

Lokosatu hew Mettananda, educationist, humanist, nationalist and Buddhist revivalist was born in Kaluwadumulla in Ambalangoda on the 19th march 1894 and passed away in Colombo on 1st November 1967 at the age of 73.

He was a rare leader being unassuming, selfless, fearless and simple in his lifestyle. He was born at a time when the campaign for Buddhist renaissance which began in the second half of the nineteenth century was successful in achieving important objectives. Buddhism and the education of Buddhist children were very low priorities for the British rulers. Buddhist schools were gradually established as a result of this movement which was spear-headed by both local and foreign religious dignitaries with the support from the laity. A Buddhist flag was designed, a public holiday was declared on Sinhalese New Year day, Buddhists were appointed as registrars of marriages and deaths. It was also the time when Ven Mohottiwatte Gunanda had won debates against the Christian clergy. Buddhist Katupothana was written in reply to the Christian catechism.

Mettananda was elected President, All Ceylon Buddhist Congress at its annual sessions held in Galle in 1935. In his presidential address he mentioned that he had no hatred for other religions but he condemned capitalism, Communism and Imperialism. He never degraded the teachings of other religions but his main aim was to restore to the Buddhists the rights which were taken away from them by successive foreign rulers. He wanted the fifth clause in the Kandyan convention of 1815 about the protection given to Buddhism included in the new constitution. He demanded that the proclamation of 1818 regard-

ing temple lands be implemented. He demanded that all four poya days be made holidays. He requested the government to publish the Tripitaka in Sinhala and founded the Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya to continue for the agitation for the rights of the Buddhists.

On 27th December 1953 a commission of enquiry of Buddhist activities was appointed during the annual sessions of the ACBC. The chapter on Education was written by Mettananda. The BJB was involved in bringing to light certain statistical evidence to show how and why the Buddhists were deprived of their rights by many newspapers who were against Buddhism.

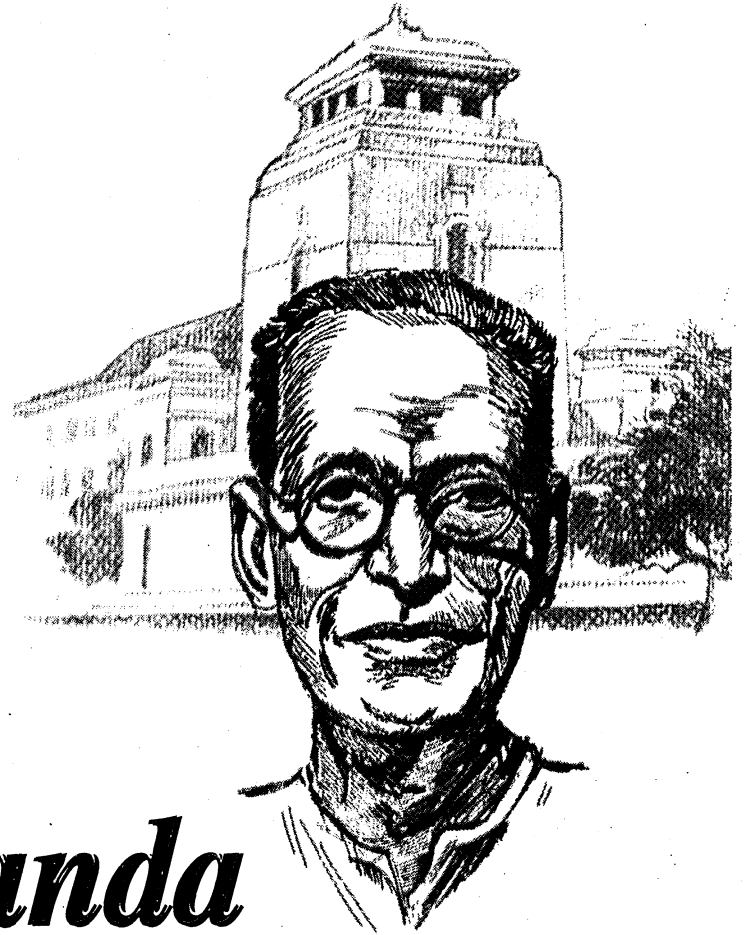
Yet he spoke strongly for press freedom and demanded a press commission.

As the Principal of Ananda in his

the front page—"We are Sinhalese Buddhists, we have a history over 2500 years. During this long period we did not harm any nation or any religion. We shall not do so in the future. But our ancestors sacrificed their lives to safeguard our nation and our religion. Similarly we will unite to fight for our rights."

Buddhist Commission

In 1951 ACBC had met the PM Rt.Hon. D S Senanayake and requested him to appoint a Commission to enquire into the Buddhist question. The Buddhists had been subjected to various disadvantages, coercions and persecutions on account of their religion during the four and half centuries of foreign domination of the island. The PM had been sympathetic to the hearing and promised to appoint a commission and



L. H. Mettananda

- Leader of a Buddhist Revival

Prize day speech in 1952, he quoted Prof Nesiah "It is not for social solidarity or national integration that English has its place, but to serve the need for a medium of international intercourse... English speech had created a new social group 2.3% superior to all other social groups." He mentioned that social harmony and national integration could only be achieved by teaching Tamil to Sinhalese children and vice versa in the primary classes. The schools where he was Principal namely Ananda, Nalanda and Dharmaraja improved and blossomed under his leadership. In 1956 the tabloid newspaper he started "Bauddha peramuna" had this statement on

asked for a list of names for appointments.

However, at the next meeting with the PM he told them that he regretted very much that he could not comply to the proposals. He had been advised by the legal authorities that the appointment of a commission to go into the affairs of any religion would be in violation of certain sections of the Ceylon constitution Order in Council, 1946. It was revealed later that certain amendments to the original draft of this section had been made at the Roman catholic hierarchy. This amendment deterred the government from enquiring into the activities of any religious body. The perceptions of the Buddhists at the time was that the ruling UNP was according the most favoured treatment to the Roman Catholic Church because they depended on the block RC vote to retain its political power. It was believed that the party was guided by five Christian knights. This was further confirmed when Dr. Howes a Catholic actionist was appointed Director of Education. The Permanent Secretary admitted that Dr. H had discriminated against Buddhist schools in favour of RC schools in grading them.

An excerpt from the Buddhist Commission Report-1955

Tolerance

It has become almost an occupational disease among our politicians and other public personages today to exhort the Buddhist public on every conceivable occasion to be tolerant. In their ignorance, whether willful or unwitting, of our island's past history these gentlemen are deserving of our sympathy, indeed of our tolerance. For what is the history of Ceylon during the last four hundred years but a long and poignant chronicle of Buddhist tolerance in the face of oppression and

injustice? Who but the Buddhists tolerated harassment by the Roman Catholic Portugese, to give shelter and employment to Muslims? Or endured similar treatment from the Dutch to shelter Roman catholics? Who but the Buddhists tolerated the rank injustice of the foreign rulers who used the revenue from one of the sacred places of Buddhist worship, the Dalada Maligawa, to pay for the construction of St. Paul's Cathedral? Or the like injustice of destroying a Buddhist Vihara in Kotte to erect in its stead a Christian school? Who but the Buddhists tolerated the extortion from them of four hundred pounds a year for building of Christian churches? In 1884 all the Government schools which were the only schools to which the Buddhists could send their children for higher education were handed over to the Christian missionaries. Up till 1886 Buddhists paid by far the largest amount for the maintenance of the Ecclesiastical Department. The undertaking to maintain the Buddhist religion given in 1815 has been and is being grossly betrayed. In the face of all this high handedness, this riding roughshod by foreign rulers and native henchmen alike of even their most elementary human rights, when their religion was being denounced as a heathen myth, their educational institutions ruined by neglect or deliberate discrimination and their Sangha subjected to insult and humiliation, what did the Buddhists show except tolerance towards the tyrants and their helpers? Almost every page of this Report bears witness to the extent and duration of Buddhist tolerance. And yet, fully eight years after this country is alleged to have gained her independence, when the Buddhists ask for some of that justice which had been denied to them for centuries, they are characterized as a truculent majority and asked to show tolerance. By a flagrant disregard of historical fact and contemporary reality, the

Buddhists are made to appear in the light of domineering tyrants. St. Xavier's acid comment on the attitude of the Portugese comes to mind: "They seem to think that it is an injury and an insult to them if anyone dares open his mouth, while they are trampling on the rights of all kinds." Of all the great religions that have stirred the hearts and captured the imagination of mankind, Buddhism is perhaps the one which sets the greatest store by tolerance and most forthrightly condemns vengeance. And the Buddhists of Ceylon were true Buddhists in this respect, as witness the words of a non-Buddhist historian: "Tolerance towards every religion which aimed at the spiritual improvement of mankind still characterized the Buddhist spirit before the aggression of those whom it had protected and assisted had soured that disposition and compelled it to adopt arms of defense." Paul E Pieris "Ceylon and the Portugese" pgs.94-95. In its travels in various parts of the island, the committee had ample opportunities to observe at first hand the harassment and obstruction placed in the way of Buddhists in all spheres of life, education, social services, hospitals. And so the time has emphatically arrived when the Buddhists need to be strong, united and steadfast for the struggle. 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 for 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 practice our religion without let or hindrance, material or spiritual, secular or religious in a free and Democratic Ceylon.

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