

ANANDA ICONS: GALLANT IN WAR & BENEVOLENT IN PEACE

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Ananda - Pride of the Nation

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It was the best of times; it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom; it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief; it was the season of light; it was the season of darkness; it was the spring of hope; it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us; we had nothing before us; we were all going direct to heaven; we were all going direct the other way - in short...

At that time, Ceylon was under the British rule. By late 1880s, our culture, language and Buddhism dwindled. During this period, a military genius himself, Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, an American led the battle for the rights of the Buddhists. He had to fight against the colonial Government, its indifferences and stubbornness.

The Buddhist Theosophical Society (BTS), became the headquarters of his campaign. With the help of leading philanthropists and the general public, a Buddhist English school was established at Pettah, known as the Buddhist Academy on November 1, 1886 with 37 students and three teachers.

On August 17, 1895, in a 3 1/2 acre land donated by Mudliyar Tudor Rajapakse, this Buddhist school was shifted to Maradana. Later, this school became the fountain of our nation's freedom movement and the centre of our freedom struggle. To give a truly Buddhist identity, the new school at Maradana was named after one of the ten great disciples of the Buddha - Ananda. He was the Blessed One's favourite disciple. He was famed for his excellent memory and also known as 'Dharmabhandagarika' (Treasurer of the Dhamma) who recited the Sutra Pitaka sermon contained in the 'Tripitaka'.

Ananda Vidyalaya is one of the crest jewels of Buddhist education in this country. If any school could claim to be representative of the spirit and aspiration of the nation of Sri Lanka, I presume, Ananda could claim that distinction very proudly.

We must not forget the fact, that, all other Buddhist institutions also played a very important and a lead role in the struggle for emancipation. Ananda was the leader and always played a dominant part in the Buddhist revival. It produced disciplined and productive citizens in all fields.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa in an address to the nation recently stated that now there are only two categories of people in Sri Lanka. Those who love the country and those who do not love the country. Words of wisdom.

Ananda always produced the first category. They produced patriots who love their motherland. In all social, political, national struggles, Anandians were in the forefront. Their philosophy was 'Country before self'. This 'Punyaboomiya' revered land - Ananda College premises, produced patriotic leaders. Who is a patriot? A person who loves his country; one who defends against an enemy.

Whenever there is a threat in any form to the national identity of the country, Anandians and the old boys of other Buddhist institutions and patriotic people always rally round the national flag to save the country. In the battle against bloody terrorism, Anandians were in the lead with other old boys from various schools in the island to safeguard the territorial integrity of the country.

Buddha uttered Mangala Sutta to explain the attainment of real blessing. If you draw the attention to the second stanza of Mangala Sutta it reads - 'Puja cha puja - niyanam - etam mangala muttaman' which means Honour those who are worthy of honour.

This is one of the supreme blessings. On July 3, 2009, Ananda war heros - 'Ranaviruwan' will be felicitated at the college auditorium and will be honoured. A Great gesture of showing the gratitude to those who deserves it.

We are all grateful and indebted to the gallant Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, General Sarath Fonseka, Rear Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda, Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekera, who planned and designed the strategy to wipe out terrorism from Sri Lanka and prepared the ground to save the territorial integrity of the beautiful island.

Major General Jagath Dias, Major General Kamal Gunaratne, Brigadier Prasanna Silva, Brigadier Chagi Gallage and their troops fought a pitch battle and saved the innocent Tamil civilians in a humanitarian exercise. They are all proud sons of Ananda. Also we must remember all others, who fought hard to liberate our Motherland under very trying conditions.

We salute all those Armed Forces and defence personnel, 'Ranaviruwan' who sacrificed their precious lives to save the motherland and sustained injuries, to build a united Sri Lanka.

The success was due to the commitment, dedication, and intelligent planning. Top ranking officers too lived with the soldiers. They looked after their welfare and motivated them. Exemplary leader Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, understood the ground realities.

He understood the pulse and the feelings of the officers and the soldiers. Commander-in-Chief President Rajapaksa was always a tower of inspiration to the Defence Forces. He personally visited the battlefield. His presence motivated the war heros. Gotabhaya provided the necessary facilities.

General Sarath Fonseka, rated by many international war experts as the

'greatest strategist' planned out the successful strategy to wipe out terrorism, which was going on for more than three decades. The officers, the soldiers gave him their hundred percent support. Under trying conditions they braved the weather, fought day and night and liberated the country.

It reminds me a lecture delivered by Dr. Senarat Paranavitana where in one of his lectures he discussed 'war strategy of Dutugemunu' to eliminate Elara. He said "Army marches on its belly". President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, General Sarath Fonseka supplied their basic needs - food to the men in the battlefield and also looked after their welfare. They were determined lot; their main aim was to annihilate the enemy and ultimately they liberated the country, and brought the entire country under our proud Lion Flag. They beat the most dangerous terrorist group in the world. Today, when Ananda felicitates their war heros (Ranaviruvan) we must remember with gratitude some of the principals and teachers who moulded them and their characters.

To begin with, Lokusathu Hewa Mettananda's name should be written in gold in the Mahavamsa of Ananda Vidyalaya. L. H. Mettananda took up the Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake, the question of Anandians' position in relation to the Armed Services.

He pointed out that his students are kept out, although they are qualified. He wanted Anandians to be considered on their merits. The Prime Minister considered his request to a certain extent, and there followed some intake of Anandians into Police and Armed Forces. Due to Mettananda's effort the doors were opened to Anandians in Armed Forces.

This great Principal and national leader formed a national movement, with some leading personalities, who loved their country called 'Bauddha Jatika Balawegaya'. This national movement fought for the rights of the educated qualified Buddhists who were deprived of gaining job opportunities in Armed Services and Police, and also in the mercantile sector.

Mettananda was a born fighter. He always stood for fair play and justice. I presume, fighting was in the blood. Probably, his name 'Hewa' denotes that his ancestors were a clan of soldiers.

My memory goes back to 1961, my university days. At that time, I was working part-time basis as a reporter attached to the Lake House group. One day I was assigned to cover a public rally organised by the BJB at Kirillapone grounds. The ground was filled to capacity. Majestic Mettananda, in his speech gave several statistics and proved beyond doubt the gross injustice done to the educated Buddhists in the field of employment.

His aquiline nose, steely complexion, towering and commanding personality reminded me so much a Greek statue. I approached him, worshipped him, introduced myself as a Nalandian.

With a smile he said, "Epasinghe you are not the Maths man, but, I can faintly remember you as a Nalanda cricketer." In our friendly chat, he told me a secret. One day, a principal of a leading Catholic school made this sarcastic remark to me. Mr. Mettananda, you give the soldiers from your school. I will provide the officers from my school."

This statement was a mouthful. How true it was. The best example I can think is the coup of 1962, levelled against the democratically elected late Sirimavo Bandaranaike's government. The majority of them involved in this coup were the officers.

Cadeting at Ananda

Cadeting in schools can be considered as the cradle of basic Army training. Royal College was the first to start cadeting in 1881 in Ceylon. It was introduced to Ananda Vidyalaya in 1922. The Herman Loos Cup is considered as the plum of cadeting. This cup is awarded to the best all round cadet platoon annually.

The most efficient platoon in the Ceylon Cadet Battalion 1949 was awarded to Ananda Platoon.

The Sgt of this platoon was D. J. Wickramanayake and Contingent Commander was Lieut. G. W. Rajapakse, who held the reins of Ananda from 1969 to 1981.

Anandians won the Dominion shoot 1950-1951. The team consisted of Cpl Gamini Jayatilleke, Cpl N. K. Dissanayake, Cdt Asoka Jayawardane, Cpl Hamilton Wanasinghe (former Army Commander) and L/Cpl A. P. Madurapperuma.

So far Ananda have produced army commanders namely Hamilton Wanasinghe, Rohan Daluwatta, Lionel Balagalla, Sarath Fonseka and Navy Commander Wasantha Karannagoda and Civil Defence Force Chief Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekera.

Some of the outstanding principals at Ananda who did yeomen service to the Cadet Corp were Col. G. W. Rajapakse, Col. E. A. Perusinghe, Col. V. S. Kudaligama. They motivated and guided many Anandians, in this discipline for many Anandians, the breeding ground to join the police, army, navy, air force was the training they gained at Ananda.

Tracing the history of cadeting in the first hundred years, Ananda annexed the Hermon Loos, nine (9) times under a number of platoon commanders.

From the beginning of late 1980s, Ananda won this prestigious cup in 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2002 - nine (9) times under One Platoon Commander Major Palitha Wijesinghe. It is undoubtedly a unique record in the history of cadeting in Sri Lanka.

What is Ananda's secret of success?

To begin with, they believed in 'One Sri Lanka'. There was no class, colour or creed at Ananda. They all lived like one family. The principals and teachers were dedicated, committed and they moulded disciplined productive citizens who loved the country. From Mr. C. W. Leadbeater (1886-1890) to the present acting principal Lal Dissanayake (2009) there were 26 in their cherished history.

Out of them the most outstanding educationists were A. E. Bultjens (1890-1898), Sir D. B. Jayatileke (1898-1908) and (1909-1910), Fritz Kunz (1914-1917), P. de S. Kularatne (1918-1923) and (1923-1932), Dr. Gunapala Malalasekera (actg. principal 1923), L. H. Mettananda (acting principal (1932-1936) and (1945-1954) S. A. Wijetileke (1955-1961), Lt. Col. E. A. Perusinghe (1964-1969), Col. G. W. Rajapakse (1969-1981), Col. V. S. Kudaligama (1982-1986), A. P. Gunaratne (1987-1995) to name a few. Among those dedicated pedagogues were: Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitriya, Heenatiyana Dhammaloka, Paravahera Vajiragnana, Tibetan monk poet S. Mahinda, Dr. Kotagama Wachissara, Ambanwelle Pannasekera Theras. Then there were many scholars in their chosen disciplines, in the staff.

Some of them were Prof. C. Sunderalingam and C. M. Weeraratne (Mathematics), Lakshman Devasena (Pali, Sanskrit, Sinhala), Sagara Palansuriya-Keyas (Sinhala), S. Thanabalasingham (English) are some of the names that come to my mind out of many. To respect the elders and teachers was a virtue that was ingrained to the students of Ananda by great set of teachers. They inspired them to become the fighters of freedom, justice and fairplay.

Sports

In the field of sports, Ananda's achievements are outstanding. In cricket they produced more than two dozens of Sri Lankan cricketers. Arjuna Ranatunga had the proud distinction of winning the World Cup in 1996. I pay a glowing tribute to my close friend, who was my rival Prefect of Games at Ananda late Mr. A. D. Karunananda and coaches Old Anandian Deputy Principal co-curricular Mr. Kulasiri de Zoysa, P. W. Perera and evergreen Anuruddha Polonnowita, who captained Ananda the year I played for Nalanda.

Ananda excelled in all sports. They produced Olympic boxers and one of them was Sumith Liyanage, a retired Deputy Inspector General of Police who was my classmate and team mate at Nalanda, who learned his basics at Ananda. C.P., H.P., S.P. Jayasuriya brothers were some of the outstanding boxers who wore the maroon and gold blazer.

The heedfulness leads to immortality

This has been instrumental in motivating the lives of generation of Anandians. I dedicate this article to all those brave men and women, who sacrificed their lives and to all who sustained injuries, in their dedicated effort to liberate this country. One day, your names will be written in gold in our cherished history - Mahavamsa.

The writer is a former student and a teacher at Nalanda Vidyalaya

The motto of Ananda - Appamado - Amatapadam is from a Dhammapada (The Treasury of Truth) stanza in Appamada Vagga (Heedfulness) (Verse number 21)

Appamado amatapadam -

pamado maccuno padam -

Appamatta na miyanthi -

ye pamatta yatha mata -

Heedfulness leads to immortality -

The heedful are immortal -

The heedless, though living,

are like dead -
