

# **OLCOTT ORATION THE IDEAL OF ANANDA**

BY SANJIVA SENANAYAKE  
22<sup>ND</sup> NOVEMBER, 2014

Venerable Sirs, the Principal of Ananda College, Mr. Kithsiri Liyanagamage, members of the staff, the President and members of the OBA, fellow Anandians, Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to thank the OBA and the College for honouring me with an invitation to deliver the Olcott oration. This is a special year. The oldest building still standing on this site, Olcott Hall, is exactly 100 years old as I speak and as soon as the current dearth of classroom space is overcome, the OBA plans to refurbish it to its former glory. We look forward to your support.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my connections with Ananda College also go back almost a century. My grandfather was Principal for 25 years starting on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918. My mother, my brothers and I were students here. So were many of my relatives.

But, despite all this, I have to confess that until a few years ago I was relatively ignorant about the “Ideal of Ananda”. What was the vision our founders had in mind when Ananda was established ? What sort of men were they ? What were the challenges they faced ? How did they succeed against immense odds ?

Almost all my school teachers and Principals were either Anandians or absolutely devoted to what Ananda stood for. They were the stalwarts who made my education at Ananda very special. They were humble and did not wish to boast. And we were probably too full of ourselves that we didn’t ask. That is something I really regret. I suppose to appreciate history, it helps to have a history of one’s own.

In researching the history of the College I learnt a lot about Ananda, about the profound influence it had on the history of our country, about the heroic individuals who made it all happen .... and about myself too. One thing is clear. Ananda was never destined to be a mere school. Its roots and its history, the vision and sacrifices of its founders and the striving of subsequent generations of teachers, benefactors and students destined it to be a pivotal national institution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An illustrious alumnus and acclaimed journalist Tarzie Vittachi described it perfectly in an article to the centenary magazine of the College - he called Ananda a ‘Crucible of Change’.

To appreciate this great institution, it is important to understand the environment in which our founders worked their wonders. Therefore, I will first speak about the events that led up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the seeds of Ananda College was planted in Pettah in the year 1886. The original school was called the Buddhist English School.

Religious persecution of non-Christians (Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims) was systematically conducted by the Portuguese mainly from the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century who, though less brutal, continued the persecution of non-Christians - as a matter of policy - through administrative and legal means.

Incidentally, the Portuguese Catholics who were relentlessly persecuted by the Dutch were given refuge in the hinterland by Buddhist kings, despite all the inhuman cruelty that the people had endured. That act of forgiveness and hospitality enabled Father Joseph Vaz, known as the Apostle of Ceylon to secretly enter Ceylon from Goa and revive a dying Catholicism. He is due to be canonized by Pope Francis in January in recognition of his 24 years of work in Ceylon until his death in Kandy in 1711.

After much intrigue the British occupied Kandy in 1815 bringing the whole country under their rule. Although the British gave a clear, written undertaking to protect and nurture Buddhism in the Kandyan Convention signed that year, it was really a cynical lie. The Uva-Wellessa Uprising of 1818, and the infamous massacres and scorched earth policy followed by Governor Brownrigg to quell it, made the intentions of the new rulers quite clear.

Here I would like to quote a passage from the report of the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry of 1956 that explains the thinking behind the British colonial policy. It is a quotation by Lord Acton, Regius Professor of History at the University of Cambridge, in relation to colonial India -

“We have to accomplish a change both in the State and in society to supersede the traditional government and the traditional civilisation. Indian culture, though it was developed, by the same Aryan race to which our own civilization is indebted, has been arrested in its progress. Its law has been identified with its religion and, therefore, religion has tied down the people to the social usages and opinions which were current when the laws were first reduced to a code. The religion and manners of the Orientals mutually support one another; neither can be changed without the other. Hence the pioneer of civilisation has to get rid of the religion of India, to enable him to introduce a better culture, and the pioneer of Christianity has to get rid of the Indian culture before he can establish his religion. Thus the future progress both of Christianity and of civilisation demands that the Oriental career of England should not stop short at the point of contact with Eastern kingdoms and governments but should go on to deal with Eastern society.”

Lord Acton goes on to say that this change in society was being accomplished not by violent suppression but by “choking out of all life” of the local institutions by apparently harmless laws and unseen administrative changes. This duty that Acton speaks of was accomplished with greater success in Ceylon than in India.

As a matter of interest, it is the same Lord Acton who said “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Of course, he also wrote “There is no error so monstrous that it fails to find defenders among the ablest men.”

The broad strategy was straightforward – destroy the local religions to create brown Englishmen and destroy the local culture in order to implant Christianity. It was a package-deal.

During the early 1800s the evangelical Christian movement was politically powerful in Britain and missionary activity was actively encouraged from London. The first to arrive in Ceylon were the Baptists in 1812 followed closely by American missionaries from Boston

(1813) and the Wesleyans (1814). Anglicans from the Church Missionary Society came in 1818. They fanned out with assistance from the government and started opening schools, primarily as a means of gathering converts to Christianity. The Americans concentrated their efforts in the north centred on Jaffna.

The government openly funded building and repairing of churches and regular missionary activities, aided production of Christian literature in the local languages and provided grants to Christian educationists. The entire cost of building Anglican churches was met by the government up to 1845, when protests from other Christian groups led to partial financing being given to them. In 1831, government expenditure on the Ecclesiastical Department was three times the expenditure on the entire government school system; and the focus of the government schools was also the dissemination of Christianity.

Ironically, State-funded education only began in England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Apparently, it was considered that wider education opportunities would affect the availability of industrial workers.

Economic, legal and administrative measures were also systematically used to undermine the social structures of non-Christians. For instance, only Christian marriages were recognized as legally valid thus coercing people to convert so they could leave their property to their children. Rev Twisleton, the Archdeacon of the Anglican Church, wrote in 1810 –

“According to the Dutch law as it existed and still exists here, no Sinhalese whatsoever can claim inheritance in a court of Justice with success, unless the parents had been married according to the Christian mode. If the parents were married according to what is called the Sinhalese, he is in the eye of the law a bastard.”

There is certainly no ambiguity there. The Anglican Church had a monopoly on registering marriages until 1847, after which other Christian churches were permitted to do so.

The sweeping Colebrooke-Cameron reform proposals of 1832 perversely helped the Buddhist cause too. Strangely enough, it was as mundane a matter as persistent government budget deficits that caused London to send to Ceylon Messrs Colebrooke (who handled administrative and economic issues) and Cameron (who worked on legal matters). I will just mention a few reforms that are relevant to today's topic.

The absolute power of the Governor was reduced and certain government trade monopolies were eliminated. The civil service was opened up to Ceylonese - a move more liberal than in any other European colony - even though it was only to the lower levels and mainly to cut down government expenditure. To achieve this, Colebrooke proposed standardisation and expansion of English education - but not for the masses on the periphery.

Although Colebrooke said that “the education afforded by the native priests in their temples and colleges scarcely merits any notice”, he ignored the demands of the missionaries to keep the government out of education. He also rejected the contrary view of Governor Barnes who said that the school system “has got too much into the hands of the clergy. It has been considered more as an instrument of conversion of the people to Christianity than of general improvement in civilization.”

The judicial system was overhauled and officially all were granted equal rights in the eyes of the law under the Charter of Justice of 1833. The feudal *raja-kariya* system of service in exchange for land tenure, which obliged dependents to provide free labour to those who had power over them, was abolished. Even the British had up to then exploited this practice and forced villagers to provide much more than the traditional quota of free labour for their infrastructure projects. The cost per mile of road shot up and affected the pace of road building thereafter.

The reforms devalued the Sinhala language but they also broke down some of the barriers of caste and traditional servitude, improved social mobility and provided openings for previously excluded locals to enter the power structure. They also inadvertently opened up opportunities for some Ceylonese to become wealthy enough to support and sustain the subsequent Buddhist revival later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the reforms led to the creation of an educated, Westernized group, some of whom would spearhead the drive for modernization and independence in the twentieth century. A silent revolution had been set in motion and this is why the respected historian G.C. Mendis called the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms “the dividing line between the Past and the Present”.

A Central School Commission set up in 1841, was empowered to provide grants-in-aid to private schools but in practice no grants were given to non-Christian institutions until 1870. Grants were crucial for the much poorer non-Christian groups, and the injustice was commented on later in an education commission report : “There is something anomalous in a system under which funds raised by taxation are used to support a movement for changing the religion of those taxed.”

Then there were the “distance rules”. In 1874, the so-called ‘Three-mile rule’ was introduced decreeing that “No grant will be made to any school establishment ....within a distance of three miles from an existing Government or Aided-school of the same class, save in exceptional circumstances”. The missionaries, especially the Protestants, had of course already established schools in all the population centres using government patronage and even the Catholics protested about the rules. The rules were outwardly loosened but administratively tightened over time and were still in force in 1886.

In the meantime, vast areas of the hinterland were being expropriated and opened up for coffee plantations. The Colebrooke-Cameron reforms had reduced costs by cutting back on compensation and perks of civil servants and many of them went into the coffee business on the side. Even Governor Barnes had his own Gannoruwa estate, which is now part of the Peradeniya Gardens. Conflicts of interest ensured that the plantation business was afforded many privileges.

But there was a silver lining in all this plunder and injustice. Hitherto suppressed individuals, many based in coastal areas, benefitted and created a new middle class, as opposed to the traditional land-owning class. Transport and labour contracts, supplying the needs of plantations, general commerce, retailing arrack and later on graphite mining, owning estates and urban real estate were all roads to riches for entrepreneurs. Some of the wealthy Buddhist businessmen from this group stepped up to support and sustain the Buddhist revival which arose from the south of the country.

I now turn briefly to the state of Buddhism. For a period of almost 200 years (try to imagine ten generations) from the time the Portuguese pogroms started in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century,

Buddhism was in decline in the absence of royal patronage, with rulers being pre-occupied with survival. In the coastal areas under Portuguese control Buddhism virtually disappeared. Many monks in the hinterland misused temple lands treating them as personal property and became part-time businessmen. Monastic discipline deteriorated and the requirements for conducting *upasampada* (higher ordination) could not be met due to the absence of pious monks of sufficient seniority in sufficient numbers.

Finally in 1753, King Kirti Sri Rajasinghe helped Ven. Velivita Saranankara, later known as Sangharaja, to bring down senior monks from Thailand to establish the Siyam Nikaya in Kandy. However, less than ten years later it was decreed that only those of the Govigama caste could receive *upasampada* and only from the monasteries at Malwatte and Asgiriya in Kandy, despite the Buddha having explicitly rejected caste in his lifetime.

To re-establishing Buddhism in the coastal regions, where the majority were non-Govigama, Ven Welitota Gnanavimala Tissa and five monks set sail in 1799 from Galle to Burma to receive higher ordination. They returned in time to conduct an *upasampada* without any caste restrictions on Vesak day 1803 thereby establishing the Amarapura Nikaya.

A monastic lineage was thus established for the first time through the collective efforts of laymen independent of royal patronage. As the wealth and power of these patrons grew during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so did the influence of the southern Buddhist sects. In general, the southern temples of all sects were much more intellectually dynamic than their larger, better endowed Kandyan counterparts. They even managed to re-convert many of those who had become Christians. It was the Buddhist monks of the south and west, irrespective of monastic sect who powered the Buddhist revival.

Despite the years of bitter experience with earlier Christian missionaries Buddhist monks initially had cordial relations with the British missionaries, which the latter found puzzling. Daniel John Gogerly, a well-known Methodist missionary and student of Buddhism and Pali wrote:

“Until Christianity assumed a decidedly opposing position, even the priests looked upon that religion with respect, and upon its founder with reverence.”

The monks would provide access to their libraries to missionaries, make temple halls available for missionaries to preach and even offer them accommodation for the night when travelling. Two scholarly monks helped the Colombo Auxiliary Bible Society in 1812 to translate the Bible into Sinhala.

However, as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed and the missionaries felt better established they seem to have concluded that the Buddhist monks were passive and weak, and that they were in reality quite alienated from the lay population.

Incidentally, the three individuals most identified with the movement that led to the formation of Ananda were born within ten years of each other. Ven Mohottiwatte (aka Migettuwatte) Gunananda of the Amarapura Nikaya was born in 1823; Ven Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala of the Siyam Nikaya in 1827 and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott in 1832.

Towards the middle of the century several Buddhist temples were established in Colombo, which had surprisingly poor coverage up to the 1830s. The Jayasekararamaya (Kuppiyawatte

temple) and Gangaramaya in Hunupitiya are examples. In 1844, Ven Gunananda took up residence at the Deepaduttaramaya in Kotahena and revitalized its activities. Olcott later said of him –

“Some of the more meditative monks habitually drop their eyes when conversing with one, but he looked you square in the face, as befitted the most brilliant polemic orator of the Island, the terror of the Missionaries. One could see at a glance that he was more wrangler than ascetic .....”

Initially a propaganda war emerged with increasingly antagonistic speeches, pamphlets and papers being published. Venerable Gunananda was at the forefront during this phase and is rightly recognized as a pioneer. In 1862, he started a ‘Society for the Propagation of Buddhism’ to publish Buddhist material. Funnily enough, he used an old printing press that had been sold by the Anglicans of Kotte to an ex-employee. Ven. Sri Sumangala authored many of the articles. Things gradually came to a head and led to the famous face-to-face debate at Panadura, which took place at Panadura on 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> August 1873. By all accounts, the then 50 year old Ven Gunananda who spoke for the Buddhists was an inspiring orator.

The substance of the debate and who won can be debated but what is important is that it created quite a stir and a totally unexpected resonance in far-off America. A local booklet about the debate was picked up by an American who, quite by chance, happened to be visiting Ceylon around that time. On his return to America, he re-published the booklet and gave a copy to Colonel Olcott, who had by then co-founded the Theosophical Society with Madam Helena Blavatsky. Olcott was impressed and started a long correspondence with several prominent Buddhist monks in Ceylon, during which he learned more about the state of Buddhism in Ceylon, and decided to come over and help.

Olcott and Blavatsky arrived in Galle in May 1880. In his diary Olcott says–

“..... this visit of ours was the beginning of the second and permanent stage of the Buddhist revival begun by Megittuwatte, **a movement destined to gather the whole juvenile Sinhalese population into Buddhist schools under our general supervision ...**”

The establishment of schools teaching a modern curriculum in English had clearly been agreed prior to Olcott’s arrival. Mainly for this purpose, the Buddhist Theosophical Society (BTS) was established the following month. Among other goals were establishing ‘a centre for the strengthening of Universal Brotherhood without distinction of race, religion, sex, caste or colour’ and ‘to encourage the study of comparative religions, philosophy and science’. I am sorry to say that the BTS today bears no resemblance whatsoever to its noble origins.

A few words now about the great man we commemorate today, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, and his catalytic role in the entire movement.

Col Olcott was an accomplished agriculturist who took part in the American Civil War and soon thereafter he was appointed as one of three men on the commission to investigate the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in 1865. He then qualified and practised as a lawyer in New York City. He had an interest in metaphysics and the supernatural and during an

investigation met Madam Helena Blavatsky with whom he founded in 1875 the Theosophical Society, which has as its motto - “There is no religion higher than Truth”.

In the oppressive climate that existed in Ceylon following 3 ½ centuries (i.e. about 18 generations) of subjugation and oppression, especially in the coastal areas, most natives had lost their self-esteem. Olcott, with his energy, commitment and optimism represented fresh hope. Quite apart from the rarity of being a ‘white man’ on the side of Buddhism, he brought to the revival movement qualities that were lacking. He was an exceptionally action-oriented man with the organizational skills and persistence needed to achieve results. His legal background and his oratorical and negotiating skills were key factors. He took great care to consult and work closely with the prominent Buddhist figures of the time, especially Ven. Sri Sumangala and Ven. Gunananda, and supplement their efforts rather than project his image as a ‘white saviour’.

As for strategy, let me quote Olcott once again –

“If you ask how we should organise our forces, I point you to our great enemy, Christianity, and bid you look at their large and wealthy Bible, Tract, Sunday-school, and Missionary Societies - the tremendous agencies they support to keep alive and spread their religion. We must form similar Societies, and make our most practical and honest men of business their managers. Nothing can be done without money. The Christians spend millions to destroy Buddhism; we must spend to defend and propagate it. We must not wait for some few rich men to give the capital: we must call upon the whole nation.”

True to his word, he came back in 1881 to raise money for Buddhist education and take the message to the people. He embarked on tedious tours of the Western province by bullock cart on primitive roads that lasted many months, accompanied only by an interpreter. This is something no native had done before.

During these trips, he realized that many of the lay Buddhists did not have a good grasp of the basic teachings of the Buddha and had no access to books. In keeping with the broad strategy, he wrote a Buddhist Catechism in his spare time on the lines of the elementary hand-books used by Christian missionaries.

He felt that this summary of the Buddha’s teachings in the form of a series of questions and answers could also be used in schools. Having got it translated into Sinhala, he spent many hours in discussion with Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala and his star pupil Ven. Heiyanthuduwe Devamittha to get their stamp of approval and published it the same year - 1881. There has been criticism of the Buddhist Catechism in some circles blaming Olcott for introducing a so-called ‘Protestant Buddhism’ as opposed to ‘Traditional Buddhism’, but we should remember that Ven Sri Sumangala, one of the foremost Buddhist intellectuals of the day, was a co-author and ordered 100 copies for the use of his students. The booklet eventually went into more than forty editions and was translated into over twenty languages.

On numerous occasions Colonel Olcott was nominated by the Buddhist leadership to negotiate with the British on their behalf, something at which he became very successful. His level of acceptance and trust can be gauged by the fact that as early as 1884, on the eve of a visit to England on behalf of the Buddhists, the high priests of the Siyam Nikaya and the Amarapura Nikaya, who did not always cooperate, united in giving him full powers to

administer Pansil and admit laymen into the ranks of Buddhism. He was interested in uniting all Buddhist groups in Asia and visited Myanmar and Japan twice - in 1889 and 1891 – the first trip with Anagarika Dharmapala.

Olcott committed himself to the cause of Buddhism, and Buddhist education in Sri Lanka in particular, for 27 years, until his death on 17th February 1907 – i.e. from the age of 48 to 75 years. He made around 30 visits to Ceylon, his last being 3 months before his death. He was the one constant factor from the Theosophical Society as far as Ceylon was concerned and was instrumental in obtaining the resources and services of the Society for the benefit of the Buddhists. We can only speculate as to how the Buddhist revival would have fared if not for this great servant of Buddhism.

Initially, the BTS set up Sunday schools given the limited resources available - the first in Galle and several others in various parts of Colombo. A few rich businessmen came forward to support the new movement and in May 1885 the BTS bought Nos. 60 and 61, Maliban Street as well as 29 and 30, Beira Street (now Olcott Mawatha) for Rs. 6,000! At that time, the Beira Lake extended up to where the Fort railway station stands today.

With these acquisitions it was decided to establish a full-time school and a meeting was called on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1886 for Ven Sri Sumangala and Gunananda to speak about setting up such a school at 61, Maliban Street, Pettah with Charles Leadbeater, an English theosophist, as Principal.



Notice about the meeting published in the “Sarasavisandaresa” on 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct, 1886

Probably to encourage people to attend, the notice stated that ‘No collection will be made on this occasion’

“ME PRASTHAAVEDI KISIMA SAMMAADAMAK KARANU NOLABE”

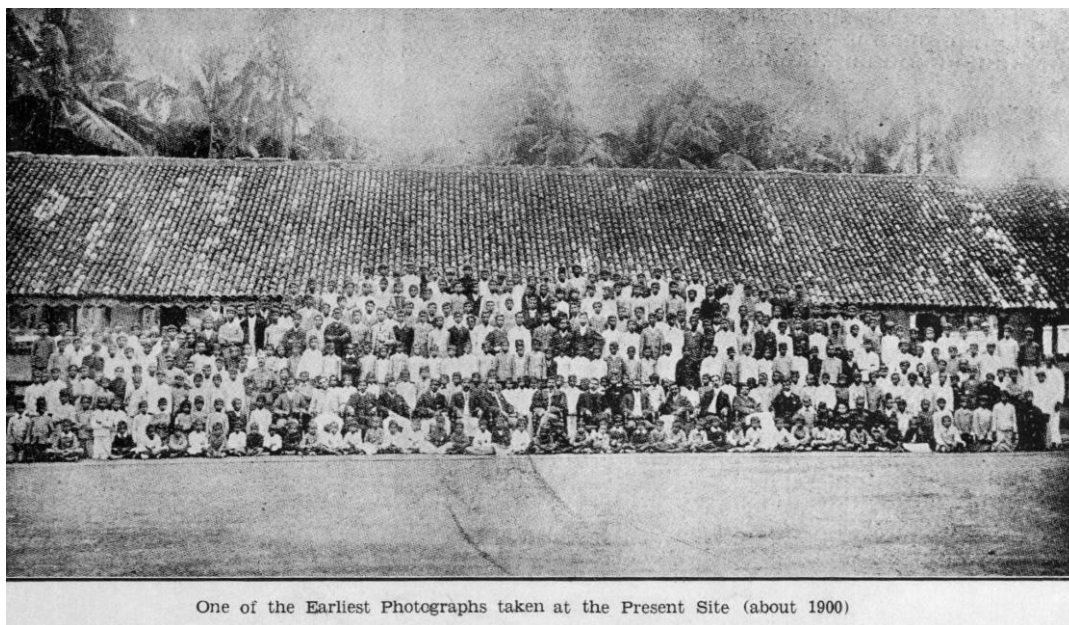


The Buddhist English School was established with 37 students and 3 teachers on 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1886, which is the official birthday of Ananda College. But, ironically, Olcott was not in the country having returned to India after making another fund raising cart-tour accompanied by Leadbeater, with Anagarika Dharmapala as interpreter.

The initial intention of the Buddhist leadership was to create a generation of young Buddhists with patriotic sentiments and modern skills to play a bigger role in national affairs. The more fundamental goal was to redeem the self-esteem of the majority and help them stand up for their rights that had been long denied. Failure in the attempt would make the situation worse. But where would they find the money and the teachers? How could they convince people, including Buddhists, to entrust their children to very basic schools when it was much safer to enrol them in established Christian schools with far superior facilities?

In late 1890 the Buddhist English School became eligible for grants from the government but these were insufficient to meet all the expenses of maintaining the school. The founders identified the need for educated women to be potential partners for the growing number of English educated Buddhist youth. Recognizing also that the mother is the first teacher, Sanghamitta Girls' School was started in Maradana in October 1890. In addition to Olcott and Buultjens, Ponnambalam Ramanathan also spoke at the inauguration.

In 1894 the BTS leased 4 acres of mainly coconut land in Maradana and the school with 300 pupils was moved there from Pettah in August 1895. The name was changed to Ananda College and a new chapter began. The land was later purchased using a loan granted by the Theosophical Society.



**The first building constructed at the present Maradana site**

With room to grow unhindered by the 'distance rules', educational achievements improved. The quality of the premises and teaching resulted in higher government grants being awarded. Some Indian and British teachers were also employed.

In the meantime, the BTS was active setting up smaller schools in other population centres and by 1898 grants had grown to Rs 27,430 for 99 schools from a mere Rs 84 for 7 schools ten years earlier. However, The BTS was running at a loss and heavily in debt. Although the stranglehold of Christian missionaries gradually declined in the 1890s, they were dominant even in 1900 controlling over 80% of the grant-aided schools and student numbers.

From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new crop of Buddhist leaders, mostly educated in missionary schools and abroad, gradually got more actively involved in national issues. Ananda College naturally became a centre of their activity. One of the biggest meetings of the temperance movement was held at Ananda College. This was a controversial issue since government revenue relied quite heavily on licensing income. The involvement of almost all the Buddhist leaders in the movement was considered suspicious and subversive by the government.

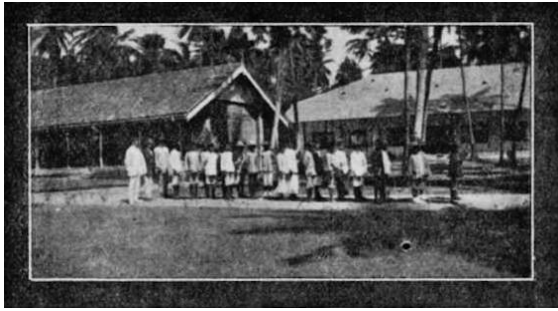
The so-called Sinhala-Muslim riots broke out in Kandy in May 1915, while World War I was raging in Europe. The unexpected aftermath was a surge of patriotic sentiment that thrust Ananda College too into a more prominent role.

Governor Chalmers, egged on by his armed forces, imagined a national rebellion fomented by the same people involved in the temperance movement and went overboard. Martial Law was declared for 100 days and virtually all the Buddhist leaders, including D.S. Senanayake, were imprisoned. Some were sentenced to death without any evidence and later reprieved. Henry Pedris, son of a senior BTS member was summarily executed. Anagarika Dharmapala, who was in India was placed under house arrest there and not allowed to return until 1920. His brother Edmund Hewavitarane died in prison.

With Buddhist leaders in jail, prominent Christians such as E.W Perera, James Peiris and Dr. Marcus Fernando and Hindus such as Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, rose to the defence. London was petitioned and Chalmers recalled and replaced in December the same year. The whole sordid episode served to cement solidarity among the different national groups and accelerated the agitation for independence. The Ceylon National Congress was formed in 1919.

The perception the government had of Ananda College can be judged by the fact that the grant-in-aid was suspended and the College magazine was subject to censorship by the Director of Education until February, 1916 – six months after Martial Law ended!

During the 30 years leading up to 1917 Ananda had excellent Principals such as A.E. Buultjens, from a respected burgher family in Matara. He had won the coveted government scholarship from St. Thomas' College and gone on to graduate from St John's College, Cambridge University. He was followed by D. B. Jayatilaka who became one of the most prominent and respected national figures of his time. An American Theosophist named Fritz Kunz became Principal in April 1914 and reorganized and revitalized Ananda. In his very first year he constructed the Olcott Hall which became the venue for many meetings of national significance. In 1916, after the riots, Kunz added a state-of-the-art science laboratory with a generous donation from Mrs. Selestina Dias of Panadura, the founder of Visakha Vidyalaya. It had electricity and piped gas and incorporated an elevated demonstration theatre that could accommodate 100 people. It was also "equipped with a modern projecting lantern" and a hand-operated lift to move supplies to the upper floor. Impressive for 1916 !

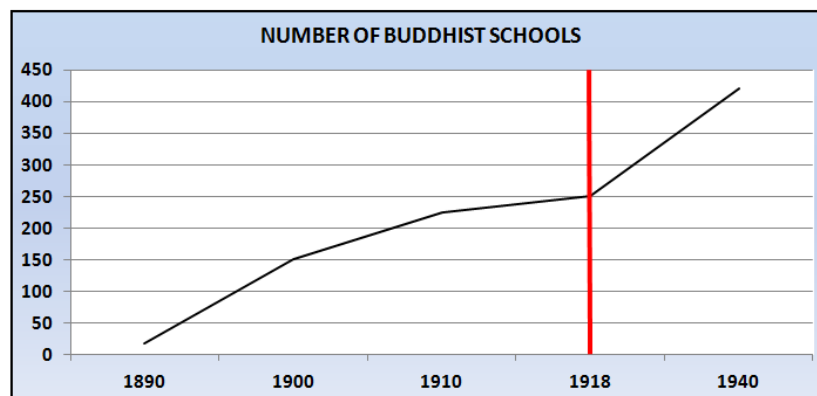
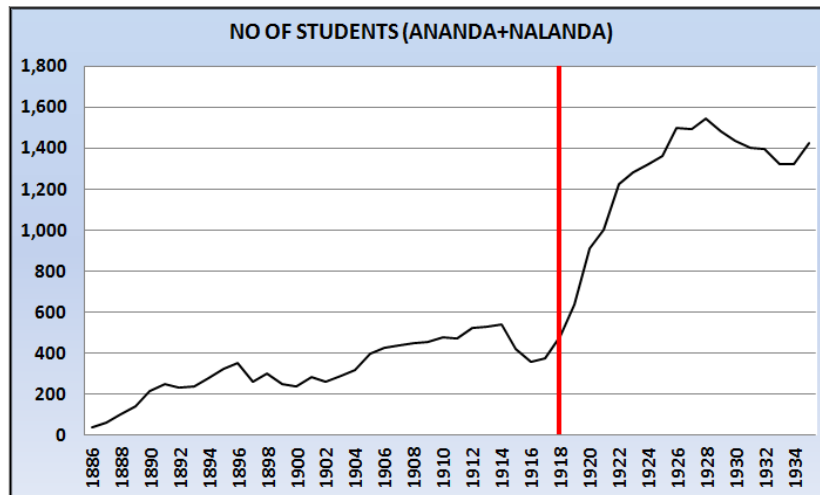


**Scenes of Ananda College in 1915**

However, the student population in 1917 was still only 400. The school had levied fees from the beginning and received government grants but adequate funding had been a perennial problem. Also, the supply of educated Ceylonese willing to become teachers at a relatively small school like Ananda was limited. More importantly, many Buddhists were quite obviously reluctant to entrust their children to Ananda, preferring established missionary schools.

The country was now in ferment with talk of independence in the air. The politically astute Dr. W.A. de Silva, manager of the College, sensed that Ananda needed a grander vision if it was to make a real contribution by producing enough leaders. In his own words he “decided to take a new and bold step to make the College take its place with other Secondary Schools, to give it a new life and vigour.” The bold step that he took was to appoint 24 year old P. De S. Kularatne, who was just finishing his studies at the University of London as Principal on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918. There was great synergy between the pragmatic De Silva and the imaginative Kularatne and Ananda’s fortunes soared.

Of course, I am now talking about my grandfather so let me show you some numbers to convince you that I am not being overly generous.



Kularatne's vision for Ananda was not merely to cope with externally imposed circumstances, but to actively influence them for the benefit of the masses. In that sense, Ananda was now to be not just a school, but an engine of change and a nursery of competent men who could empathize with the masses. Ananda would have to grow significantly and have a social and cultural dimension. It would also have to become a role model for similar institutions throughout the country. His student Tarzie Vittachi summed up –

“Ananda, for him, was a proving ground for his vision of a free Lanka, a united, mentally and physically educated country whose way of life would be modulated by the broadmindedness of the Buddha and inspired by his rejection of superstition as an explanation of reality. His horizons were far beyond Maradana Road and Kuppiyawatta.”

For all this Ananda needed money, infrastructure and teachers – and there was no time to waste. Kularatne realized that underlying all this was the need to attract students and the key to that was excellent academic results.

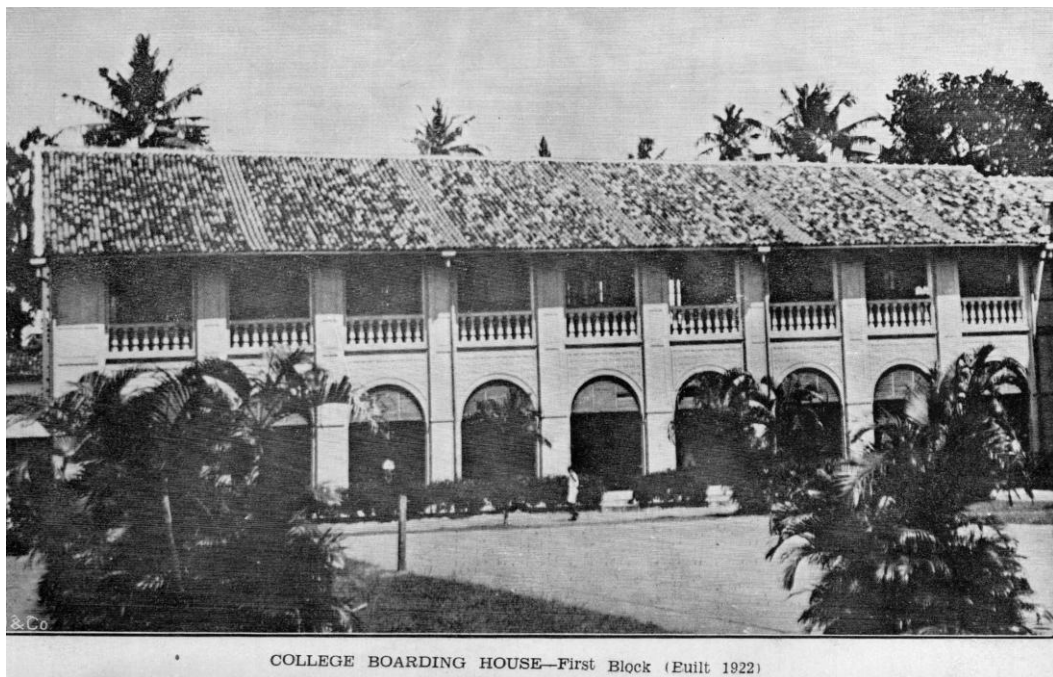
At the end of his first year he convinced his teachers to contribute a portion of their salaries to create a scholarship. W.A de Silva matched it with his own funds and two students were selected through an open examination. They both gained first class honours in the Cambridge Junior examination in 1919. 45 students passed as against 18 the previous year. As results improved at senior level too, Buddhists took notice and Ananda was able to charge more reasonable fees from the eager parents.

Kularatne was given full control over College finances by the indebted BTS and a free hand to plan Ananda's future. I shall try to quickly give you a flavour of how Ananda evolved in the brief time I have left.

The first seven years of the Kularatne era saw a building boom. The covered floor area tripled to about 60,000 sq. feet. This included two hostel buildings for boys from rural areas and structures at Nalanda College where the overflow from Ananda had been housed from 1923 onward. Finding money was always a struggle and Kularatne once called himself "the best beggar in the country".



**Ananda in 1920**



**Hostel – Stage 1 (Built 1922)**



**Hostel – Stage 2 (Built 1923)**

Despite objections from conservatives, English classes for Buddhist monks commenced in 1919 and they in turn taught Pali and Sanskrit to the students. Kularatne and G.P. Malalasekera were instrumental in getting Pali included in 1922 as a subject for the Cambridge examinations.



**English language classes for Buddhist monks - 1919**

Sinhala and Tamil language classes were made part of the curriculum since the College had a significant number of Tamil teachers and several Tamil students, some on scholarships. In 1922 the Tamil students staged their first play in aid of the Tamil section of the library under the patronage of Sir Ponnambalam and Lady Ramanathan.

Subjects like Ceylon History, Pali and Sanskrit were introduced. Workshop technology and handicrafts were options and social service through the *Ananda Paropakara Samitiya* was actively encouraged. A College Council consisting of teachers and senior students was tasked with managing some aspects of school life as an experiment in self-rule. Senior Prefects were considered to be as important as teachers.

Ananda had some excellent, experienced teachers on the staff in 1918 such as V.T.S Sivagurunathan, C.V. Ranawake, J.N Jinendradasa (later Principal of Nalanda) and T.B Jayah (later the saviour of Zahira College, Colombo as Principal for 27 years). The rapidly expanding needs were filled with the best scholars Kularatne could find - Sinhalese, Tamils, Burghers, Indians and Europeans and of all religions. In fact, the majority of them were initially non-Buddhist. They were encouraged to write school textbooks to suit local needs and these were used in government and Buddhist schools. Kularatne himself wrote several on mathematics.

Several British Governors attended functions at Ananda and most were extremely helpful. Senior bureaucrats and even Principals of Christian schools participated. Part of Kularatne's approach to overcoming obstacles was not to retaliate in kind, but to produce excellent performances and win the admiration of the more progressive elements among the opposition.

Ananda was always a haven for progressive national activities. The Ceylon National Congress held meetings at Olcott Hall and the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress held its inaugural meeting there in 1919. National figures of various persuasions made public speeches at Ananda and so did charismatic figures of the Indian independence movement such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sarojini Naidu.

N.M. Perera, who moved from St. Thomas' College to Ananda in 1922 had this to say –

“Herein lay the great divide. Missionary education was both apolitical and anti-national, not specifically, but insidiously so. An institution like Ananda had a different tone and a different atmosphere. At Ananda, one felt the impact of everything that was happening in the country, to the people of the country. At an institution like St. Thomas' one felt aloof and immune from the hurly burly of everyday life. I believe this was typical of most missionary schools that functioned during this time.

In this new atmosphere charged with nationalist feelings, the more serious side of my character was being stirred. Ananda was slowly remoulding me. Every discussion, every controversy was stirring something latent in my consciousness.”

The teachers who had worked with Kularatne and became Principals later, like L.H. Mettananda, S.A. Wijayatilake, E.A. Perusinghe, M.W. Karunananda and G.W. Rajapaksa continued to preserve the progressive character of Ananda and enhance its image and impact.



Now Ladies and Gentlemen, before I conclude, I would like to place before you three points of view expressed by our predecessors for our collective consideration.

The first is from the famous Buddhist Commission report published in that critical year 1956. Four of the members, P. de S. Kularatne, G.P. Malalasekera, L.H. Mettananda and Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya, had direct Ananda College connections. In a section titled 'Tolerance' it states –

“But we wish to state with all the authority at our command that this struggle which the Buddhists must make is NOT a struggle to obtain a favoured position at the expense of other religious groups, however much we may have suffered at their hands in former times. We ask no favours and we expect none. But we do ask for and expect the right to a decent education for our children, the right to save our country from becoming an Eastern outpost of the Vatican, the right to be allowed to profess and practise our religion without let or hindrance, material or spiritual, secular or religious in a free and democratic Ceylon.”

The second is from P. De S. Kularatne writing in Ananda's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary magazine in 1966 – almost 50 years ago. He argues for State support of schools rather than depending on charity, purely on practical grounds. He asks, “Should our children have to study in poorly equipped schools because we are not good beggars?” And then he goes on to say –

“I must say however that a system of state schools unless they are well organised will not serve our purpose. Important schools like Ananda should be removed from the direct control of the Ministry of Education, and should be handed over to an Advisory Board of Governors representative of the old pupils, the parents, the public and the Ministry of Education. The Principal should be made solely responsible for the internal administration of the School.”

And finally a plea expressed by V.T. S. Sivagurunathan, a product of Jaffna Hindu College and a teacher and Headmaster at Ananda for 25 years. He was invited to be the Chief Guest at the Ananda College prize-giving by Principal S.A. Wijayatilake in April 1958, just the month before the racial riots of that year. This is what he said –

“And finally may I remind you all, that you are one and all the proud inheritors of a sacred trust, and it is for you and me, a past servant of hers, to see that Ananda does not become a lifeless State school, is not satisfied with being merely a Sinhalese Buddhist School, but grows into a greater and greater Ananda, so that it may ..... continue to be the hub of all national education activities, the hub of the commonwealth of the Ceylonese people, of Lanka.”

Let us all reflect on what we were, what we are and what we should become.

Thank you