Rescued from the Nation,
Returned to the Region:
Anagarika Dharmapala as South Asian

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Abstract

Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) was a Sinhala Buddhist reformer who played a formative role in modern Sri Lankan history. He revitalized the Buddhist religion and rescued his community from deracination. This part of his life lends itself to his being seen as a Protestant Buddhist, modernizer, and activist, and that interpretation has become hegemonic.

In turn it enables a particular reading of the nation and modernity. In doing so, it overlooks 90% of Dharmapala’s adult life spent in Calcutta and London, as well as his lifelong involvement with the Himalayan mahatmas and Theosophy. I want to approach him not so much as a hybridized figure linking South Asia and the West but a hybridized figure whose life was marked by the transidiomatic passage between Theosophy and South Asian religiosity.

About the speaker

Steven Kemper is Charles Anderson Dana Professor of Anthropology at Bates College. His most recent book is Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World (University of Chicago Press: 2015), an attempt to approach Dharmapala independent of the narrative pull of the nation-state. At the Asia Research Institute he is working on the emergence at the beginning of the twentieth century of two contradictory forms of Buddhist modernity—a cosmopolitan, transnational, universal Buddhism and a local Buddhism, nationalist in both its reach and political aspirations.

Date
Thursday, 17 November 2016

Time
3.00pm to 4.30pm

Venue
AS8 #04-01, Singapore 119260