealed, in vain, to the King of Portugal at the harsh treatment meted out by the Dutch.

With the capitulation of the Dutch to the British in 1796, and sans a proper religious policy, Buddhism raised its battered head once again, but not for long. Kandy, stood as the last bastion of Buddhism in Sri Lanka as the maritime provinces quickly fell to the military might of conqueror after conqueror.

With the fall of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815 the British Crown outwardly professed religious tolerance and respect for the religion of the native people.

In the fifth clause of the Kandyan Convention it said; "The religion of Boodho professed by the Chiefs and the inhabitants of these provinces is declared inviolable and its rites, ministers and places of worship are to be maintained and protected."

The convention was soon to become 'a mere scrap of paper', and executive action by the British Crown saw to the mass confiscation of lands by the government leaving Buddhist institutions and the people who supported them in a miserably impoverished state.

For the next 50 years, Christianity, actively sponsored by the British Crown began converting more and more Sri Lankans. But, as every action has a reaction, so too did a Buddhists Resurgence Movement begin. It began in the low country coastal belt and came to its most famous headlong confrontation in the year 1863 with what is still known as the Baddegama controversy, or the Baddegama debate. This was followed by the controversy at, or the Panadura debate a decade later in 1873.

Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky meanwhile had started a Theosophical Society in America. In Sri Lanka, the Panadura debate held on Saturday August 26, 1873 and Monday August 28, 1873 (because the debate could not be concluded in a day) had been held near the beach on a block of land provided by businessman Jeramias Dias who also provided food and refreshments to the public who attended.

The arguments on behalf of the Buddhists and Christians were heated, but never was there any disturbance of the peace. Religious tolerance was at its height, and westerners who later came to hear of the debate could never imagine such an event in their so-called Temples of Democracy.

The Chief Buddhist priest who organized the debate on behalf of the Buddhists was the Ven. Walpita Gunaratanatissa who engaged the service of the fiery orator Ven. Miggettuwatte Gunananda. After each day's debate, the

respecting cheering squads would go in separate processions shouting aloud "Api Dinum" (we have won).

The Editor of the then Ceylon Times asked Edward Perera, an Advocate of the Panadura Bar and father of E.W. Perera to cover the Panadura debate and his dispatches were published in the Colombo based newspaper. He reported all eight speeches made on the two days. Following this, one John Cooper published a book containing these reported speeches of the Ceylon Times and it was a copy of this book presented to him by Dr. J.M. Peebles that Col. Olcott read in America which inspired him to sail to far away Sri Lanka along with Madame Blavatsky.

Their visit to the Indian Ocean island was to transform the lives of the people in no small way.

Essentially, the Anagarika was translating the speeches of the two foreigners to the ordinary Sri Lankans and at the same time cutting his teeth into an electorate he was to conquer subsequently.

In 1884, Dharmapala left on his first overseas mission. In the company of Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, he sailed for Adyar in Madras where the Theosophical Society had its headquarters.

For four years Dharmapala was a frequent visitor to Dravidian India and towards the end of 1889 he sailed from Colombo, with Col. Olcott, for Japan on an invitation from the Japanese Buddhists. Having spent five months on this Far Eastern tour, Dharmapala returned to Sri Lanka with one ambition – to visit Buddha Gaya in the State of Bihar, among other Buddhist holy places in India.

On 21 January 1891, the Anagarika arrived at Gaya after a long and arduous journey. He had arrived in the land hallowed by the touch of the feet of Gautama the Buddha. Accompanied by some of his Bengali and Bihari friends, the Anagarika was to pay homage the following day to the sacred spot where the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

The next day, the Anagarika, shaken by the gross neglect and scant respect of this holiest of holy spots, as it had shaken Sir Edwin Arnold before, wrote in his diaries: "After taking breakfast we went in the company of Durga Babu (i.e. Sri Durga Shankar Bhattacharya, a Bengali gentleman of Gaya) and Dr. Chatterjee (i.e. Dr. Haridas Chatterjee, another Bengali gentleman of Gaya) to Bodhgaya - the most sacred of all sacred spots to the Buddhists. After driving six miles (from Gaya) we arrived at the holy spot. Within a mile you could see, lying scattered here and there, broken statues, etc. of our Blessed Lord. At the entrance to the Mahanta's temple, on both sides of the portico, there are statues

of our Lord in the attitude of meditation and expounding the law ! The Sacred Vihare - the Lord sitting on his throne – and the great solemnity which pervades all round makes the heart of the pious devotee weep. How delightful! As soon as I touched with my forehead the Vajirasana, a sudden impulse came to my mind. It prompted me to stop here and take care of this sacred spot - so sacred that nothing in the world is equal to this place where Prince Sakya Simha gained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree. The tree is a noble representative of the old tree. I gathered some leaves of the tree and one was very peculiar in its formation. When the sudden impulse came to me, I asked Kozen Priest whether he would join me and he joyously assented, and more than this, he had been thinking the same thing. We both solemnly promised that we would stop here until some Buddhist priests come and take charge of this place".

Clearly, with those words, the Anagarika had embarked on a life's mission on behalf of all Buddhists. Almost single-handed, he began organizing, from that day onwards, a movement that was to untie Buddhists in a struggle that was to culminate many years later in having a say of the control and administration of Buddha Gaya by Buddhists for Buddhists.

From the Burmese Rest House, built 20 years earlier by King Mindon of Burma, the Anagarika, only 26 years old at the time, began handwriting the first in a series of thousands of letters that were to reach Buddhists throughout the world - in Japan, Burma, India and Sri Lank -stirring them to the reality of the conditions at Holy Buddha Gaya. He was a crusader at the time. It took time for his message to reach the far corners of the globe and to receive any response.

On February 17, 1891, he wrote: "This night at 12 for the first time in my life, I experienced that peace which passeth all understanding. How peaceful was it? The life of our Lord is a lofty and elevating subject for mediation. The Four Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path alone can make the devoted pupil of Nature happy".

Alone, in the 'wilderness' of Buddha Gaya, the Anagarika must surely have been at peace with himself that night. But he was not to rest – not for a moment, until his mission was accomplished.

An early reversal in this mission was when G.A. Grierson, the then Curator of Gaya of the British Raj, informed the Anagarika that the Temple at Buddha Gaya was government property, that its management was in the hands of a Hindu Mahanta and that any transfer to the Buddhists was possible only with the permission of the British Government – that too on strict financial terms.

After six weeks at Buddha Gaya, the Anagarika left for Calcutta – the seat of government in colonial India at the time – to raise funds, and raise the cry, - 'Buddha Gaya for the Buddhists!'

The house of Neel Kamal Mookerjee, a Bengali theosophist, was thrown open to the Anagarika and together they visited the Indian Museum, the Royal Asiatic Society and newspaper offices, lobbying for support and influence for the task ahead from men in power and place.

From Calcutta, the Anagarika sailed for Rangoon - another important city for both Buddhists and the British Empire. He won much support from the Burmese people, but little money. Encouraged nevertheless, the Anagarika sailed for Colombo via Adyar in Madras determined as never before to establish a Society for the restoration of the Buddha Gaya temple to the hands of the Buddhists.

On May 31, 1891, with this in mind, a huge public rally was held at Maligakande in Colombo on property donated by Andris Perera Dharmagunawardena, the Anagarika's maternal grandfather, with the erudite world-famous scholar-monk, the Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala, the then Principal of the Vidyodaya Privena - later a University and the first Buddhist monastic college in Ceylon - in the Chair, and thus was formally launched THE BUDDHA GAYA MAHA BODHI SOCIETY.

The Anagarika, still only 26 yeas old, made an impassioned plea to the people of his native land and described to them how the impulse to restore the Buddha Gaya Temple came to him as he knelt in prayer beneath the ancient spreading bo-tree where the Buddha attained Enlightenment. The meeting was a huge a success and the founder office-bearers of the Budha Gaya Maha Bodhi Society were:

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| President | - The Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Maha Thera |
| Director & Chief Adviser | - Col. H.S. Olcott |
| Secretaries | - G.P. Weerasekera, Anagarika Dharmapala |
| Treasurer | - W.de Abrew |
| Executive Committee | - Pandit Batuvantudave and 12 others |

Representatives

Siam

His Royal Highness Chandradar Chundatdhar,

Prince of Siam

Japan

The Rt. Rev. Shaku Unsiyo -Tokyo

The Committee of Buddhist Sects, Kyoto S Horiuchi, Tokyo

Ceylon

G.P. Weerasekera – Colombo

Burma

Moung Hpo Mhuin, K.S.M. – Rangoon

Chittagong

Krishna Chandra Chowdhury

Arakan

Maung Hla Pru-Akyab

Objectives

The established of Buddhist Monastery and founding of a Buddhist College, and maintaining a staff of Buddhist Bhikshus at Buddha Gaya representing the Buddhist countries of China, Japan, Siam, Cambodia, Burma, Ceylon, Chittagong, Nepal, Tibet and Arakan.

The publication of Buddhist literature in English and Indian vernaculars.

To carry on this important work, a sum of Rupees one hundred thousand is required, which will be invested in Government Securities. Buddhists all over the world are invited to contribute liberally.

Later, when the Maha Bodhi Society of Ceylon was incorporated under the Societies Ordinance, the objectives of the Society were:

- (a) To work for the restoration of the Buddha Gaya Vihara to the Buddhists and to revive Buddhism in India;
- (b) to promote, foster and protect the spiritual, intellectual, and social welfare of the Buddhists of Ceylon in particular and of the Buddhists of the world in General;
- (c) to establish and maintain schools, hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages, libraries, museums, reading rooms, scholarships and other similar institutions;
- (d) to establish printing presses, publish and arrange for the publication of newspapers, books, periodicals and other literature dealing with the Buddhist religion, Buddhist education and Buddhist culture;

- (e) to work for and assist in the propagation of the Buddhist religion and Buddhist culture and to train Dharmaduta Bhikkhus and lay workers of both sexes for such purposes;
- (f) to affiliate Societies and take over Trusts having similar objects; and
- (g) to take all such steps as may be found incidental or conducive to the attainment of any one or more of the above Objects.

One of the foremost tasks of the newly-formed Society, the forerunner to the Maha Bodhi Societies formed later throughout the world, was to find Buddhists monks willing to reside at Buddha Gaya. Four monks were 'recruited' with a little difficulty, viz. Dunuwila Candajoti, Matale Sumangala, Anuradhapura Pemananda and Galle Sudassana. That the Maha Bodhi Society was instrumental in sending Buddhist monks back to India, the very birth-place of the Buddha Sasana, after 2400 years, and whose continued presence has been mainly due to the Society's efforts, must surely rank as one of the greatest achievements of the Society in the last 100 years.

On 10 July, 1891, the Anagarika Dharmapala led the four monks to Buddha Gaya via Calcutta to be in residence on the Full Moon Poya in the month when the Buddha preached His first Sermon to the Members of the Sangha.

The Maha Bodhi Society was now at work. Four Buddhist monks had been installed at Buddha Gaya and the Anagarika was negotiating with the British Colonial Government and the Indian Hindu Mahant, the second wealthiest landlord in all Bihar to regain control of Buddha Gaya.

By October 31, 1891, the campaign for the restoration of Buddha Gaya, spearheaded by the Maha Bodhi Society, was in full swing. An International Buddhist Conference was organized at the holy site. Delegates from Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Chittagong (now in Bangladesh), India, etc. were present. Buddha Gaya had awakened the eyes of the Buddhist world.

The Japanese flag flying alongside the new Buddhist flag raised British Officialdom's eyebrows - their upper-lips slightly stiff with the thought that Buddha Gaya was being used by the Japanese as the launching pad for their ambitions in India and South Asia. From obscurity only a few months earlier, Buddha Gaya had also become well-known as a political hot-bed.

By May 1892 the Maha Bodhi Journal commenced to take the message of the Society in printed form to the world, and in November that year an office was opened by the Society, shared with the Theosophical Society, at 2, Creek Row in Calcutta. Buddhists, Oriental scholars and students of Comparative Religions

in America, England, Germany and Buddhist Asia began communicating with the Society.

In the month of February 1893 - possibly with the tacit backing of the then colonial British Government, the Mahant took decisive steps to oppose the Maha Bodhi Society's (M.B.S.) moves for the restoration of Buddha Gaya to the Buddhists. Direct action was taken. The four resident monks were assaulted by thugs. A well-known Gaya lawyer, Nanda Kishore Lall, was retained as Counsel for the M.B.S., but in an act of supreme tolerance, the Bhikkhus refused to make complaints to the police or Court. The Superintendent of Police of the Gaya District is reported to have remarked: "I always thought these Indian priests made a living out of religion. These Buddhist priests from Ceylon actually practice it".

That year was a momentous one for the founder of the Maha Bodhi Society. In a sense it was the year he won fame and fortune, both of which he diverted to the Society and its struggles in the years ahead.

In May, he visited Burma again, and in July he left for the famous 'Parliament of Religions Conference' in Chicago, held in September. Volumes of his contribution and the impression he made thereat have been recorded thousandfold ever since.

The Anagarika's name spread throughout the Buddhist and non-Buddhist world alike. From Chicago, when he arrived at Honolulu, among the visitors who came to visit him on the steamer he was traveling in, was Mrs. Mary E. Foster. Mrs. Foster was later to become the greatest single financial benefactor of the Maha Bodhi Society, and her philanthropy, through the Society, stands to this day – eternal.

The Anagarika proceeded to Japan and returned to Colombo via Thailand and Singapore. He was by now a content young man – content that the Buddhists and the supporters of Buddhism, even though non-Buddhists, had awakened!

Work in India was his prime concern. In February 1893 he left for Madras and in April he arrived at Buddha Gaya bringing with him the beautiful stone image of the Buddha by the famous Japanese sculptor, Sodatomo Nara. This was later taken to the Mulagandhakuti Vihara of the MBS at Sarnath - mainly because of the possibility of vandalism at Buddha Gaya by the Mahant and his men. It was brought back to Buddha Gaya in 1895 and upto date is being worshipped by Buddhists who visit the Bodhi Tree.

The installation of this stone image originally at Buddha Gaya was by no means easy. It nearly caused actual physical harm to the Anagarika and the Buddhists

who were spearheading the move. The Mahant had vowed to let loose his thugs on the grounds that the installation of the Buddha image was tantamount to desecration. He threatened to kill the Anagarika. Wrote the latter in his diaries on 25 February 1895, "At 2 in the morning I woke up and sat in meditation for a little time and then my mind suggested, as it did yesterday under the Bodhi Tree, to take the Japanese image to the Maha Bodhi Temple. I woke up the priests and then asked them to sit in contemplation for a time. Then it was decided that we should take the image early morning from Gaya to Buddha Gaya. In silence, I vowed 7 times to give up my life for the Buddha's sake. Before dawn, we packed the image and by 7 were off to Buddha Gaya."

At Buddha Gaya there was great excitement. The Anagarika, now under the auspices of the M.B.S., took the image to the upstairs of the Maha Bodhi Temple. As he and his followers lit candles, the Mahant's goondas. (thugs), armed with clubs, threatened the Anagarika and asked him to remove the image. The Anagarika refused. Buddhist worshippers were physically handled. The old Japanese Buddha image was thrown to the courtyard below.

Non-violent though he may have been, the Anagarika Dharmapala was no pacifist when it came to defend the rights of Buddhists. Together with Col. Olcott, by now Director of the M.B.S., the Anagarika sought redress in the Courts of Law.

Criminal action was instituted against the Mahant's men who were convicted and sentenced to a month's simple imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 100 was imposed. On appeal, the conviction was upheld by the Session's judge and it went further for revision to the Calcutta High Court, which set aside the conviction, where it was held that there could be no disturbance in an area not recognized by law as 'sacred'. Right through, the judges in the lower and higher Courts however held that the evidence overwhelmingly pointed to Buddha Gaya being sacred to the Buddhists and, though the old Buddha image had a tilak or Hindu caste mark on its forehead (Hindus believe Buddha is an avatar of Vishnu), actual Hindu-worship carried on at the temple took place only after the M.B.S. launched its campaign.

The Anagarika and the M.B.S. lacked the funds at the time to go to the highest tribunal of British justice – the Privy Council in London. The M.B.S. may also have lacked confidence in British justice at the time.

The Viceroy, Lord Elgin, had visited Buddha Gaya and ordered that the Buddha image be placed at the nearby Burmese monastery – later the Rest House. The British Collector for Gaya then ordered the M.B.S. to remove the image from the Rest House, but was unsuccessful.

The case, widely known as 'the Buddha Gaya Temple Case,' may have been eventually lost in Courts, but it won the desired publicity for the struggle of the Buddhists at the time. Legal proceedings were published in all the leading newspapers, whipping up public opinion to a point that in 1897 the British-Indian Association, of which the Mahant was a prominent member, urged the Colonial British Government to get the M.B.S. to remove the statue from the Burmese Rest House – again unsuccessfully. The Bengali people, however, cultured as they are, with close affinity to the people of Lanka, were increasingly sympathetic towards Buddhism.

The otherwise staid 'London Times' supported the Buddhists' campaign and Sir Edwin Arnold wrote to the 'Times', saying: "To have declared the Temple open to the devotees of the Siamese, Burmese, Ceylonese, Tibetans, Chinese and Japanese pilgrims who desired to supervise would have been worth untold moral face to England in Asia."

With the turn of the 19th Century and the advent of the 20th, the battle for Buddha Gaya was on the up-beat. A major set-back came in 1904 with the death of the great Sir Edwin – the man able to galvanize English public opinion at the time.

The Court battles were by no means over. In 1906, the Mahant, at the instigation of the Commissioner for Patna, filed action against the Anagarika and the Ven. Sumangala, one of the resident-monks of the M.B.S. at Buddha Gaya, for their ejection from the Burmese Rest House and the removal of the Buddha image on the grounds that the Mahant was the sole owner of the building which, he claimed, was built for the temporary convenience of Burmese Buddhist pilgrims only. The Government of India were also made defendants.

The Mahant won the case and the Anagarika Dharmapala appealed - quite naturally. The Calcutta High Court varied the decree of the lower court by saying that the Mahant had control over the building but was subject to the right to use it "in the customary manner." The crucial issue of the rights of the parties was left vague enough and this prompted the Anagarika to turn his attention to the Court of the People for redress.

Newspapers, led by the 'Indian Mirror', splashed articles by scholars of all nationalities. Rabindranath Tagore, the famous son of India, wrote: "I am sure it will be admitted by all Hindus who are true to their own ideals that it is an intolerable wrong to allow the temple, raised on the spot where Lord Buddha attained His Enlightenment, to remain under the control of a rival sect.."

Even in 1921, 30 year after the Buddha Gaya Maha Bodhi Society was founded, the temple remained under the Hindu Mahant's control. The Buddha image at

the temple was dressed up in a red cloth and the forehead daubed with lime or clay. The Buddha image also had a turban round the head.

By this time an overall anti-British presence movement was crystalising. Anagarika Dharmapala kept in touch with promising Indians who had politics and freedom in mind. The winds of change were sweeping across the subcontinent of India.

Anagarika Dharmapala was now 56 years old. The young man who had launched the Buddha Gaya Maha Bodhi Society was now very much a senior citizen. He has expanded the Society he first formed at the Vidyodaya Pirivena in Colombo to a worldwide movement with branches in almost every Buddhist nation.

The original Society had become the Maha Bodhi Society of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). A Maha Bodhi Society of India was formed almost immediately after the Colombo launching. Branches were formed for the propagation of Buddhism in Burma, Thailand, Arakan, Akyab, Chittagong and Darjeeling in the early years. Properties were purchased for temples. Monks were recruited and dispatched to teach the Dhamma to those interested. By far, the Maha Bodhi Society was the pioneer Buddhist movement to organize the Buddhists of the world under one umbrella. The struggle for control of Buddha Gaya, one of the most significant spots for Buddhists, was the catalyst that united the Buddhists, and that Anagarika Dharmapala, a Sri Lankan, was the one great force behind this powerful organization, must surely be a pride to his countrymen.

The Maha Bodhi Society was now working very much like a modern-day multinational corporation, except that its goal was one of spiritual awakening and not financial profit. In many ways, Colombo remained the operational base of the Society. It was in 1915 that the Maha Bodhi Society of India was registered and regular office-bearers elected, with Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee as the first President. Ceylonese office-bearers were often visiting India and the two Societies were hand-in-glove in its organizational work. For instance, when the malaria epidemic broke out in Sri Lanka, the MBS (India) organized relief measures as much as the M.B.S. (Sri Lanka) organized similar relief measures in Colombo during the Bihar earthquake (1934) and the Bengal famine (1943).

On 5th February 1928 the M.B.S. opened an office in London under the Chairmanship of B.L. Broughton. Three Buddhist monks were sent from Ceylon to propagate the Dhamma in England – still the powerful Colonial Master of more than 350 million people at the time. One of the first Buddhist monks was the Ven. P. Vajiranana, who obtained a Doctorate from Cambridge University

and later became the President of the Maha Bodhi Society of Ceylon. The other two were the Ven. Nandasara and the Ven. Pannasara.

This was the first known Buddhist missionary expedition to the West.

These monks engaged not only in the academic study of Buddhism, which was done anyway in the Oriental Schools of Universities, but also in the rituals and the preaching of the Dhamma to laymen. It was done at the height of colonialism when British-Christian missionaries were active on Sri Lanka soil. To the MBS, Ceylon, goes the credit for giving the start to the modern day spread of Buddhism in the West.

Two years later, the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust Fund sent Pandit Rahula Sankrityayana and Bhadanta Ananda Kausalyayana - both graduates of the Vidyalankara College, Ceylon, to London to propagate Buddhism. They functioned under the auspices of the British Maha Bodhi Society which is still under the control of the Maha Bodhi Society of Sri Lanka.

By this time, Europe was feeling the presence of the Maha Bodhi Society and, through it, Buddhism, the great religion of Asia. On 18 August 1934, the Berlin Maha Bodhi Society was formed. In 1935, branches of the Society were formed in Holland, Natal and South Africa (1931) and in Singapore (1939).

Anagarika Dharmapala wrote to India's undisputed leader of the time - Mahatma Karamchand Gandhi, asking for support for the campaign. Gandhi wrote back: "I received your letters in Calcutta. Much as I should like to help you, it is not possible for me to do anything directly at the present moment. The question you raise can be solved in a moment when India comes to her own".

It is unlikely that Gandhi was wavering. He was a great believer in secularism - much to the anger of sections of the Hindus. He probably wished to wait till India was free to implement Anagarika's wish. Not much later, Gandhi was to write a simple Foreword to an MBS publication on the Buddha Gaya Temple issue, thus:

"There is no doubt that the possession of the temple should vest in the Buddhists.. We should take pride in helping the restoration of the temple to the rightful trustees".

At a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee on 16 December 1922 at Gaya, which was attended by Buddhist monks from Ceylon and Burma, headed by the Rev. Srinivasa and U Ottama respectively, a Resolution was passed recommending to the All-India Congress Committee to give its sympathy and active support to any peaceful association of the Buddhists for the rescue of the Buddha Gaya Temple.

The 37th Sessions of the Indian National Congress was held at Gaya during the Christmas week of 1922 and the resolution from Bihar's Committee was now before it. The future of Buddha Gaya, in a sense, was at stake, but so was the future of all India. And so, the deliberations drifted towards the freedom of India in general and on the controversy of whether the Congress should participate in the proposed Legislative Councils. The issue of Buddha Gaya was not totally forgotten, and the following Resolution was passed on 21 January 1923:

"Babu Rajendra Prasad is authorized to investigate the proposal of placing the custody of Bodh Gaya temple in Buddhist hands and to make report to this Committee. Babu Rajendra Prasad is also empowered to co-opt suitable persons in the investigations".

That Rajendra Prasad was later to become President of a free India is history, and among those "suitable persons" he co-opted to his Committee were the Anagarika Dharmapala and the Mahant of Bodh Gaya, naturally. The others were Swami Dayanand, Brajakishore Prasad, K.P. Jayaaswal and Paramhansa Ramodar Daas Sadhu.

After a delayed start, the Committee began sittings only in 1924 when Rajendra Prasad began communicating with the Buddhists of the Maha Bodhi Society and the Mahant of Bodh Gaya.

Much of the evidence led before the Rajendra Prasad Committee was by Devapriya Valisinha – the hand-picked nominee of the Anagarika as the Anagarika was touring much of Europe at the time. Along with P.P. Sirivardhana, Valisinha (both of whom later became Secretaries of the M.B.S.) argued the following case for the Buddhists:-

[From the Official Report of the Committee]

"The Buddhists say that the Bodhi 'druma' or Bodhi tree is regarded as a most sacred thing by them as the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment under that tree. The temple that stands by the side of the tree stands on a spot hallowed by the attainment of Buddhahood by Lord Buddha and the whole locality is sacred to them in the same way as Mecca is to the Moslem, Jerusalem to the Christian and Ajodhya or Muttra or Kashi is to the Hindu. The temple, they say, was built and visited by Buddhist pilgrims from China, Ceylon, Burma and other places. It continued to be in their possession and in good condition up to the 14th century and thereafter it was neglected and fell into disrepair. In 1833 it was repaired by the King of Burma, and again between 1875-1884 the King of Burma had it restored at great cost with the help of the British Government which also spent money in the act of restoration. The Burmese king also built a rest house near

the temple for Buddhist pilgrims and Bhikshus and they occupied it for several years till they were ejected from it by the Mahanth. The Buddhists enjoyed full liberty of worship but interference commenced about the end of 1891 when the present incumbent Gosain Krishna Dayal Gir became the Mahanth. The Anagarika Dharmapala brought an image of great sanctity and antiquity from Japan which had been presented to him by the Japanese High Priest for installation on the upper floor of the temple which is regarded as the sanctum sanctorum in it but was prevented from installing it by the Mahanth's men who assaulted him and his associates. A criminal case resulted in the conviction of the assailants by the District magistrate but they were acquitted by the High Court of Calcutta. As a result of a second litigation they were ejected from the Burmese rest house. They say that the Mahanth, who is a Saivite, has no right to the temple and its precincts, that the temple has never, until the dispute arose, been regarded as a Hindu temple, that there is practically no worship conducted in it on behalf of the Mahanth, that whatever is done is in a form repugnant to Buddhist sentiments and is only a camouflage to bolster up his claim to it and that they should be placed in exclusive charge of it. In the words of the Anagarika Dharmapala what the Buddhists require are the following:-

- (a) To worship, meditate and offer flowers according to Buddhist methods at Buddha Gaya
- (b) Brahamcharis, Upasakas, Upasikas and Bhikshus to lie unmolested at Buddha Gaya
- (c) The Mahanth, being a Saivite, should not be allowed to appoint menials to desecrate the holy images inside the temple
- (d) The Bodhi tree worshipped by the Buddhists to the West of the temple be set apart for their exclusive worship as was intended by the late General Cunningham who planted a separate Bodhi tree for the Hindus to worship
- (e) The offerings made to the Lord Buddha by Buddhists should not be removed by the Mahanth
- (f) To build a Paribhoga house, as directed by the King of Burma, and deposit all valuables offered by Buddhists therein
- (g) A Buddhist Chowkidar to look after the Buddhist pilgrims staying in the Mahabodhi Dharamshala erected by the M B S

- (h) No Japanese pilgrims to have negotiations with the Mahanth of a political nature
- (i) No animals to be sacrificed within the precincts of the Temple; no liquor to be brought within the sacred area
- (j) More cottages to be built for the pilgrims who intend to pass their days in prayer and meditation at Buddha Gaya
- (k) The ex-officio President and General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society to be members of the General Committee which shall be formed hereafter with the consent of the Buddhists, Hindus and British Government
- (l) To start an unsectarian Buddhist College at Buddha Gaya for students of all creeds and castes on the basis of the Nalanda University
- (m) No movement to be set on foot at Buddha Gaya which shall not win the confidence of the British Indian Government.

Apart from certain details regarding the mode of worship and upkeep of the temple, the other Buddhists whom we met have generally agreed that failing a complete transfer of the control of the temple to Buddhists, they would be satisfied with a joint Committee of Management of Hindus and Buddhists.

The Mahanth's Case was as follows:

"The Mahanth says that the temple is a Hindu temple which was originally built by Hindus. Lord Buddha is one of the Avatars of Vishnu and, as such, is worshipped by all Hindus. The great image, which is now seen in the ground floor chamber of the temple, was installed after 'Pranpratishtha' with the Mantras of Vishnu Bhagway. Hindu pilgrims visit Bodh Gaya in large numbers to offer 'Pinda' to their ancestors. The Mahanth and his spiritual ancestors have been in possession of the temple and its precincts since the sixteenth century when his ancestors came and settled there. While he conducts worship in the Hindu form, perfect liberty is given to the Buddhists who are not interfered with or molested in any way and are allowed to worship as they please. He has received all presents and offerings from time immemorial. The Buddhists have no right whatever beyond the right of worship which they enjoy at present and their present agitation is spurious and unreal. In any case there is no reason why we should be disturbed from possession."

The following points arise for consideration:

(a) is the temple a Buddhist or a Hindu Temple?

Was it built by the Buddhists or by the Hindus, and what has been its history?

(b) What is the position of Buddha in the Hindu pantheon?

(c) Do the Hindus worship Lord Buddha in the temple, if so, how is worship done by the Hindus and Buddhists respectively at Bodh Gaya at present?

(d) What are the rights of the Mahanth and the Buddhists to the temple respectively?

The History of the Temple [Again from the Official Report]

The best and earliest records available in which mention is made of the Bodh Gaya Temple are the travels of the Buddhist travelers. Fa Hian, who is said to have traveled in India at the beginning of the 5th Century, A D, mentions the temple and also the monastery attached to it. He says: "At the place where Buddha attained to perfect wisdom, there are three monasteries, in all of which, there are monks residing. The families of their people around supply the necessities of these monks with an abundant sufficiency of what they require so that there is no lack or stint. The disciplinary rules are strictly observed by them.... The places of the four great topes have been fixed and handed down without great sins Buddha attained Nirvana. Those four great topes are those at the places where Buddha was born - 'where he attained wisdom'; where he began to move the wheel of His Law; and where he attained Parinirvana' [vide Translation of Fa Hian's Travels by James Legge, pp. 89, 90]. This passage is taken by Cunningham to imply, as it does, "that there was a great Vihara of the Maha Bodhi tree in existence at the time of Fa Hian's visit in A D 409.

[Maha Bodhi by Cunningham, p. 17] The most important and complete description however is found in the travels of Huen-tsang who saw it in 637 A D. He describes it as follows:

"To the east of the Bodhi tree there is a Vihara about 160 or 170 feet high. Its lower foundation wall is 20 or more paces in its base. The building is of blue tiles (bricks) covered with 'chunam'; all the niches in the different stories hold golden figures. The four sides of the building are covered with wonderful ornamental works: in one place the figures of stringed pearls, in another figures of heavenly Rishis. The whole is surmounted by gilded copper 'amaluk' fruit. The eastern face adjoins a

storeyed pavilion, the projecting eaves of which rise one over the other to the height of three distinct chambers; its projecting eaves, its pillars, beams, doors and windows are decorated with gold and silver ornamental works with pearls and gems set in to fill up interstices. Its somber chambers and mysterious halls have doors in each of the three storeys. To the right and left of the outside gate are niches like chambers; on the left is a figure of Avalokiteswara Bodhi Satva and on the right a figure of Maitreya Bodhi Satva. They are made of white silver and are about ten feet high. On the site of the present Vihara Asokaraja at first built a small Vihara. Afterwards there was a Brahman who reconstructed it on a larger scale. At first this Brahman was not a believer in the Law of Buddha and sacrificed to Maheswara. Having heard that this heavenly spirit (God) dwelt in the Snowy Mountains, he forthwith went there with his younger brother to seek by prayer (his wishes). The Deva said, "Those who pray should aim to acquire some extensive religious merit. If you who pray have not this ground (of merit), then neither can I grant what you pray for".

The Brahman said, "What meritorious work can I set about to enable me to obtain my desire?" The God said, "If you wish to plant a superior root (growth) of merit, then seek a superior field (in which to acquire it). The Bodhi tree is the place for attaining the fruit of a Buddha. You should straightway return there, and by the Bodhi tree erect a large Vihara and excavate a large tank and devote all kinds of religious offerings (to the service). You will then surely obtain your wishes".

Finally, the Bill, known as 'The Buddha Gaya Temple Bill' that was proposed was as follows:

"TO BE INTRODUCED IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY A BILL"

To make provision for the restoration of the Buddha Gaya Temple and its premises to Buddhists and for the better management of the same.

Whereas it is expedient to make provision for the restoration of the Buddha Gaya Temple to the Buddhists and for the better management of the same, it is hereby enacted as follows:-

Short Title, Extent & Commencement

1. This Act may be called the Buddha Gaya Temple Act, 1935.
 - (i) It shall extend to the whole of British India; and

(ii) It shall come into force immediately

Definition 2. In this Act, unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context-

- (a) "The Temple" means the Great Temple built by the side of the Maha Bodhi Tree near Buddha Gaya village in Gaya District.
- (b) "The Temple Land" means the land on which the Maha Bodhi Temple and its precincts stand.
- (c) "The Mahanth" means the presiding priest for the time being of the Saivite Monastery at Buddha Gaya.

Management & Control

3. The Government of India shall immediately on the passing of this Act, establish a Committee as hereinafter provided and entrust it with the management and control of the Temple land, the Temple and the worship in it.

Constitution of Committee

4.1. The Committee shall consist of the Mahanth and nine representatives of the Buddhists of India, Burma and Ceylon, to be nominated by the Governor-General of India in consultation with the Governments of Burma and Ceylon.

4.2. Any vacancy that occurs in the Committee shall be reported by the Committee to His Excellency within three months from the date of its occurrence.

Rights of Hindus

5. Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act or in the rules framed thereunder, Hindus of every sect shall have access to the Temple to worship the image of Lord Buddha and to the Temple Land to offer Pinda under the Bodhi tree to the north of the Temple. Provided that nothing in this section shall enable any person to slaughter goat or any other animal on this Temple Land for any purpose, religious or otherwise.

Exemption of Property

6. Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act or in the rules framed thereunder, the Committee shall have no jurisdiction over the Zamindari or any other property attached to the Saivite Monastery at Buddha Gaya.

Statement of Accounts

7. Within three months after the first day of January in every year the Committee shall prepare and furnish to the Court a full and true statement of accounts of all moneys received or expended by them on behalf of the Temple during the previous year.

Provided that the Court may, if it is satisfied that there is sufficient cause for so doing, extend the time allowed for the furnishing of any statement of accounts under this section.

Power to Make Rules

8. 1. The Committee may, from time to time, make rules to carry into effect the purposes of this Act.

2. In particular and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing power, such rules may provide for all or any of the following matters, namely:-

(a) the upkeep and repair of the Temple;

(b) the improvement of the Temple Land;

(c) the welfare and safety of the pilgrims;

(d) the safe custody of statements of accounts and other documents relating to the Temple or the Temple Land; and

(e) The maintenance of cordial relations between the Buddhists and Hindu pilgrims.

Saving

9. Nothing in this Act shall affect any other enactment for the time being in force in British India providing for the preservation of ancient monuments”.

The Buddha Gaya Bill became an Act when the Bihar Legislative Assembly passed it in 1949, after India had become a free nation. By then, Dr. Rajendra Prasad had become the first President of a free India. An ardent follower of the Buddha, admirer of Anagarika Dharmapala and supporter of the Maha Bodhi Society, Jawaharlal Nehru, was Prime Minister.

The relentless struggle begun 58 years earlier by the Anagarika and the M B S culminated on June 19, 1949, when the Governor of Bihar gave his assent to the Law empowering the appointment of a Bodh Gaya Temple Management Committee by the Government of Bihar consisting of 8 members appointed by the Government, all of whom shall be

Indians and four of whom shall be Buddhists; and four, including the Mahanth, Hindus. For the first time, the exclusive management-control of the Buddha Gaya Temple had been wrested from the Hindu Mahanth and the Buddhists given a say in its management.

Earlier, Devapriya Valisinha and the M B S in Sri Lanka were not entirely happy. They insisted that the whole management be in the hands of the Buddhists.

They wrote the following letter;

The Maha-Bodhi Society,
Post Box 250,
Colombo.
10.12.48

The Honourable the Prime Minister,
Government of Bihar,
Patna.

BUDDHA GAYA BILL

Dear Sir,

I have the honour to refer you to your under Secretary's D. O. No. 507 P.G.R. of 5.8.48 (Ranchi) and to state that the Board of Management has since examined the proposed Buddha Gaya Bill and it desires me to express its sense of utter disappointment at the attempt made in the Bill to hand-over the management of this most famous Buddhist Temple to a body of Hindus who, according to evidence placed before the Rajendra Prasad Committee, are quite indifferent to the Buddha Dhamma.

2. The proposal to have 4 Indian Buddhists and to appoint a Hindu as Chairman if the District Magistrate is a non-Hindu appears to be a deliberate attempt to perpetuate the very element which the Buddhists agitated against for over half a century - viz. the non-Buddhist control of the Temple. It is a matter for great and genuine regret that your Government is unable to appreciate the Buddhist point of view. Surely you will not hand over the control of Jagannath to a committee with a Buddhist majority.

3. In your statement of Objects and Reasons you quite rightly say that the “Temple is the most sacred place to Buddhists all over the world” and with the same breath you suggest a controlling body with a Hindu majority. You will remember that the Buddhists rejected the Rajendra Prasad Committee’s award for joint control because it was very clear then that the Buddhists would not achieve the object for which they carried on the agitation with unabated vigour.

4. Apart from considerations of any affinity between the Buddhists and the followers of various Indian religious faiths, it is really not understood why it is necessary for non-Buddhists to own control over a religious place with which they did not associate themselves as real worshippers. It is also a well known fact that Mahanth’s rights are the acquired rights of a squatter.

5. The demand of the Buddhists to possess exclusive controls is inspired by their natural desire to maintain the sacred place worthy of their great Teacher in whose name the Temple is built, but not to keep out any bona fide worshipper whether he be a Bhakta of Shiva or Vishnu. You are perhaps aware that Viharas maintained by the Buddhists in India and Ceylon are open to all irrespective of one’s creed.

6. I should like to refer you to great promises made by the late Mahatmaji and Deshbandhu C.R. Das etc., that Buddha Gaya would be restored to the Buddhists when Indians achieved their own freedom. But what the Bill proposed to do now is to perpetuate a Hindu control in a worse form than what it is now. The proposed Committee with its statutory powers and a Hindu majority will indeed be a new menace which the Buddhists will not be in a position to remove once it is installed in authority.

7. Now that you are free, the Buddhists would naturally expect your lost leader’s promises to be redeemed in a manner that would not leave any room for the world think that your Government and the people were not generous towards a minority religious community in your own country and the great Buddhist nations outside India.

8. The Board further desires me to emphasize the fact that even as the Buddhists refused to accept the Rajendra Prasad Committee’s award they would be most reluctantly compelled to refrain from accepting appointments to the proposed Committee until Justice is done.

9. While the Buddhists always desire entire control of the Vihara for themselves they would be quite willing to come to a compromise if your

Government is prepared to make provision for a Committee with a clear Buddhist majority and for the General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society of India to be a member of the Committee by statute.

10. The Society will be very grateful to you if you will kindly amend the Bill conformity with the demands of the Buddhists that the restoration be a real one so that your Government may earn the everlasting gratitude of the vast Buddhist population of the world.

Yours faithfully,

P.P. Sirivardhana,

Hon. Secretary.

It was only at the request of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who urged that an unanimous report stood a better chance of being accepted, that the M.B.S. agreed to the present terms.

The first formal meeting of the new Management Committee was held at Gaya on April 26, 1953, and the historic handing-over ceremony took place at 5.30 p.m. on May 28 that same year. Mrs. Bianca Moonasinghe, whose husband, Nalin, was the Secretary of the M.B.S. of Sri Lanka, immediately undertook to bear the cost of electrifying the holy Temple area.

Buddha Gaya assumed new life. In 1956, to commemorate the 2500th year of Lord Buddha, the Government of India chipped in with long-needed repairs for long-neglected buildings, water supply, and the construction of a museum and hostel.

By 1971 a Buddha Gaya Temple Advisory Board had been constituted with Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in India, and Diplomats from almost all Buddhist countries, on it.

The inspiration of Sir Edwin Arnold, the dream of Anagarika Dharmapala and the organizational support of the Maha Bodhi Society of, first, Sri Lanka, and then together with India, begun 80 years earlier to obtain Buddha Gaya for the Buddhists of the world, had become a reality. It had seen the light of day.

The battle for Buddha Gaya had been won. But not entirely. Unlike at Sarnath and Sanchi in India where the Maha Bodhi Society, or the Buddhists, have complete managerial control of the Buddhist temples thereat, the Hindus still have part-control of Buddha Gaya.

In recent years, however, the Buddhists at Buddha Gaya have, in effect, run the affairs at the once disputed site. In November, 1978 the then Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene on a state visit to India declared open the new road by the side of the main Maha Bodhi Temple named as the Srimath Anagarika Dharmapala Road as but a token appreciation to the founder of the Maha Bodhi Society who made it all happen.

(From: 'They Turned the Tide' By Sinha Ratnatunga) The Anagarika Dharmapala Trust

Having reached what he himself referred to as "an advanced age" of 66, the Anagarika would have known that it was time to ensure that the work in which he was so fully immersed throughout his life, would be continued when he was no longer among the living.

He would also have known that nothing effective could be done without adequate finances, and that how difficult a task it is to fund and maintain ambitious projects.

With this in view, he set about creating what still exists as the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust. He first appointed his brother Dr. C.A Hewavitarane as executor of his Last Will, but the doctor died in 1929, before signing. The Will was then converted into a Trust.

On the 29th of November, 1930 Anagarika Hewavitarne Dharmapala of Aloe Avenue, Kollupitiya in Colombo (the "Settler") appointed Nanayakkarage Don Stephen Silva, J.P., of Gregory's Road, Colombo, Neil Hewavitarne, Raja Hewavitarne, S.K. Moonesinghe all of H. Don Carolis & Sons Ltd., and U.B. Dolaphilla of Rajagiriya (The "Trustees") to administer the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust.

According to the Trust Deed attested by G.T. Hale, Notary Public, of Julius & Creasy, Notaries Public, the Anagarika's ambitions set out in the general objectives of the Trust, among others, were;

(a) To revive and carry on Buddhism in India, and to carry on and maintain the Buddhist Vihara at Calcutta, and to carry on and maintain the work of the Maha Bodhi Society founded by the Anagarika on May 31, 1891;

(b) To disseminate Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist Literature, to carry on the publication of the "British Buddhist" in England and to establish and carry on Journals in English and the vernacular for disseminating the ethics of Buddhism;

(c) To publish Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist texts and to translate the same into English and Indian vernaculars;

(d) To educate people in domestic science, hygiene, technical and home industries and to open and carry on for either or both sexes, schools, trade schools, gymnasias and other institutions for the instruction of arts and crafts;

The Trustees were also enjoined to maintain and upkeep Buddhist monks in India and London, train and educate Buddhist missionaries to carry the message of the Buddhist religion to India and other countries, and to carry out various other objects connected with the spread of the Buddha Dharma, such as financing the activities of the Maha Bodhi Society;

(e) To train and educate Bhikku missionaries to carry the message of the Buddhist religion to the people of India and other countries;

(f) To send students of Buddhism to Buddhist countries and to Europe and America and to provide for and otherwise assist such students and foreign Buddhist students in Sarnath, Benares and other parts of India; and

(g) to support all schools managed by the Maha Bodhi Society.

From these objectives it is manifestly clear that the work of the Maha Bodhi Society was paramount in Anagarika Dharmapala's thoughts. For he must have known that it was through this Society which he founded in 1891, that the revival of Buddhism had its base.

In the Trust Deed, the Anagarika has acknowledged the contributions made by various parties, but specially Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Foster of Honolulu, Hawaii whose monies, together with the private property of the "settler" have been utilized for the purchase of landed property in Ceylon, India, London and America and for the use of Buddhist Societies, hospitals and schools, and for furthering the publication of literature concerning the Buddhist religion.

All his properties, movable and immovable, were transferred to the Trustees to be held by them upon the terms and conditions set out in the Trust Deed.

Long-time General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society, and pupil of the Anagarika, Devapriya Valisinha was to be paid Rs: 200/- per month so long as he was in India or Ceylon or anywhere else (with the leave of the Trustees), and another Rs. 200/- per month for expenses, if bills are produced only, and so long as he is engaged in the work of the Maha Bodhi Society at Calcutta, Sarnath, Benares, Buddha Gaya and Madras "or any other town or country under the supervision of the Trustees and devotes his whole time and attention to such work".

The Trustees were required to manage the Foster Robinson Free Ayurvedic Hospital. The Trust Deed shows that the Anagarika was not a hopeful optimist, but a realist. He tied the hands of the Trustees from selling any property on which the Mallika Santhagara and the Maha Bodhi College stand in Maradana, but gave the Trustees, at the same time, a free hand to close those institutions down if these projects failed or did not benefit the Buddhist community. He then ensured that those same premises be used in the absolute discretion of the Trustees for any project that was beneficial for the continuation of Buddhist educational and hospital work in Ceylon.

Among the properties' that fell within the purview of the Trust were:

- (1) Westcliff Retreat, Kandy
- (2) Mildred House, Maligakande, Colombo
- (3) Property at Slave Island adjoining the steel furniture works and Slave Island Railway Station
- (4) No. 62, Church Street, Slave Island
- (5) Property in Baniapooler Lane, Calcutta
- (6) Vihare at College Square, Calcutta
- (7) Property at Meleodagani Road, Gaya
- (8) Property at Sarnath, Benares
- (9) The Foster Hall in Perambur, Madras
- (10) Properties at Rajagiriya
- (11) No. 41, Gloucester Road, Regent Park, N.W., London

The proceeds from these properties and the properties themselves were to be used for:

- (1) The publication of Pali Texts in the Dewanagari character for the use of people in India.
- (2) The training of young Samanera monks and Brahmacharies for Buddhist Missionary work in India, England and America.
- (3) The continuance of the Maha Bodhi Journal.
- (4) The continuation of any religious or educational work carried on by the Maha Bodhi Society.

(5) The celebration of the birthdays of the "Settler's" father and mother and Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Foster – in the absolute discretion of the Trustees - and provided that the expenses do not exceed Rs. 1,000/- per year.

The Trustees were also given the Anagarika's shares of Mawarella Estate in the Matara District and Ambana Estate in the Negombo District, as well as his other shares in Ceylon.

A nephew of the Anagarika, and son of Dr. C.A. Hewavitarane, Wimala Dharma Hewavitarane was to be co-opted to the Board of Trustees automatically upon his reaching the age of 21 years provided that he desired to be a Trustee.

N. Don Stephen Silva was appointed the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees. A Statement of Income and Expenditure of the Trust and a Balance Sheet of the Assets and Liabilities were to be made available at a meeting, where the two Nayake Theras of Maligakande and Peliyagoda and the members of the Maha Bodhi Society were to be present, to be held at least once every year.

In a lengthy statement issued to the then Editor of the 'Ceylon Daily News', the Trustees pointed out that to understand how the Anagarika Dharmapala carried on his extensive religious and charitable activities, and later disposed of his own estates, as well as the funds entrusted to him, it was necessary to realize the three main phases of his life viz., Don David Hewavitarane, the Government Servant, Anagarika Dharmapala, the Buddhist propagandist, and Ven. Devamitta Dhammapala, the Buddhist monk.

This, the Trustees said, would help one understand his contact with the material world and the manner in which he disposed of his material possessions in each phase.

To put it briefly, Don David Hewavitarane inherited from his father shares in the furniture business of H. Don Carolis & Sons Ltd., to the value of Rs. 160,000 and property to the value of Rs. 235,000. Except for 1,900 ten rupees shares in the business distributed among 19 members of his kinsfolk, the rest was left in trust to the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust.

In 1932, disappointed with the way the Trust was working in Sri Lanka, Anagarika Dharmapala created a separate Trust for the M.B.S., India and appointed Devapriya Valisinha, S.C. Mookerjee, Ven. Kumbuluwelle Sirinivasa and Rajah Hewavitarane as Trustees. They were to handle the M.B.S. properties in Calcutta, Benares, Delhi, Darjeeling, Bombay, Perambur, Gaya, Buddha Gaya, Kushinara and Lumbini.

"I will return to spread the glorious teaching of the Buddha. May I be reborn in India 25 times to spread the Dhamma – until then continue my religious work", he told the Trustees.

When the Anagarika became Ven. Dhammapala he had no worldly possessions and it was in this state of perfect renunciation that he entered the Sangha, and eventually died in 1933.

It appears that Anagarika Dharmapala's personal wants were minimal during his ascetic life as a missionary, but that did not deter him from investing wisely the money in his possession.

The enormous amount of funds he received – the virtual blank cheques - from Mrs. Mary Foster in Honolulu were never credited to the M.B.S. but annual audited reports of those accounts were always published along with the accounts of the M.B.S. Indeed in her letters, Mrs. Foster Robinson repeatedly asked Anagarika Dharmapala to spend some of her money for his personal comfort, but he never did so.

The monies collected from the General Public of Ceylon were always for a specific object which was carried out. For instance, the Ceylonese public contributed Rs. 33,000 out of a total of Rs. 140,000 spent on the Mulagandhakuti Vihara at Sarnath. Again Rs. 4,000 was contributed by the Ceylon public for the Calcutta headquarters of the M.B.S. which initially cost Rs. 110,790.

According to a series of articles written by Rajah Hewavitarne, the State Councillor and later Ambassador to Burma, in the "Sinhala Bauddhaya", the official organ of the Maha Bodhi Society, when the Anagarika had been sick he had called Edmund Hewavitarne's two sons Neil and Rajah to his bed-side and told them "You both are small boys, I want Dolaphilla and N.D.S. Silva to be Trustees".

From the inception it appears that the Trustees were unable to work together. The Trustees would often turn to Ven. Dhammapala for advice, and he would write back asking them not to bother him with such matters at this stage when he had entrusted his properties to the Trust and the Trustees.

By 1942, one of the Founder Trustees, viz., Neil Hewavitarne had died (1939), and W.D. Hewavitarne, having reached the age of 21 had become a Trustee. The rest of the Trustees remained.

Twelve years after the Trust was created, and hardly nine years after the death of the Anagarika Dharmapala, however, a major dispute arose among the

Trustees. The dispute went to the District Court of Colombo for trial on the advice of K. Nadarajah, Q.C., and a settlement was eventually reached in 1942.

The Daily News of May 26, 1942 reported that, when the case came up for trial before James Joseph, Additional District Judge, Colombo, the parties arrived at a settlement. The defendants undertook to retire from the post of Trustees and it was agreed that a Managing Trustee should be appointed in their place while the Public Trustee should be the Custodian Trustee.

The Judge then made the following order:-

"All parties agree that Mr. J.R. Jayewardene, be made trustee, he being invested with all the powers of a managing Trustee under the Public Trustee Ordinance".

A report submitted by Mr. J.R. Jayewardene, then a young Advocate and State Councillor stated "I found the Trust a very wealthy one" and adds that the total value of the properties alone was nearly Rs. 725,000. During a 12-year period (1942-52) when he was sole Managing Trustee, Mr. Jayewardene is on record saying an average of Rs. 35,000 to 40,000 was spent annually on the propagation of Buddhism in India and Ceylon and other parts of the world. A considerable sum was spent for the Foster Robinson Free Ayurvedic Dispensary and Hospital which was founded in 1914 during the life-time of the M.B.S. founder.

An average sum of Rs. 1500 was spent per month on the maintenance of M.B.S. branches in India. Were it not for funds from the Trust in those early years, M.B.S. centres at Sarnath, Madras and Calcutta would have had to close down.

Another important project was the financing of Buddhist publications in Sinhala and other languages. The Dhammapada was translated and published in the Tibetan language. Financial assistance was given to the Buddhist Congress for the publication of the Tripitaka in Sinhala.

The Ceylon Public was not asked for a single cent for the Pilgrims' Rest at Buddha Gaya nor were they asked for several other M.B.S. projects overseas. However, other appeals for contributions had the desired effects on a Buddhist public in the country which felt they were participants in a great Buddhist re-awakening movement throughout the world.

The Foster Robinson Free Hospital was built on a property then worth Rs. 30,000 donated by the Anagarika. Mrs. Mary Foster gave a further Rs. 67,000 for the establishment of this hospital.

Prior to the creation of the Trust, the estate's investments were as follows;

	Rs. Cents
Land and buildings in India, England etc.	394,805.71
Land and buildings in Ceylon	261,231.78
Investments in Ceylon and abroad	381,500.00
Total	1,037,537.49

Of this total, the contribution by the Public of Ceylon was Rs. 75,748.58 and the Anagarika's own contributions totalled Rs. 53,435.74.

Of his 16,000 shares in H. Don Carolis & Sons Ltd., he left Rs 1,000 to the Hewavitarne Weaving School. 100 shares to his relations, 100 shares to be sold and the monies given to old employees of the firm, the balance 13,750 shares went to the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust.

The Trustees were not only given charge of his personal properties, but also the gifts he had received from other philanthropists particularly Mrs. Foster Robinson.

The Trust has also been the main financier of the London Buddhist Vihara founded in 1926 by Anagarika Dharmapala.

When Mr. J.R. Jayewardene resigned from the Trust in 1954 due to pressure of work (he was Minister of Finance by then), new Managing Trustees were appointed. They were Mr. H.W. Amarasuriya, Mr. Nalin Moonesinghe, Dr. A. Ratnapala, Mudaliyar P.D. Ratnatunga and Rajah Hewavitarne, Maj. Herby Seneviratne served as the Secretary to the Trust.

The investments held by the Public Trustee at the time amounted to Rs. 259,000 in Ceylon Government Stocks. The Trustees continued the work that was so close to the heart of the founder of M.B.S. without hiccups, concentrating much of their efforts in the field of education. The M.B.S. managed over 100 schools during these years, and the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust was responsible for finding much of the funds for the purpose. All these schools were taken over by Government without payment of any compensation.

By 1964, the composition of the trustees had changed. Messrs. Gamani Jayasuriya, Upajiva Ratnatunga and W.D. Hewavitarne replacing Dr. A. Ratnapala, Mudaliyar P.D. Ranatunga and Mr. Rajah Hewavitarane.

Mr. Lalit Hewavitarne joined the Trust in 1968, ten years after the passing away of his father, Mr. Rajah Hewavitarne. In 1974, Mr. P.U. Ratnatunga resigned as a Managing Trustee and recommended Singha Weerasekera as his

nominee. Mr. N. Moonesinghe also resigned and Mr. Nanda Amarasinghe was appointed in his place.

The Trust did not undertake any new projects and was concentrating its efforts towards maintaining the work it had already commenced. The Foster Robinson Free Ayurvedic Hospital and the London Buddhist Vihara were the two main projects handled by the Trustees in Colombo. The Maha Bodhi centres at Sanchi, Madras and Bangalore in India were some of the other projects of the Trust. Along the years the Maha Bodhi centre at Bangalore slipped away from the control of the M.B.S., Sri Lanka, and today the expanding centre there in Bangalore carrying the name of the Maha Bodhi has little, if no communication with the Maligakande headquarters of the Sri Lanka M.B.S. Sanchi was just the reverse, whereas it first came under the jurisdiction of the M.B.S. India, it is now under the control of the M.B.S. Sri Lanka mainly because its chief incumbent for many years, Ven. Hedigalle Pannatissa who was also the chief incumbent of the Agrasravaka Vihara at Maligakande.

The Foster Robinson Free Hospital, one of the major projects of the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust was begun on 22nd November 1914 at Foster Lane at Maradana. As has already been stated, the property for this free hospital was provided by Anagarika Dharmapala on land bequeathed to him in the Last Will of his late father, Don Carolis Hewavitarne, and the funds for other requirements came from Honolulu courtesy Mrs. Mary Foster Robinson who wanted to build a hospital for the poor in Ceylon in memory of her late father and her late husband.

This Free Hospital was to provide native medicine (Ayurveda), and was in fact, the first Ayurvedic dispensary in the island. There were at the time, Ayurvedic practitioners, but no dispensaries. The one administered by the Maha Bodhi Society, was therefore, the first in the island. The colonial British not wanting the re-emergence of native medicines was the root cause of why there was no paying or non-paying Ayurvedic dispensary in all Sri Lanka.

Maradana was then, as even now, a bustling area heavily populated by both the affluent, as well as the very poor. The Maha Bodhi Society's activities in Colombo, it could be seen, concentrated around this zone in the city catering mostly to the poor and needy sections of society.

From the commencement of this free dispensary Ayurvedic practitioners volunteered their services free-of-charge. The Foster Robinson Hospital became a favourite spot for the sick who could not afford western medical care.

The hospital developed throughout the years under the care of the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust and by the year 1957 practitioners at the hospital rostered themselves as follows:

Mondays - (Ayur.) Dr. E. Sederis Perera

Tuesdays - Muhandiram J.P. Elvitigala

Wednesdays - Weda-Arachchi J.W. Waidyakulatilake

Thursdays - (Ayur.) Dr. D.D. Amaratunga

Fridays - (Ayur.) Dr. T.S. Fernando

Saturdays - (Ayur.) Dr. D.B. Samarasekera

Sundays - H.D.M. Perera

Specialist doctors were also in attendance at the hospital on the following basis:

Eyes

Saturdays - (Ayur.) Dr. W.I. Fernando

Wednesdays - (Ayur.) Dr. Dalugama M.D. Hemachandra Jayakody

Boils

Fridays - (Ayur.) Dr. S. Samarawickrama

Orthopaedic

Sundays - (Ayur.) Dr. Amunukumbure H.P. Don Aaron Appuhamy

Additional Doctors

(Ayur.)Dr.S.G. Abhayadeva, R.M.S. Waragoda, Algama, G.A.D. Karunasena.

In 1964, for the 50th anniversary of the hospital, the M.B.S. decided to construct a new building to replace the old. According to one of the live wires of the Free Hospital in recent years, Major Herby Seneviratne, it was only Minister of Health A. P. Jayasuriya, who promised help, that followed it up with actual assistance. He obtained Rs. 50,000 for the construction of a new upstairs building with consulting rooms, waiting rooms etc.

In 1978, the then Prime Minister R. Premadasa who was also Member of Parliament for Colombo Central made a request for the premises so that the adjoining Maha Bodhi College could be expanded. The M.B.S. agreed to shifting the hospital on the allocation of alternate land elsewhere.

In March 1983, the foundation stone for a new and more spacious Foster Robinson Hospital was laid at Narahenpita, and on October 1986 the new hospital was declared open by Prime Minister, R. Premadasa and Gamani Jayasuriya who was Agriculture Minister and President of the M.B.S. the Society obtained Rs. 950,000 as compensation for the property at Maradana and with interest for delayed payment, the sum received topped the million - mark.

The Colombo Municipal Council and the Ayurvedic Department contribute Rs. 50,000 each, per month, for the hospital, the latter on the basis of patient attendance.

In 1989 as many as 38,000 patients received treatment at this Free Hospital, and in 1990 the numbers rose to 42,000. Not a cent is charged from any of these patients either for consultation or for medicine. Publishing houses provides paper free-of charge for writing the 'Thundu' or prescription chits and for wrapping the Arishtayas (medicine.) Patients are requested to bring their own bottles for this purpose, but where they cannot, even these are given free.

In 1989, in particular, when anti-government groups forced the closure of state and private hospitals in a bid to bring about civil commotion in the country, the Foster Robinson Hospital was not spared the 'orders' to close. Its staff was not exempted from the death threats by these groups, but the hospital was able to continue un-interrupted in the service of the people, its founders dreamed of helping, nearly 80 years ago.

The properties that came under the control of the Trust, and from which an income was obtained were:

Mawarella Estate, Mawarella

Dambulanda Estate, Divulapitiya

Manikwatte Estate, Weligama

Ambana Estate, Mirigama

Maha Bodhi Estate, Hiniduma

Shares at H. Don Carolis & Sons Ltd.,

Shares at Ceylon Match Company Ltd.,

Some of the properties the Trustees were permitted to sell have already been sold. For instance, one of Sri Lanka's blue-chip companies, Hayleys Ltd., purchased 35 perches behind the Maha Bodhi College at Maradana and is now part of their massive complex. Properties at Karapinchawatte near Maligakande have also been sold, all by seeking the permission of the District Court of

Colombo as required by law. In one case, the Court fixed the price of sale which it deemed was reasonable. It happened to be to the advantage of the Trust.

Source: 'They Turned the Tide – By Sinha Ratnatunga)

THE HEWAVITARNE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

In 1912, the Hewavitarne Industrial Centre was established in a plot of land at Rajagiriya, in the outskirts of Colombo, now a popular residential cum industrial metropolis. The centre was just about the first, if not the first, industrial school in the island.

This centre housed the first of Sri Lanka's weaving centres. Thousands of such centres have bloomed since then, but the one begun by the Maha Bodhi Society was the first. The Maha Bodhi Society picked Buddhists for employment, and some of them were sent to Japan on scholarships.

Don Carolis Hewavitarne, father of the Anagarika gave Sterling 2,000 to send Sinhalese boys to Japan to learn weaving. It was through public contributions, raised through the columns of the 'Sinhala Bauddhaya' that the first student was picked to go to Japan to learn to make safety matches. He worked for three years in Japan "from the ground up", so to say.

The Hewavitarne Industrial School started, but later had to stop, making inlaid handles for knives and working in metal and ivory. Sri Lanka was too poor to withstand the enormous factory output, and free imports of such material from Lancaster, Manchester and other European cities. But a beginning had been made for the birth of industry in Sri Lanka.

The Hewavitarne Industrial Scholarships Scheme enabled young Buddhists to go to India as well, where Mahatma Gandhi himself was extolling the virtues of the spinning wheel and of the local garment industry. These scholarship winners, particularly those who went to Japan, learnt not only the finer art of textile weaving, but also ceramic manufactory and match manufacture.

The country's first Match factory – Three Gems was begun by the Senanayakes, De Mels and Hewavitarnes but no sooner than they started competition came from Sweden with the brand – Three Stars. The match sticks were of fine quality and except for the portion of the gun-powder that went into its manufacture, the remaining components were of indigenous material. The Three Gems factory, like the estates that were run by the Maha Bodhi Society, were eventually handed over to H. Don Carolis & Sons Ltd., for better

management. But the world famous Swedes began cut-throat competition under cutting prices and nearly ran Three Gems to the ground. The Swedes then purchased shares from Three Gems. Eventually foreign collaboration was obtained with the Swedish Match Company in what was an early joint-venture in this country which ultimately provided quality matches that were of export standard made under the firm of Ceylon Match Company and the brand name Two Elephants.

Dr. C.A. Hewavitarne on behalf of the Maha Bodhi Society administered the Industrial Centre. As those who were trained in Japan, India and at Rajagiriya began establishing more and more such weaving centres in other parts of the island, there was formed an All Ceylon Cottage-Industry Association. The message was spreading. Buddhists began engaging in non-agricultural pursuits. Shortly thereafter, the Maha Bodhi Society helped start a Government Technical College and colonized Ceylon had its first industrial exhibition. Dr. C.A. Hewavitarne of the Maha Bodhi Society became the President who organized this exhibition.

As the industrial revolution got off to a start through the efforts of the Maha Bodhi Society, the colonial governors were getting jittery. For obvious reasons they did not want a self reliant Sri Lankan nation. The Maha Bodhi Society by this time was in full thrust. Battles were being waged in Buddha Gaya and Benares; in London, the very heart of the British Empire, a branch of the Maha Bodhi Society had been opened. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist schools had come of age. And now industrial schools. "What next?" was surely in the minds of the colonial authorities.

Came the 1915 riots, and the British government in colonized Sri Lanka took the opportunity to slam the sledge-hammer on the work of the Maha Bodhi Society. They not only imposed city arrest on the Anagarika Dharmapala in Calcutta, India, and closed down the "Sihala Bauddhaya" newspaper, the organ of the Maha Bodhi Society, but also closed down the Hewavitharane Industrial Centre.

One of the centre's Directors, Edmund Hewavitarne was arrested by the Colonial powers for complicity in the riots. Charges, later proved to be trumped-up, said that Edmund Hewavitarne led a mob on a mission to destroy a shop close to H. Don Carolis & Sons Ltd., in Pettah. Was that good reason to shut the industrial centre at Rajagiriya?

The history of the riots, and the miscarriage of so-called British justice is another story by itself. Suffice it to say in the context of the industrial revolution of Sri Lanka that Edmund Hewavitarne died in a jail in Jaffna from sickness

contracted while in prison. The British governor of the day was sacked for his mishandling of the riots. His successor, Governor Sir Henry William Manning apologized on behalf of the British Empire to Mrs. Edmund Hewavitarane, and then became personal friends of the Hewavitarne family.

The Manning's visited the Hewavitarne Industrial School which was reopened some time after the riots had subsided. Following that visit, Lady Manning installed a weaving loom at Queen's House (now Janadhipathi Mandiraya); made dresses out of hand-woven material; and when they were leaving the island of Sri Lanka after their stint in office, they bid farewell to those engaged in the Hewavitarane Industrial School at the industrial exhibition at Rajagiriya.

(Source: extracts from 'They Turned the Tide' By Sinha Ratnatunga)

MAHA BODHI SOCIETY

The Maha Bodhi Society of Sri Lanka was founded One Hundred years ago in 1891, at the zenith of British Imperial rule in both India and Sri Lanka.

It was an age when the Imperial masters in sun hat and toppee believed the Sun would never set on the British Empire, and the natives believed that this was so probably because their almighty God would not trust them in the dark. It was an era when the most famous dictum that illustrated their rule from Whitehall in London was 'Britannia rules the Waves; and Waives the Rule.'

The Maha Bodhi Society, originally founded to win for the Buddhists a say in the management of the Temple at Buddha Gaya in India, then in the hands of the Hindus, went on to become, what in modern-day parlance could be called a multi-national corporation. It was indeed, the Maha Bodhi Society Incorporated with branches not only in every nook and corner of India where Buddhism once thrived thousands of years ago, but branches in almost every major city in Buddhist Asia, Europe and America.

The Maha Bodhi Society is the one organization that had more representation world-wide than any other Sri Lanka at a time when there were none; it purchased plantations and gave employment to a people who had none unless they converted to another faith; it set up Industrial Centres and sent young Buddhist youth to foreign lands on scholarships when there were none; it organized pilgrim parties to Buddhist places of worship in India when there were none; it ran a Buddhist monastic college when there were none; and it sent monks to preach a forgotten Dhamma to the four corners of the world, when none before had ventured forth. It was in the vanguard of the national liberation movement of Sri Lanka and

played a small but significant part in the freedom struggle of Burma and India. In Sri Lanka it imbibed in a people the pride of their race; their religion, their dress; their language; and their culture. It instilled in a people self-confidence by first, asking them to make scare-crows that looked like the conquerors, and hit them in order to escape from their fear psychosis towards their rulers. But never were they exhorted to mob violence. It turned the tide in these parts of the British Empire beginning a 100 years ago from fear and meekness to self-assurance and national pride.

The ruling British authorities, both feared and respected the Maha Bodhi Society. On the one hand they once banned all its activities, including the publication of its newspaper, 'The Sinhala Bauddhaya'; incarcerated its active members; and closed its schools under the tyranny of martial Law. On the other, they apologized for their wrong doings and treated the society as the "representative body of Buddhist opinion" of all Asia.

It was the Maha Bodhi Society that at one time was the sole representative of the Buddhists in the British Empire that included India, Burma and Sri Lanka. When the Burman Buddhists once asked London for a share of the sacred relics of the Buddha's two main disciples London promptly cabled back; "Ask the Maha Bodhi Society in Colombo for permission"

Kings, Princes, Presidents, Prime Ministers and Ministers in Buddhist countries felt it an obligation, if not a pleasure, to be members of this Society. Hindu India's Jawaharlal Nehru was one of its greatest admirers and supporters.

Many are the hosannas and eulogies to the man who started it all, the Anagarika Dharmapala. As a lad of just 26, fired by a burning enthusiasm and drive far beyond normal human expectations, he started this Maha Bodhi Society with the guidance of the Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thera, an erudite Sri Lankan monk in every sense, and an American theosophist, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, by then, a 100 years ago, a sensation in the island.

Together, and with others from many parts of the world, they launched a truly defiant revolutionary, non violent movement that, which at least to Sri Lanka introduced modern political agitation into the hearts and minds of an otherwise frightened people. It became a worldwide movement of the Buddhists. It galvanized the Buddhists of the world under one banner; one flag; for the first time in a thousand years. It set the stage for unity among Buddhists throughout Sri Lanka, and the world.

Today, most of these countries are free, sovereign and independent. The work of the Maha Bodhi Society has largely fallen on the shoulders of those free governments. And still, it is the branches and pilgrims rests set up by the Society in holy India that offer a night to sleep and food to eat for the Buddhist pilgrims from wherever they may come. It is these centres, dotted all over the Buddhist

parts of India that give the confidence for a pilgrim to visit the blessed land, and tread the good earth 'sanctified by the touch of the feet of Gautama the Buddha'.

(Source: Preface of the book ' They Turned the Tide' by Sinha Ratnatunga)

1915 riots

It was on my Achchi's knee that I first heard of the 1915 riots. To my young ears, it was just another of grandma's tales. The significance of those turbulent times dawned on me only later, when as a youthful law student I came across the proceedings of the Field General Court Martial of the British Raj, which probed those riots.

Achchi's husband – my grandfather – had been a teenager when his own father Edmund Hewavitarne (younger brother of the Anagarika Dharmapala) along with Namanidewage Albert Wijesekera was hauled up before the drumhead Court Martial presided over by Lt. Colonel R.L. Muspratt-Williams of the Royal Garrison Artillery and charged with treason and shop-breaking.

The normal laws had been suspended. Civilians were tried on the orders of Governor Robert Chalmers under the Army Act. Charge 1 read: "The above-named accused (Hewavitarne and Wijesekera) are charged with treason, in that they, at Colombo, on or about the 1st June, 1915, did levy war against Our Lord the King, contrary to Section 41 of the Army Act."

The riots, of course, were a reaction in Colombo to what had just happened in and around Gampola where the island's Sinhalese and Muslims had sharp disagreements over the use of loudspeakers outside mosques.

A mob of Sinhalese had broken into and looted a Muslim-owned shop, Crystal Palace down Keyzer Street in the Pettah. Hewavitarne and Wijesekera were accused of leading that mob.

The Court Martial was held the very next month. The Attorney General appeared for the British Crown. Two legal luminaries of the time, Frederick Norton and Allan Driberg led the defense team. After many witnesses were heard on both sides and within just three days of trial, the accused were found guilty of treason.

The charge of shop-breaking was dropped, and the accused sentenced to "penal servitude for life". The death of my grandfather at the age of 42, leaving my grandmother a widow at 31, was traced to the traumatic experience he would have undergone at that tender age, seeing his father incarcerated first at the Welikada Jail, later in Jaffna - and then succumb to the deadly disease of the tropics at the time, enteric fever contracted in prison. The Jaffna Prison 'hospital' was just another cell. The patient lay on a mat, on the floor, with no attention and

no suitable treatment. When recovery was hopeless and only then, was the patient transferred to the civil hospital in Jaffna.

Five days before his death, his brother Dr. C.A. Hewavitarne was permitted after having to petition the Colonial Secretary, to attend to his dying brother. But it was too late.

Edmund Hewavitarne died on November 19, 1915, five months after he was sentenced by an army officer to a life of "rigorous imprisonment".

A large gathering honoured a patriot, not a traitor, at his funeral. A 13-page petition of appeal by his widow Sujata Hewavitarne together with petitions and affidavits by leading Buddhist monks and lay persons from different communities, and by Mallika Hewavitarne (mother of Edmund and the Anagarika) was sent to London addressed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Andrew Bonar Law asking that Edmund Hewavitarne's name be cleared. The petitions were upheld. Sir Robert Chalmers KCB the Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Island of Ceylon was recalled to Britain for his mishandling of the riots.

The new Governor, Sir Henry William Manning apologized on behalf of the British Empire to Mrs. Edmund Hewavitarne for the miscarriage of British justice. He and Lady Manning became personal friends of the Hewavitarne family.