

THE GROWTH OF LIBRARIES IN SRI LANKA DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The establishment of public Libraries in Sri Lanka in the modern sense is a result of western influence. Free voluntary subscription libraries as of the present cannot be traced to an era beyond the early nineteenth century, though ample evidence is available as regards the availability of reference library facilities in Buddhist temples from the very early times.

The basic function of a library is the collection and preservation of reading material and making them available for the benefit of the reading public. In the earliest times there was no distinction between a record room or an archive (both in the modern sense) and a library as such and in this sense it may be said that the preservation of written records marked the origin of the earliest libraries.¹ Thus, the stores of the Sumerian Cuneiform of the temples of Nippur of the 3rd millennium B.C. can be identified as the earliest libraries. The idea of book collecting, however, had its origin in the Greek temples. The Academies of Plato and the Epicureans of Athens in the 4th century B.C. possessed such libraries whose influence lasted for many centuries, while the more famous library of Aristotle founded systematically for scientific research formed the model for the advanced library of Alexandria housed in the temple of the MUSES called MOUSEION. It was intended to collect the whole body of the Greek literature and was staffed by many famous Greek writers and scholars who arranged the papyrus and vellum scrolls systematically.

The first ever public library planned to be established was by Julius Ceasar, who entrusted the task to scholar Marcus Terentius Varro. It was built only after five years of his death. Thus the concept of libraries meant for general reading and research was a product of the Western classical world.

Monastic Reference Libraries in Sri Lanka

Since the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks were the principal custodians of educational activities. Elementary education was provided at the village temples while an advanced education was provided at the better equipped monastic complexes, some of them named Parivenas.² Almost every Buddhist Monastery had a Library which was regarded as its

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica Micropaedia 15th edition, Vol. 10 p. 856.

2. Parivena in Pali means a living quarter of the Buddhist priests. But during later stage the word Parivena was used to denote a monastic college. In present day usage Parivena or Pirivena means a higher Buddhist educational centre.

'*Sine qua non*'.³ Many famous libraries had emerged in and around Anuradhapura and Magama either attached to the Mahavihara or the Abhayagiri fraternity. Amidst ravages caused by sectarian rivalry, invasions warfare the monks managed to maintain only a part of this inheritance at the risk of their lives.

Before printing was introduced to Sri Lanka,⁴ duplication of books remained a laborious task and was expensive and beyond the means of all but a few influential and wealthy people. However, Buddhist monks the custodians of the sacred literature and of the education, spared no pains in editing and copying manuscripts. A scriptorium was, often a part of a Vihara where a congregation of learned monks were engaged in teaching and research pursuits.

Books were written on Ola leaf with an iron stylus. The olas were carefully prepared from the young leaf buds of the talipot palm, cut before they opened out. They were boiled under moderate temperature and laid out in the shade to dry. Leaves thus processed were smoothed and cut to size and punched so that a cord could run through them. Two decorated wooden strips formed the covers.⁵ The numbering of pages was by means of letters of the alphabet. The first page of a manuscript was often blank, and the second page had broad margins at both ends, but the subsequent pages had thinner uniform margins. Three different sizes of letters were in use, although pages of a particular manuscript was written by letters of uniform size.⁶ There were not many illustrations and diagrams, as it was difficult to draw them with the stylus against the grain of the Ola and they were often limited to works on medicine, astrology and fine arts.

Owing to the scarcity of books and the labour spent in writing, books were zealously preserved. These manuscripts were coated with resin oil, wrapped in fine cloth and kept in wooden boxes and almirahs. They were considered precious, and the keys of these repositories were retained by the chief monk. They were made available under strict supervision to the scholars after careful examination of their competency to handle such books. When Buddhaghosa, the commentator, visited Mahavihara to consult these sacred texts, he was given access to the library only after such an examination. His proficiency was proved by the compilation of *Visudhimagga*.⁷

3. Gunasekera H. M. *Catalogue of Pali, Sinhalese and Sanskrit manuscripts in the Colombo Museum Library* 1901 P.X.

4. The idea of establishing a printing press for the publication of Christian literature of the new converts was put forward by the Dutch Governor. Jacob Christian Pielat to the Batavian Authorities in 1734 and the first book was printed in 1737 in Sri Lanka in the press established as a result.

5. Vidyodaya, Vol. III Nos. 11—12 1929, p. 344.

6. Piyadasa T. G. *Libraries in Sri Lanka their origin and history from ancient times to the present times*. Dehli 1985 p. 22.

The free circulation of copies of a book, other than those of the Tripitaka was limited. The habit of reading leisurely was not in vogue. Mass listening to the recital of sacred books at a common place such as the temple itself was the current practice particularly on *uposatha* (or *poya*) days.

However, reading and the act of writing was common. The males were patronised by the village temple while the females received their education from their parents at home. This primary education was limited to reading, writing and acquiring of knowledge of cultural values. The first letter of the alphabet was taught to a child at an auspicious hour with particular stress on intonation. When the child had mastered the alphabet he was introduced to the *Valipilla*. (sand board) to learn the art of writing. He was later introduced to the palm leaf and *panhinda* or (stylus), where he initially wrote large letters. Experience made him write small letters and that with speed and artistry.⁸

A higher education, sought by a limited number of students, who aspired either to become Buddhist monks or to learn and take to professions such as Medicine and Astrology were provided by a monastery called Pirivena staffed by the experts in numerous fields of study. Such a monastery imparted religious cultural, scientific and medical training.

At elementary level, knowledge was passed down orally and retained through an arduous exercise of memory. Discussion between teacher and pupil was the popular technique which facilitated comprehension. At higher institutions such as Pirivenas a student developed his aptitudes by means of reading and debate too. This was broadly the situation in Sri Lanka as regards its educational centres and libraries for a greater part of its historic period upto about the end of the 15th century.

The libraries of the Pirivenas possessed the copies of existing manuscripts of Pali, Sanskrit and Sinhala texts available in the island and sometimes copies of texts and commentaries brought from the neighbouring countries. New creations were added either by joint efforts of the staff and students or by individuals. The scriptorium kept the library constantly improved with additions to its collection. Thus the facilities for research and advanced study were available in the pirivena libraries which served the institution as a reference library. However, its resources were made available for the outsiders only after proper investigation of their credentials.

The political turmoil that followed the death of king Parakramabahu VI (1413—1467) of Kotte, the advent of western powers with high proselytization spirit, the withdrawal of royal patronage to Buddhism, and the gradual

8. Rev. Indurwe Pannatissa 'Secular education in the Pirivena Schools' *Ceylon Historical Journal* (C.H.J.) Vol. 1 July 1951. pp. 39 ff.

consolidation of Christian Missionary education based on models from elsewhere had an extremely adverse bearing on the established system of Buddhist education with its reference library system.

Two centuries later a Buddhist revival took place in the Kandyan Kingdom during the reign of Keerti Sri Rajasinghe (1747—1781) due to the energetic and collective efforts of Valivita Saranakara and his Associates. The king supported this group by establishing several higher educational institutions starting with the Niyamakanda Pirivena. The brave and energetic monks trained under the pioneering priests of "Silvatsamagama"⁹ collected archival records and manuscripts hidden in unknown places, and brought them in original or in copied form to the newly established monastic educational institutions such as Niyamakanda, Malvatta, Asgiriya, Gadaladeniya, Lankatilaka and Suduhumpola Viharas, for careful and critical examination under the guidance of learned monks and laymen. These monastic Colleges also managed to build up valuable reference libraries of the Pali and Sanskrit tradition. These libraries expanded with new works compiled by the learned monks. Arrangements were also made with the Buddhist monks of South and South East Asia to obtain copies of their sacred texts and commentaries to Sri Lanka. Thus at the turn of the eighteenth century the Buddhist monastic library system was in a revitalised condition in the Kandyan Kingdom with a host of young monks from the coastal areas engaged in serious studies in the higher monastic educational institutions at Kandy.

Some of these monks brought back the rich educational heritage and the disciplined monastic life to the coastal areas then subjected to Christian influence. A few Siamese monks who were helping the 'Silvatsamagama' in their attempt to restore the Buddhist tradition finding the humid climate of Kandy inhospitable, joined the monks who returned to the seven Korales. They renovated the ancient temples of the seven Korales then in ruins and established new ones and later spread out to Nuwarakalaviya and Tamankaduwa areas. In due course notable monastic reference libraries had been formed in temples in and around the seven Korales such as Wariyapola, Medagama, Warawala, Tissava, Kobeigane, Torana, Kandavihara, Ridivihara, Miwewa, Gomagamuwa, Hiriya, Medapola, Dumbadeniya, Mutugala, Padeniya, Budumuttewa, Kandulawa and Ambanpola vihara.¹⁰

The group of associates and students of Ven. Valivita Saranankara who had come down to the Matara Disavany made the biggest impact on the changing political, social and economic order of the eighteenth century. Taking advantage of the weak surveillance of the Dutch Administration, they

9. Valivita Saranankara and his close associates and followers tried to bring back the *sanghahood* to the disciplined monastic life style. This group is commonly identified by the name "Silvatsamagama."

10. *Secessional paper* (S P) xi 1874.

established small scale educational institutions attached to the existing and renovated monasteries such as those at Mulgirigala, Kahandamodara, Weligama, Pelmadulla, Totagamuwa and Bentota and established new centres particularly around Matara, Pattangahawatta, Weheragampita, Hittetiya, Godapitiya, Pallawala and Wehella, often with the patronage of the nominal Christian Mudaliyars of the area and the emerging wealthy entrepreneurial groups. Some of these temples rose to eminence due to the presence of many learned monks. The founding of a host of pirivenas in the south western coastal belt during the latter part of the nineteenth century culminated with the establishment of the two great pirivenas in and around Colombo, Vidyodaya in 1873, and Vidyalandara in 1875, both were transformed into two independent Universities in 1958.

These energetic Buddhist monks carried alive the Pali and Sanskrit tradition in the South and Southwest coastland and managed to bring back to light some copies of the old manuscripts, which were subsequently subject to serious examination at the new education institutes. Some of these editions which were becoming popular came out of the press by the middle of the nineteenth century.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century literary awareness in the coastal belt was conspicuous. Temples were founded in practically every village. Advent of the Christian Missionaries¹¹ during the first two decades of the century further accelerated the educational and proselytization interests. This was the period of the highest evangelical enthusiasm in Great Britain and the schools were looked upon as a positive instrument of conversion. Supported by the Governors, the Chief Justices, and other principal officials of the Government the Missionaries started schools in villages and seminaries of higher education at the chief towns to convert the "heathens" and "papists" to christianity and to train the more enthusiastic youths for pastoral purposes and government jobs. W. Knighton, wrote in his historical survey that 'it is rare indeed to see a Ceylonese even of the poorest class who cannot read and write his own language'¹² and questioned whether the most civilized nations of Europe could make the same boasting. Though the literacy was high the habit of reading at leisure seems to have been very limited, except among the Buddhist monks and laymen who had access to the monastic reference libraries.

The social stratification in the coastal areas had been disturbed due to the socio-economic changes that had taken place during the preceding centuries. The caste based feudal institutions were either weakened or changed by the forces of emerging merchantalism and capitalism. A wealthy westernized

11. London Missionary Society (1804) the Baptist Missionary Society (1812) Wesleyan Missionary Society (1814) and the Church Missionary Society (1817) started their evangelical movements in Sri Lanka in the same area where the Catholic Church and the Dutch Reformed church had a hold.

12. Knighton W. *History of Ceylon from the earliest period to the present time* (1845) p. 178.

proprietary class wielding considerable social status who functioned as junior partners to foreign dominance had arisen. A division in the sangha of the Matara dissavany was seen with the emergence of several 'sub-sects' such as the Mulgirigala fraternity, the Vehella fraternity and the Veva Siyanegama fraternity.

The majority of the pioneering Buddhist monks of the Southern coastal belt who were instrumental in the Buddhist revival were of the non-goyigama caste, and had their higher education and higher ordination in the Kandyan areas. A subsequent Royal Decree¹³ issued by King Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe, with the consent of Walivita Saranankara, reserved higher ordination only to those of the *goigama* caste and that too had to be performed only at the Malvatta and Asgiriya *Sima*. This had a profound effect on the emerging sangha organization of the coastal belt.

With the demise of Ven. Valivita Saranankara and his associates the zeal and vigour of the preceding years began to decline in the Kandyan areas. The rich endowments and grants conferred on the *Sangha* by the Nayakkar kings and the nobility had made the leading Buddhist temples proprietors of vast stretches of land. "Caste feudalism" and stabilized social inequalities of Kandyan society under the Nayakkar influence, and these differences, dovetailed into the *Sangha*. Thus, the disciplined monastic life restored by the '*Silvatsamagama*' had only a brief survival and the conditions of the monasteries deteriorated so rapidly with the expansion of capitalistic plantation economy in the interior that in 1876 the Diyavadana Nilame of the Temple of the Tooth, C.B. Dunuwilla, reported before the Buddhist Temporalities Commission that 'the studying and teaching religion both to the priests and laity a duty of the priests is now being neglected and disregarded. The priests employ their time in other pursuits such as trade, and the management of temporal affairs of the temples.'¹⁴ The neglect was so greivous that Malvatta and Asgiriya, the two leading Buddhist institutions of the Kandyan areas, had only six and three monks. respectively who knew Pali out of a total of twenty residing in these temples.¹⁵ The valuable libraries that had emerged during the past decades in the Kandyan areas obviously passed on to a group of custodians who were ignorant of the rich resources they held. Incidentally the valuable manuscripts were either kept locked under the boxes and almirahs or became the prey of the European soildiers, planters or the civil servants who took an active interest in collecting them.

While Kandyan monasteries witnessed a deterioration in the academic and spiritual standards, the Buddhist monasteries of the Matara district were rapidly expanding inspite of the sectarianism to which they were subjected.

13. Labugama Lankananda thero ed. *Mandarampura Puwatha* 1958, pp. xiii-xv.

14. SP., xvii 1876.

15. SP., xvii 1876.

Notable rich reference libraries were being built up in the main temples occupied by the associates and disciples of the Ven. Valivita Saranankara. The temple at Pelmadulla, situated halfway between the Kandyan monasteries and the emerging coastal temples, became a convenient meeting place for the monks on either side during the early stages of the Buddhist renaissance i.e. late eighteenth century. The Pelmadulla temple also became the abode of the high priest of Sripada, and the Sanghanayake of the low country, a title conferred mainly on a low country monk by the Kandyan King. The higher education institution which came into existence at Rajamaha Vihara, Pelmadulla produced a group of eminent Buddhist scholars of the nineteenth century. George Turnour the outstanding civil servant received his Pali education at Pelmadulla while serving as the Agent of Sabaragamuwa. In 1868, the revision of the Tripitaka¹⁶ too was undertaken at the Pelmadulla temple and the revised copies were deposited in the temple library.

Mulgirigala, one of the earliest Buddhist educational institutes which met destruction at the hands of the Portuguese, received new life under the guidance of these enthusiastic Buddhist monks of the eighteenth century and was a flourishing institution when the British gained control over the coastal belt. Sir Thomas Maitland (1805—1811) the British Governor, made an unsuccessful attempt to create a separate title of the low country *Sanghanayake* and confer it on the chief prelate of Mulgirigala, in order to undermine the influence of Kandyan monks and to establish a British backed low country *sangha* organization. The British Civil Servants Edward Upham and George Turnour found the manuscripts of the Mahavamsa for translation at the Mulgirigala temple library, and the majority of early British Civil Servants learned their Sinhala and Pali at this monastery under Bowala Dhammananda, the teacher of the leading personalities who led the revolt by violating the caste-oriented Royal Decree of Keerti Sri Rajasinghe.¹⁷ The reference library at Mulgirigala was supposed to have been one of the finest monastic libraries of nineteenth century Sri Lanka. However, with the decline of the spirit of its custodians during the latter part of the century much of its intellectual property was removed either by antique hunters or others interested in ancient literature.

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16. The revision of the Tripitaka was undertaken by the prominent priests of the Siamese and Amarapura sects at Pelmadulla under the patronage of Iddamalgoda Abeykoon atapattu Mudiyanse the Rate Mahatmaya of Navadum and Kukul Korales and the Basnayake of Maha Saman Devalaya Ratnapura. Hikkaduwe Sumangala, Walane Siddhatta, Puwakdandawe Sumangala, Mullertiyana Gunaratne and six other priests of the Siamese sect participated at the revision with Lankagoda Dheernanda, Weligama Sumangala, Welitara Dhammalankara, Bulatgama Dhammalankara, Dodanduwe Piyaratana, Waskaduwe Subhuti and Kosgoda Pannasekera of the Amarapura sect and Pandita Batuwantudawe participated in this revision.
17. Ambagahapitiye Gnanawimala, Kataluwe Gunaratana and Attudawe Dhammarakkita established the three different sections of the Sangha which was subsequently identified as the Amarapura fraternity at Balapitiya, Dodanduwa and Dondra respectively which in due course came to be patronised largely by the *Salagama*, *Karawa*, and *Durawa* Communities.

The other notable reference library of the south at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the Veheragampita temple at Matara. It came into prominence during the time of the Ven. Karatota Dhammarama (1735—1827), another literary figure of the time. When the Dutch government was making arrangements for the codification and compilation of the ancient laws of the Sinhalese the Tamils and the Muslims, Karatota Dhammarama helped in the codification of the traditional laws of the Sinhalese. However, the '*Lakrajalosirita*'¹⁸ compiled in reply to a series of questions they raised did not receive the same attention of the administrators as the '*Tesa Valamai* and the Mohammedan code. The Ven. Karatota Dhammarama was closely associated with the Dutch and British Governors, and taught Sinhala and Pali to many civil servants of the early British administration. John Doyly the politically astute Civil Servant, who was instrumental in the down fall of the Kandyan Kingdom studied Sinhala and Pali under him. Both these monks Karatota Dhammarama and Bowala Dhammananda helped the Colombo Auxilliary Bible Society in the task of translating the Bible to Sinhala begun in 1812 under the supervision of William Tolfrey. The library that developed at Veheragampita under the Ven. Dhammarama was one of the best reference libraries at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The three institutions of Palmadulla, Mulgirigala and Veheragampita were instrumental in the resurgence of literary and religious activity in the low country at the turn of the eighteenth century and the disciples of these three institutions played a key role in the cultural revival that took place subsequently in the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka.

The Buddhist monastic library system was further strengthened with the establishment of the Amarapura fraternity in 1803. The new fraternity merged on account of the struggle of the monks of the non-Goyigama castes for the due recognition of their claims for higher ordination. Supported by the emerging moneyed class of the coastal belt, four groups of non-Goyigama monks¹⁹ left the island within a short space of a decade to various parts of Burma with the intention of resuscitating the doctrine of Buddha by disentangling it from caste considerations theistic ritual practices etc., to which it had been subjected for several centuries. Each group having studied the Buddhist scriptures under eminent monks and having received higher ordination, returned to Sri Lanka to establish different sects of the Amarapura fraternity at Balapitimodara, Dodanduwa, Dadalla and Devinuwara, the last mentioned being later shifted to Mihiripanna. They also managed to collect and bring back many originals or translations of the sacred texts taken to Burma from

18. Rt. Rev. Edmon Peiris (ed.) *Lakraja Lo Sirit a* Published by Historical Manuscript Commission of Ceylon, 1973.

19. Ambagahapitiye Gnanawimala, Kataluwe Gunaratna, Attudawe Dhammarakkhita and Kapugama Dhammarakkhenda founded the four major sections of the sangha who did not adhere to the accepted norms of the Kandyan court patronized by the Siamese sect.

Sri Lanka itself during the preceding centuries and the Burmese commentaries. Such collections were further enriched by subsequent donations from the Burmese royalty and leading devotees. In course of time the headquarters of these different sects built up impressive reference libraries even surpassing the Kandyan ones.

Amarapura turned out to be a 'rebellious' fraternity functioning in an area supposed to be a stronghold of the Christian Missionaries. They were serving a community subjected to a 'wave of cultural infiltration leading to a linguistic, cultural, religious and spiritual alienation'²⁰ for centuries. Its members were quite aware of the external threats to their course of activity and were more dynamic and systematic in their endeavours. A greater emphasis was laid on the study of the doctrine and the *Vinaya* rules and also of Christian philosophy. This in turn gave rise to various controversies between monks within as well as outside the fraternity and also with the Christian Missionaries. They closely followed the missionary line of attack and used the printing press in bringing out religious tracts attacking the Christian publications. These multifarious religious tracts which came out of the press in attacking and supporting the religious observances and the monks further encouraged the habit of reading that spread fast among the masses.

Within a few years of the emergence of the Amarapura fraternity, four major educational centres with rich reference libraries grew up at Velitara, Dodanduwa, Dadalla and Mihiripanna, each having its own supporting institutions around them. All these managed to train a team of disciplined and intellectually alert monks who had a thorough and analytical grasp of the teachings of the Buddha and had mastered not only Pali, Sanskrit and Classical Sinhala but also some of the South Asian languages such as Burmese, Siamese and Cambodian. The majority of them studied English, Christianity, Western Philosophy and Science too.

Therefore, unlike the monastic libraries of the past, the majority of the Amarapura fraternity libraries possessed works on Christianity, Western Philosophy, Science and technology. The Christian Missionaries attacked the mythical belief and associated customs of the natives often bringing them into direct confrontation with modern Science and Mathematics. They also publicly converted some of the prominent Buddhist monks to Christianity and made them instruments of their criticism at public meetings. However, the new "order" of Buddhist monks too read about Christianity, modern science and technology. Laymen purchased copies of the Bible and other christian publications and handed them to the monks to "criticise and refute" as reported by the Baptist Missionary James Charter,²¹ These too enriched

20. Jayatilake D. B., *The Message of Buddhism—The Buddhist Review*, Vol. II 1910 p. 313.

21. James Charter Manuscripts 1823 Baptist Missionary Society London (BMS), Vol. 1.

the temple library collections. As early as 1817, Robert Newstead, a Methodist Missionary visiting the Dadalla temple, found two copies of the New Testament among the books and Manuscripts of the temple library.²²

A majority of these Amarapura fraternity monastic libraries were examined by Maha Mudaliyar Louis de Zoysa in 1878²³ for the compilation of a catalogue, and noted that some of the manuscripts mentioned in James de Alwis catalogue were missing in the temples. However, he managed to examine a large amount of manuscripts on many subjects ranging from religion to literature, and on professions such as medicine and astrology in Pali, Sanskrit, Sinhala and other South and South East Asian languages.²⁴

The advent of Christian Missionaries during the first two decades of British rule and their virtual hold over the educational systems of the island, the consolidation of the status of the English language as the medium of administration and the expansion of the printing press each contributed to effect far reaching changes in the reading habits of the Sri Lankans. A new literary style had come into vogue in Sinhala very much different from the classical style due to long associations with Tamils, Portuguese and Dutch. Elementary education was imparted to the natives through the medium of this new style. Higher education, which assured job opportunities in the government and mercantile sectors, and was hence held in esteem was imparted in the English Language. Furthermore, this English education assured the youth a position and lifestyle quite different from that of the ordinary man.

On the other hand, the higher oriental education imparted in the the Buddhist monasteries was left to those who aspired to become monks, native physicians and astrologers. None of them stood at par with the lowest scale professions held by an English educated youth. Thus the long preserved treatises on astronomy, mathematics, physical sciences, cosmography, medicine, surgery, astrology, music, painting and fine arts in Pali, Sanskrit or classical Sinhala—the rich resource of knowledge from which the oriental scholars (draw their strength) began to bear a relationship with a few who did not care for social position.

Oriental Library

However, these changes took place in Sri Lanka at a time when western scholars were allured by the rich oriental literature of India and the rest of the South and South East Asian region. These Orientalists formed themselves into various study circles such as the Royal Asiatic Society, which started local

22. Extract of the Journal of Robert Newstead May 27 1817 ; Methodist Missionary Archives now deposited in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. (MMS) 443.

23. *SP XXV* 1879.

24. *ibid.*

branches in many parts of Asia, were exploring and evaluating the rich heritage of the culture of that region. Caught up by this enthusiasm the missionaries, civil servants, military officers, planters and businessmen joined those intending to collect the ancient manuscripts to be carried back home. The simultaneous declining spirit of a section of the Buddhist clergy of Sri Lanka which, due to some unexplained factors, seen as a contemporary phenomenon, made it easy for these treasure hunters to pursue their task. Their rich collections were shipped to their homelands to be perused by the growing band of European oriental scholars. Thus, museums and libraries of the main cities of Europe profited by what the Sri Lankan temple libraries lost.

British civil servants who had to learn native languages as part fulfilment of their proficiency first came across the rich monastic libraries. Doyly, Turnour and Upham were among those who studied Sinhala and Pali at the monastic colleges around Matara managed to consult some of the rare manuscripts. George Turnour, the Agent of the Central Province who had closely moved with the Buddhist monks of Malvatta and Asgiriya published a series of articles in the journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Bengal Branch), under the heading 'the Pali Buddhistical Annals,²⁵ at a time when the Indian civil servants were hunting for the rich literature of India. Subsequently, Rev. Spence Hardy, a missionary who resided in Sri Lanka for over twenty five years, read a paper before the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch) on the books in Sri Lanka on religion, grammar, history and medicine in the Pali Language.²⁶ A few years later P. Grimbolt, Vice Consul in Sri Lanka for France, and the librarian of the Royal Asiatic Society, (Ceylon Branch), despatched a valuable load of Buddhist manuscripts to France, collected during a period of over six years in Sri Lanka. A review of them appeared in the Saturday Review, London, on July 28, 1866, which also spotlighted the neglect of the monastic libraries in Sri Lanka and the further availability in them of rich manuscripts in Pali, Sanskrit and Sinhala Languages. In the same year John Murdoch addressed the Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), on the need for the preparation of a catalogue of Pali and Sinhala books found in the pansala (i.e. temple) libraries, and in the possession of individuals, and stressed the need for legislation as in India²⁷ compelling the publisher to submit three copies of any publication to the authorities mentioned in the law²⁸. In the following year the British Government of India took steps to make a record of Sanskrit books found in Indian libraries to which the Government Agent of the Northern Province, (Sri Lanka), H.S.O. Russell drew the attention of the government. Thereupon, the government issued a circular to the Government Agents and their assistants to collect such

25. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Bengal Branch), (JARSBB) Vol. v.p. 521 Vol. vi, pp. 299 799, 1049.

26. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Ceylon Branch) (JRASCB) Vol. 1 No. 3 pp. 189ff.

27. Indian Act No. XXV, of 1867.

28. John Murdoch *Classified catalogue of Printed Tracts and Books in Sinhalese* Madras, 1868.

information on manuscripts available in the temple libraries and individuals through the village headmen.²⁹ James de Alwis an unofficial member of the Legislative Council and a lawyer, who took a keen interest in oriental literature was entrusted with the task of preparing a catalogue of such manuscripts through the information thus collected and by personal observations. Having found many duplicate copies in temple libraries, and seen the threat of destruction that these valuable manuscripts faced by white ants and treasure seekers, de Alwis stressed the need of creating an Oriental manuscripts library attached to the Government Record Office.³⁰ He recommended the feasibility of purchasing the duplicate copies from their custodians or transcribing the manuscripts through the Government Agents.

This suggestion was accepted by the government and funds were voted for by the Legislative Council. An Oriental Library Committee was formed at a meeting held in the Colombo Kachcheri on July 27, 1870 to administer the library.³¹ The rules and regulations for the management of the library were drafted and gazetted for general information.³² Regional committees were appointed under the Government Agents to secure the necessary manuscripts from the Sabaragamuwa, Galle and Matara districts³³. A copy of the Tripitaka revised at Pelmadulla was procured. The copy of the Tripitaka presented by the King of Burma to the Sri Lankan Government was also deposited in the Oriental library.

Thus in Sri Lanka a palm leaf manuscript library was born on lines of a modern reference library for the first time in 1870. This Oriental library was placed under the immediate control and supervision of the Colonial Secretary. A paid librarian³⁴ was appointed to look after the management of the library. The library was kept open for the readers from 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m on week days and 11.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. on Saturdays. The manuscripts were allowed to be consulted within a prescribed area in the presence of the librarian and the readers could obtain extracts of the documents on payment.³⁵

29. Robinson to Earl of Granville January 11, 1870, Sri Lanka National Archives (SLNA) 5, 57 No. 20.

30. Robinson to Earl of Kimberley, October 11, 1871, SLNA 57 58 No. 250.

31. Oriental Library Committee members elected are R. F. Morgan, Chairman James de Alwis, Secretary-C. P. Loyard Louis de Zoysa, Andiris de Silva.

32. *Ceylon Government Gazette*, October, 1870.

33. Local Committees for,

Matara District

A.G.A.

Keerti Sumangala

Dodampahala Dheepankara

Bambaranda

Kachcheri Mudaliyar of
Matara

Abraham T. Obysekera

Interpreter to Police

Court

James de Alwis to Colonial Secretary, 10 January, 1870; SLNA, 6, 3434.

Galle District

G.A.S.P.

Bulathgama Terunnanse

Weragoda Medhantha of

Kachchiwatta

A.R. Karunaratne

Edmund Rowland

Gunaratne

Sabaragamuwa District

A.G.A.

Hikkaduwa Sumangala

Waskaduwe Subhuti

Morapitiye Attadessi

Don Adrian de Silva

Batuwantudawe

Eddamaligoda Basnaike

Nilame

L.C. Wijesinghe

34. Louis de Zoysa, the Maha Mudaliyar, was the first librarian.

35. James de Alwis to Colonial Secretary, 20 September 1870 ; SLNA 6/3436.

Within a short time of the establishment of the Government Oriental Library in Colombo, steps were taken to establish such libraries on voluntary contributions in Kandy and Matara. At a meeting convened by the Government Agent of the Central province on November 29, 1875, it was resolved to establish an Oriental library at the Octagon in Kandy. Twenty four members including the Government Agent, District Judge, Assistant Agent, the Diyavadana Nilame and the Rate Mahatmayas of the districts assembled and each member promised to pay a subscription fee of Rs. 40.³⁶ Lists for the collection of voluntary contributions from the respective divisions were distributed among the Presidents of the Village Tribunals and the Rate Mahatmayas. Special donations were received from the king of Burma in 1875,³⁷ and the Prince of Wales reception committee of 1897.

The management of the library was entrusted to a committee³⁸ which decided on all important matters. A librarian was appointed³⁹ to administer the matters of the library. The library was kept open every day from 7.00 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. to 7.30 p.m and on Poya days as long as it was necessary because the devotees to the Dalada Maligawa kept on contributing money to the library.⁴⁰

The attempt made at Matara to form an Oriental library in 1875 with the ultimate aim of opening up of a high class Oriental school attached to it did not materialize due to financial and other restraints.⁴¹ Thus it is evident that the government was compelled to take a lead in the collection and preservation of the monastic literature and make them available for the readers at convenient places.

Meanwhile James de Alwis had completed his catalogue of ancient literary manuscripts in 1871, a voluntary contribution which he completed in twelve months⁴². The catalogue brought to light many works in Pali and Sinhala which till then had escaped notice beyond a small circle of Buddhist Priests and native physicians. The examination and compilation of a list of manuscripts available in the Buddhist temples was found urgently necessary and the Government appointed Maha Mudaliyar Louis de Zoysa for the purpose.

36. SLNA 18, 3423.

37. James Swan to Government Agent of Central Province, 23 February 1875, SLNA 18 3423.

38. The Library Committee was composed of GACP. AGA (Secretary) Diyawadana Nilame Ratamahatmayas of Udunuwars, Yatinuwars, Tumpane, Harispattuwa, Lower Dumbara, Hewaheta, Udapalatha, and Bulathgama.

39. Suriyagoda Sonuttara of Malvatta Viahara was the librarian till 1896.

40. Secretary of the library to the Colonial Secretary, 27 February 1879, SLNA, 18, 342.3

41. District Judge of Matara to Colonial Secretary, 7 May 1875 SLNA, 6, 5081.

42. Robinson to Kimberley, 11 October 1871 ; SLNA 5, 58, No. 250.

De Zoysa, a Christian by birth, managed to survey the major part of the Buddhist temples in the North Western Province,⁴³ Southern and Central Provinces.⁴⁴ However, due to 'Jealousy and ignorance of the custodians,' De Zoysa was not given access to a majority of temples in the Matara district.⁴⁵

Subsequently De Zoysa compiled a catalogue of palm leaf Manuscripts in Pali, Sanskrit and Sinhala languages in 1876 which he came across in his surveys and those consulted by James de Alwis. In submitting a copy of this catalogue to the Secretary of state for colonies, William Gregory, the Governor of Sri Lanka, (1872—77), admitted the long neglect of a duty of the Government thus.

"It is most unfortunate that this investigation was not conducted at an early period of the British rule when the Buddhist monasteries were presided over by men of learning or at all events by men who highly valued their literary stores. Since we occupied the Kandyan Country and more especially of late since we dissociated ourselves altogether from Buddhism and in my opinion, very improperly allowed temple property to become the prey of every spoliator, the old class of learned priests has generally disappeared and has been replaced in too many instances by men whose only object is to enrich themselves as fast as they can, leaving the temple and all belonging to it to go to rack and ruin. From this cause thousands of valuable manuscripts are supposed to have perished, either by the devastation of white ants or by the climate. It is therefore, fortunate that we have received even the small remnant which we now possess."

Museum Library

This was a time of much literary activity in Europe and in India. Advanced research on Oriental culture was a theme of the day and much interest was shown on the collection and editing of Oriental manuscripts, restoration and curing of archaeological monuments and studying of social customs and behavioral patterns of Asian Societies. Meanwhile due to the increasing agitation the local intellectuals⁴⁷ and the energetic and enthusiastic support of the civil servants steps were taken to preserve and maintain the various aspects of the culture of the Sri Lankan people by the establishment of the Museum of Colombo by Ordinance Number 11 of 1873.

43. *SP XI* of 1874.

44. *SP XXV* of 1879.

45. *Governor's Address*, Vol. 11 p. 409.

46. Gregory to Carnavon, 26, October 1876, *SLNA* 5, 63 No. 331.

47. Gregory to Kimberley, 5 April 1873 ; *SNLA*, 5,60 No. 251.

A museum library was created by the amalgamation of the Government Oriental Library with the library of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), formed in 1845. The Museum library thus established was opened to the public in January 1877. This was the first free public library that came into existence in Sri Lanka with books on many subjects except fiction. A Librarian⁴⁸ under the Director of the Museum was appointed to manage its affairs. A Committee of management presided over by the Governor of Sri Lanka however, decided on all important matters. It met once a year in January unless a special need arose till 1 May 1889, and later on monthly on the second Friday of every month.⁴⁹ The committee inspected the books newly received and the lists to be purchased and considered the monthly reports, applications for admission to the reading room etc. The reading room was kept open from 10.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. from Monday to Thursday and on Saturdays from 3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. except on Christmas and New Year days. The admission to the reading room was granted on request by a written application to the committee of management accompanied by the recommendation of two respectable persons if the applicant was not personally known to the Director of National Museums. The readers were expected to sign the register before they commenced reading.

The conception of library activities as a science is of recent growth. The administration of a library providing for the full exploitation of its resources to a reader as by providing indexes etc. was not in vogue. The librarian was looked upon as a mere custodian of books and was entrusted with other duties which had no connection with the management of the library. In keeping line with this trend the Librarian of the Museum was expected to perform the duties of the Office Assistant to the Director of the Museum in his non-technical duties, to act in his capacity in his absence and to perform the duties of the accountant in addition to being the custodian of the records and books.⁵⁰

Governor Gregory kept high hopes of collecting whatever manuscripts that had escaped destruction by the weather at the hands of man and by insects for the Museum library, either by outright purchase or in copied form.⁵¹ Rupees 13,250 was voted by the Legislative Council between 1877 to 1885 for the same purpose. However, only Rs. 6,688.27 was spent on the purchases and the balance was either diverted to other work of the Museum or allowed to revert to the Government revenue.⁵²

48. Richard Van Cuylenburg was appointed in 1875 as the first librarian of the Museum library.

49. *Administration Report of the Museum (ARM)* 1889 pp. 1—7.

50. *Ferguson's Directory* for 1893.

51. *Governor's addresses* Vol. II pp. 384-85.

52. *ARM* 1889.

In 1887, there were 188 volumes classified into six categories by Mudaliyar Louis de Zoysa in the following manner. (a) Buddhist canonical texts 27 in Burmese characters presented by the Burmese King, and 14 in Sinhala characters copied at the expense of the government or presented by individuals (b) Religious works of a miscellaneous nature 71 in number. (c) Historical works, legendary tales etc. 25 in number. (d) Philosophical works 29 in number. (e) Poetry, 16 in number. (f) Scientific and medical works 6 in number. The library proper contained about 450 volumes on history, languages archaeology, ethnology, astronomy, geography and other miscellaneous works.⁵³ Even as late as 1901 there were only 411 volumes of manuscripts available in the Museum library, of which 372 were in Sinhala, 35 in Burmese and 4 in Cambodian.⁵⁴ The failure to procure copies or the originals of the manuscripts according to the librarian was due partly to the ignorance and jealousy of the custodians and partly to the fear of losing them in such transactions.⁵⁵ In this context he suggested that a competent person be appointed by the Government for such transactions and that he should carefully work out on hearsay, and build up goodwill with the owners before any transactions on purchases or copying was made.

With the enactment of the Ordinance No. 1 of 1885, making the publisher or the printer liable to supply three copies of any publication to the Registrar of Books and Newspapers, of which a copy was sent to the Museum library for the use of the general reader, the number of books accrued to the library improved. However, the reading facilities thus provided were hardly been made use of by the average reader. Till 1886 only 226 visits were recorded per year, and thus 'the existence of a free public library' seems to be unknown to the majority of the residents of Colombo.⁵⁶ According to the librarian "even the educated man who had been living in Colombo for more than a decade knew nothing about the library."⁵⁷

With the widening of courses at the newly established Vidyodaya Pirivena and the improvement of the knowledge of English among the young monks the attendance of the Museum library improved.⁵⁸ Regional Stephen Copleston, the Bishop of Calcutta, had noted this change and wrote in his book in 1908, that 'in the Oriental library at the Museum you will see the yellow-robed students at work with pen and notebook on Pali manuscripts in Sinhalese or Burmese characters they are students at the Buddhist College. On the table you may find a copy of the Buddhist, an English newspaper as modern in tone

53. John Ferguson, *Ceylon in the Jubilee year*, 1887, Colombo, p. 413.

54. H. M. Gunasekera, *Catalogue of Pali Sinhalese and Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Colombo Museum Library*, 1901 P.X.

55. ARM 1889.

56. ARM 1887.

57. ARM 1887.

58. In 1887 five Buddhist monks of Vidyodaya were permitted to enter the library, 10 in 1888, 30 in 1889 and by 1889 the average visits rose to 2,198.

as the Daily News, full of reports of Buddhist schools, meetings, ceremonies and conversions mingle here and there with a paragraph of abuse of Christianity. The old system is boldly thrown overboard and Buddhism claims to be in alliance with modern discoveries and the Philosophy of the West.⁵⁹

On the whole, towards the end of the nineteenth century the reference libraries of the Buddhist monasteries were partly explored and their materials were thrown open to the Western scholars while the Buddhist monastic educational system and then Buddhist priests themselves transformed from their isolate existence were heavily involved with the western scientific methods and Philosophy. The Ven. Migettuwatte Gunananda the orator of the great debates with the missioneries in eighteen sixties and early seventies, challenged Sir Isaac Newton's theory by quoting the 'New Principia' of R. J. Morison in the famous Panadura debate of 1872,⁶⁰ and Hikkaduwa Sumangala, the Principal of the Vidyodaya Pirivena, calling the attention of a Christian priest to a passage in Dr. Louis Buchner's work on 'Matter and Force'.⁶¹ These are two examples of the change that was taking place in Sri Lanka during the nineteenth century due to the expansion of the Buddhist monastic reference library system.

Subscription Libraries

The establishment of voluntary subscription libraries in Sri Lanka seems to have taken place in the early decades of the nineteenth century in the principal towns where a mixed and westernized population was concentrated. However, due to the paucity of material, it is however difficult to build up with accuracy a chronological account of the emergence of such institutions. The first such reference available is to the Ceylon United Service Library which was formed in 1812 in Colombo. Its membership was open to the members of the armed forces of the government while outsiders were admitted by ballot as honorary members. The latter were mostly European merchants, who had no voice in the management of the library and the disposal of funds.⁶² The library was managed by a librarian placed under the direction of an Executive Committee of which the Governor and the Major General Commanding the Forces acted as the Patron and the Vice-Patron.⁶³

59. Colpeston, R. S. *Buddhism Primitive and Present in Ceylon*, London, 1908, p. 275.

60. The Great Debate, *Buddhism and Christianity, Face to Face*, ed. Peebles, J.M. Colombo 1955, p. 153.

61. *Ibid.* p. 155.

62. Pridham, C., *An Historical Political and Statistical Account of Ceylon and its Dependencie* (Pridham), Vol. II, 1849, p. 632.

63. *Ceylon Calender* 1825.

