

**PRIVILEGE AND POLICY: THE INDIGENOUS ELITE AND THE
COLONIAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN CEYLON, 1912-1948**

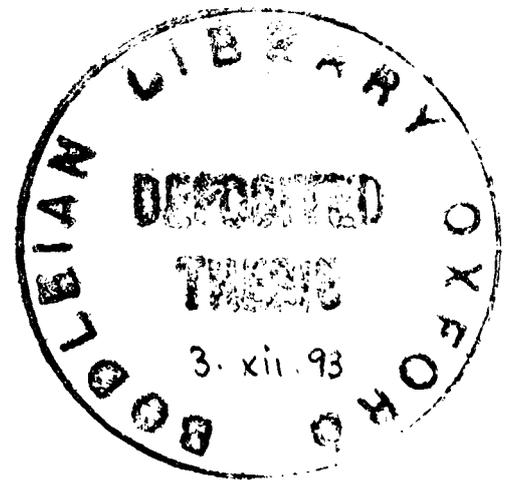
Lakshmi Kiran Daniel

St. Antony's College

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ABSTRACT

Lakshmi Kiran Daniel
St. Antony's College, Oxford

D.Phil. in Modern History
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The development of educational policies in colonial Ceylon has hitherto been examined from the perspective of either the government or missionary agencies. The role of the indigenous elite in this process has not received the attention it deserves, but merely treated as a peripheral theme. This thesis attempts to redress the imbalance by focusing on the interaction between elite initiatives and the growth of cultural nationalism as key factors in the formulation of educational policy. The many dimensions of the elite's concern with educational policy are explored. The nature of their involvement and their contribution over time are the central themes of the present study. Newspapers, contemporary journals, various school magazines, the writings of the elite themselves and transcripts of debates in the Legislative and State Councils provide an insight into the public and private opinion of the English educated Ceylonese. Chapter one sketches the social background of colonial Ceylon. It describes the plural composition of the population and highlights the importance of language and religion as components of plurality. It also identifies the economic and educational opportunities through which elite status could be acquired. The form and content of education are similarly discussed. Chapter two describes the formulation of government policy and the early contributions of the indigenous leaders. Particular attention is paid to two issues - language and the administration of schools - which emerged as problems crucial to Ceylon's educational structure under colonial rule. Chapter three traces the organizational and individual responses of the upper strata in local society to education as shaped by growing cultural nationalism. The issues of language and religion now assumed a greater degree of political significance. New techniques of opposition, including the establishment of schools and cultural associations on Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim denominational lines, are analyzed in this chapter. In chapter four the repercussions of universal franchise in the educational field are assessed. The increasing political and social aspirations of the masses became the catalyst for action on the part of the leaders, as did the ethnic and caste antagonisms that had surfaced as potentially powerful factors. In chapter five, further political developments that induced the leadership to take a bold step forward - the construction of a free and egalitarian system of education - are examined. How elite competition emerged as a determinant of policy implementation is also discussed. This thesis concludes that while knowledge of English remained the *sine qua non* for the acquisition and preservation of status, the response of the privileged social group to educational problems in the face of increasing political challenges was to ensure that the availability to the masses of an education, albeit a vernacular education remained secure.

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The formulation, development and implementation of educational policies in colonial Ceylon has hitherto been examined from the perspective of either the government or missionary agencies. Input from indigenous sources, especially the English-educated social groups, has been treated as peripheral in earlier studies and, therefore, not received the attention it deserves. The few studies concerned with the role of the elite, have assumed that they reacted to social policies, especially in the field of education, only with an eye to their self-interests. That they were deeply influenced by the growing movement of cultural nationalism, has not been denied, but the impact of this fact has been perceived to be limited to the political development of Ceylon.

This thesis attempts to redress the imbalance. What has emerged from a reassessment of the numerous educational ordinances, enactments, commissions of enquiry and official correspondence, is that the Ceylonese social and political leaders' interest in education was more than cursory. From their earliest representation to the Legislative Council, they responded very actively to the formulations of educational policy. Their stand at this early stage was often, quite

expectedly, very similar to that of the government. As challenges emerged on the political front, their contribution to the debate at times appeared self-contradictory. This was a direct consequence of their social and political evolution under the impact of burgeoning national consciousness that created a sensitivity to the needs of the masses. The initiatives that resulted from their increased cultural awareness were key factors in the development of educational policy. Thus, an examination of the many dimensions of the privileged groups' concerns about education, along with the changing nature of their involvement, are central themes of the present study. There is no dearth of information concerning the intervention of the English educated Ceylonese in educational developments. Besides their own writings, newspapers, contemporary journals and transcripts of debates in the Legislative and State Councils, offer, insights into their changing attitudes on the subject. Public and private memorials to the Colonial Office, in many instances castigating the government, are also great providers of information. Another source of elite opinions, and surprisingly untapped, are school magazines. As educational developments had its greatest impact on institutions of learning, these magazines were generally the most vociferous supporters or critics of policy, often expounded by their alumni. The reaction of the English educated to their own school days are often the most telling examples of the evolution of their ideas.

The Preface charts the variations in colonial educational policies, particularly - though not exclusively - in British territories. Two factors emerge as crucial to the formulation of policy: the local multi-ethnic context and the diverse motives of the colonizers in response to that context. The Ceylonese

experience is located within this framework of interactions. A review of the literature on the history and development of colonial education in Ceylon and their shortcomings are also discussed.

The first chapter sketches the social background of colonial Ceylon. The plural nature of society is emphasized for two reasons: first, to highlight the ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of the Ceylonese population and consequently, the heterogeneous composition of the privileged leadership and second, to establish the importance of language and religion within indigenous society. The importance of education, along with economic opportunities, are assessed as factors crucial to the formation of an indigenous elite group under the British. This chapter also discusses the traditional education system in Ceylon to indicate that historically the upper strata in local society was favoured, not only by traditional schools established by Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities, but by the Portuguese and Dutch as well. The changes to these existing systems wrought by early British policies - particularly the Morgan Commission of 1869 - whereby limited access to education for the masses became a feature of the new regime, are described.

By assessing three enquiries into the educational question between 1910 and 1926, chapter two traces the relevant developments and asks how and why the perceptions of the language issue changed over a period of about twenty years. It further examines the responses of the privileged social groups to the issue and the government's reaction to these responses.

The third chapter traces the changing attitude of the leadership to education under the impact of cultural nationalism, especially the religious

revivals that were gaining ground. There was a variety of responses, but this did not always indicate a diversity of opinion among the elite. The contribution of the revivals in the establishment of schools and cultural associations are examined in the light of new techniques of opposition against the colonial government.

In Chapter Four the repercussions in the educational field of shifting political priorities are assessed. The development in policy was largely shaped by the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission, particularly on universal franchise. The consequent enhancement in political and social aspirations amongst the Ceylonese is discussed, and so as are caste and ethnic antagonisms that had surfaced as potentially powerful factors.

Chapter five traces further political developments which induced the leadership to take a bold step forward - the construction of a free and egalitarian system of education. How elite competition determined the actual implementation of policy is also discussed. The impact of emerging communal loyalties and denominational antagonisms on the development in education is analyzed.

What emerges from this study is the complex nature of the Western educated elite's response to educational developments. On the one hand they were well aware that knowledge of English was the *sine qua non* for the acquisition and preservation of status. Their initiatives in education avoided attacks on English-medium missionary schools which had nurtured them. Instead they sought to expand the scope of instruction in these institutions to include the study of local language and culture. When their increasing political and cultural consciousness stimulated them to action, they actively sought the promotion and

extension of educational opportunities to all members of society, but ensured that such an education was in either Sinhala or Tamil. English retained its status as the language of privilege and an English education remained the preserve of the privileged in Ceylonese society.

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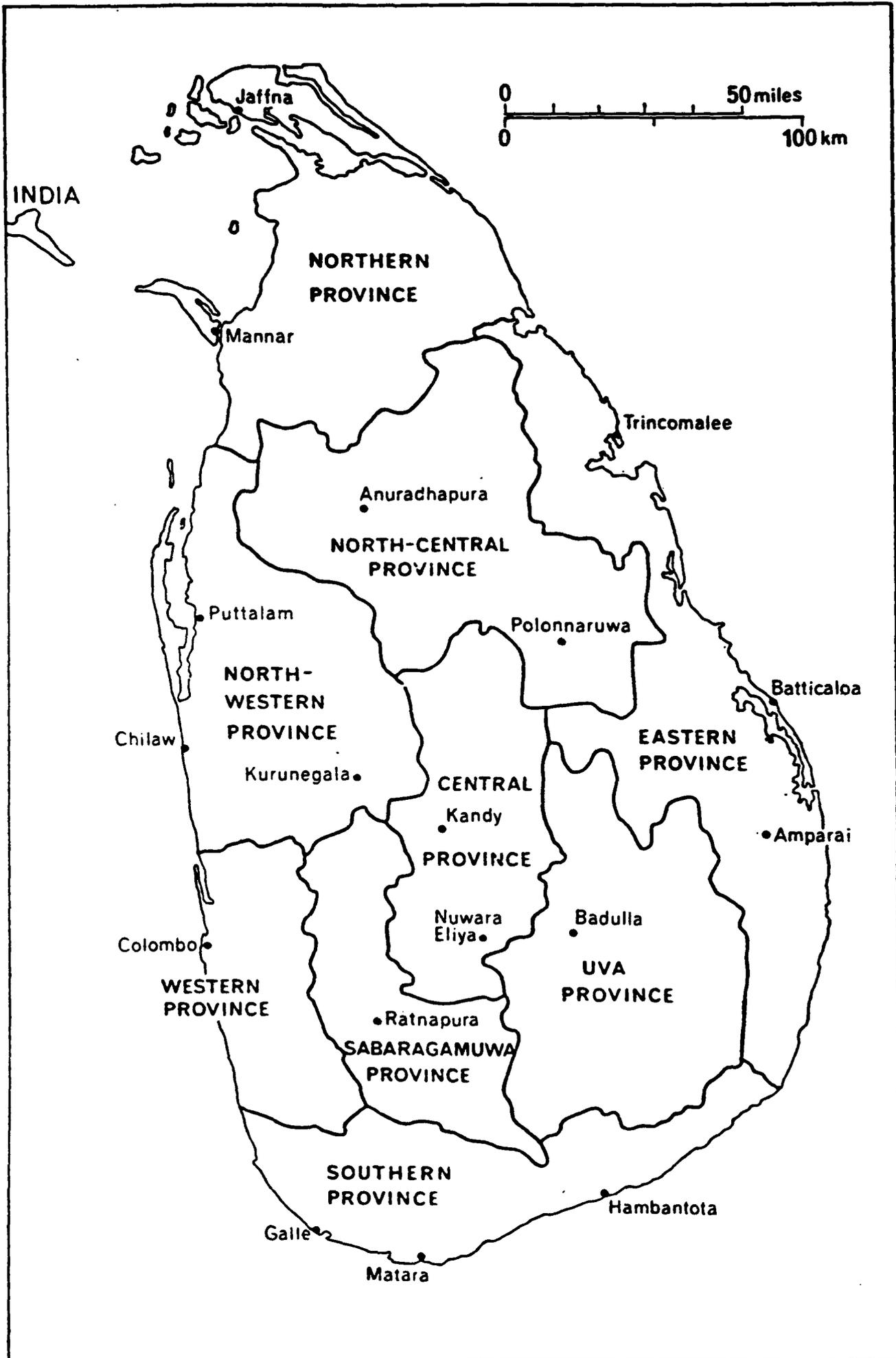
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ABBREVIATIONS

CINP	<i>Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka.</i> M. Roberts (ed.)
CML	Colombo Museum Library
CO	Colonial Office Papers in the Public Record Office, Kew, London
DCNC	<i>Documents of the Ceylon National Congress and Nationalist Politics in Ceylon, 1929-1950.</i> 4 Volumes M. Roberts (ed.)
DE	Director of Education
DPI	Director of Public Instruction
EC,CV	<i>Education in Ceylon (from the sixth century BC to the present day). A Centenary Volume.</i>
GA	Government Agent
HCNC	<i>The Handbook of the Ceylon National Congress, 1919-1928.</i> S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (ed.)
LC	Legislative Council
RH	Rhodes House, Oxford
ROHP	Roberts' Oral History Project
SC	State Council
SLNA	Sri Lankan National Archives, Colombo
UCHC	<i>History of Ceylon Volume 3 from the beginning of the nineteenth century to 1948.</i> Published by the University of Ceylon.

PREFACE

Colonial Education in Perspective

Colonial educational policies, were to a large extent, based on a common factor: the needs of the ruler, rather than the needs of the ruled. At best, the patterns of policy implementation were ambivalent. This was the consequence of a mixture of two ingredients. Firstly, the diverse and shifting motives of the colonial powers in response to internal political and socio-economic developments, and secondly, disparate local considerations. In some instances, where the colonizers found in existence a network of traditional schools, they chose either to build upon them or, alter their structures altogether. The French in Vietnam and the British in Burma and Cyprus adopted the former method, while the Americans in the Philippines, chose the latter. In each of these situations, the traditional systems of education provided for a very large proportion of the population. The policy of ensuring that literacy levels remained high, however, was modified by certain considerations. When America acquired the Philippines as a by-product of the Spanish-American War of 1898, the archipelago was their first overseas colony. What the Americans encountered was three centuries of ingrained Spanish language and Roman Catholic culture. To contend with, and counter these lingering influences, they made English the medium of instruction at all levels of education. This, they believed, was an essential measure for the co-option principle of American rule which was perceived to be crucial for ensuring the transference of loyalty. The nation-wide

education system, as conceived by the Taft Commission of 1900, was committed, on the other hand, to the expansion of literacy with a view to eventual self-government.¹

The French were confronted by a different problem in Vietnam. With colonization, the local system of education began to use its institutions as vehicles for the dissemination of increasingly anti-French sentiments in the Vietnamese language. The French strategy, unlike the American, was not to change the medium of instruction, but to re-direct the curriculum towards a more vocational orientation. Even where French was offered as the medium of instruction, the schools were not imitations of metropolitan institutions. This measure guaranteed that where mastery of both French language and culture was emphasized, it was contained within a familiar context but did not extend to the college or university stage. The British adopted an almost similar approach in Cyprus. Up to 1935 no English was taught in elementary schools, with Greek and Turkish the preferred media of instruction. Even at the secondary level, the dependence was on Greek and Turkish curricula so that pupils could gain admission into universities in both Greece and Turkey. The languages of education were also linked to religion, with the Muslim community adhering to Turkish and the Christian community studying in Greek. To the British, it seemed more beneficial to perpetuate the *status quo*, rather than overhaul a system that appeared to be functioning.

In other instances, the dominant concern of the colonial powers was

¹ T. Agoncillo, *A Short History of the Philippines*. New York:1975, especially pp. 169-191

a system that was primarily geared towards the creation of a "subordinate work force to man the lower rungs of administration as inexpensively as possible."² Education - preferably centred around knowledge of the colonizers' language - was a crucial lever by which to achieve this end. The problem of initiating such a system was frequently compounded by the pluralistic composition of the population in many colonies. In multi-ethnic, multi-religious and especially multi-linguistic communities, the colonial power was often faced with the dilemma as to which, if any, particular community should be favoured when it came to acquiring an education through the medium of the official language. The Dutch response in the East Indies was innovative. While limiting instruction in Dutch to a few schools, "designed primarily to meet the needs of the children of the upper classes for a Western education,"³ they sought to provide a complete vernacular⁴ education for the majority of the populace. In a determined effort to prevent inter-ethnic rivalry, Malay was included at the post-primary level to serve as the *lingua franca*. The few who were educated through the Dutch medium formed a very small class of persons described as the "intellectual proletariat... whose purpose in attending school had been to acquire a position in

² S. Jayaweera, "Educational Policies in the Early Twentieth Century" in *UCHC*. p. 473. For a similar discussion in India, see A. Basu, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898-1920*. New Delhi:1974, especially the Introduction.

³ R.E. Parry, "Primary Vernacular Education in the Dutch East Indies" in *Oversea Education*. Vol. XVI No. 3, April, 1945. p. 104

⁴ This depended on region, whereby Javanese, Balinese, Chinese or any indigenous dialect such as those spoken in Sulawesi or Sumatra, were considered to be the local vernacular.

the Western sphere of activity",⁵ notably in business. Colleges for higher education, including professional training, were established only in the 1920s.⁶

In other heterogeneous societies, it was from within the white settler community that the government was able to recruit local functionaries. Consequently racial considerations induced a neglect of educational developments for the indigenous communities in such places. In Mauritius, six languages⁷ were spoken widely throughout the Island. English and French were the recognized official languages, but neither formed the medium of instruction in the majority of schools. Creole, the language spoken at home by the "coloured population and... some of the Indian population"⁸ was the medium of instruction in primary schools partly for practical reasons: the arrangement helped restrict the admission of the indigenous population to the two government secondary schools.⁹ Secondary and higher education were hence the privilege of the European community in Mauritius.

The British adhered to a similar policy in Fiji, Kenya and Jamaica. Here too the settlers benefited from a policy that put them first and did not provide any advanced education for either the traditional elite or the rest of the

⁵ From a memorandum to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, Tjarda van Strakenborgh Stachouwer by the Director of Education, P.J.A. Idenburgh, 27 February, 1940. Quoted in P. Van der Veur, *Education and Society - Change in Indonesia. (1)*. Athens, Ohio:1969 p. 17

⁶ A College of Engineering was set up in 1920, a Law College in 1924 and a Medical College was established in 1927.

⁷ Creole, Tamil, Urdu, Hindi, French and English were the languages spoken on the Island.

⁸ W.E.F. Ward, Report on the "Language Problems in Mauritius" in *Oversea Education*, Vol. XII No. 3, April, 1942. p. 355

⁹ W.E.F. Ward, Report on the "Language Problems in Mauritius" p. 359

population amongst the indigenous people. This was most clearly illustrated in Fiji, where three separate systems were introduced, one for each racial group - the Fijians, the Indians and the Europeans - with "very little real co-ordination" of policy.¹⁰ The result was a very uneven system of education, its disparities enhanced by the fact that separate bodies were in charge of administering its several components.¹¹ Such a system was acknowledged even by the colonial officials as leading to "considerable overlapping and inevitable gaps which it is no-one's responsibility to fill...."¹²

What emerges, in spite of certain variations, is that the educational structures created in most colonial situations were often two-tiered, based on different media of instruction. Education in the language of the metropolis was a *sine qua non* for upward mobility within colonial society and was therefore considered a prized commodity. Exclusion from that education meant a virtual exclusion from superior career opportunities and enhancement of social status. Thus English in British colonies was proffered, first and foremost, in the hope of creating "intelligent and zealous co-operators."¹³ This type of education was necessarily limited to a small segment of the population, while the education for the majority, if at all on offer, was through the media of the local languages and

¹⁰ F.B. Stephens, Report on "Education Policy in Fiji" in *Oversea Education*. Vol. XVI No. 3, April, 1945. p. 116

¹¹ The Education Department, Fijian Tribal Provincial and District Councils, the Indian Schools' Committee and various missionary organizations each administered their own schools.

¹² F.B. Stephens, Report on "Education Policy in Fiji" p. 116

¹³ C.E. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People in India*. London:1838 pp. 189-190. Quoted in A. Basu, *Essays in the History of Indian Education*. New Delhi:1982 p. 6

that too, only up to a certain level.

Apart from concern for its practical and functional uses, British attitudes towards education were infused with a notion of cultural and moral superiority,¹⁴ which they believed justified the importation of a system from the mother country. Brelsford, when District Commissioner of Northern Rhodesia saw colonial education as a method of modernization, to replace a traditional system which, he scornfully declared, reached "its climax in puberty rites and initiation ceremonies."¹⁵ Brelsford's attitude, though extreme, was not uncommon amongst those who initiated educational policies in British territories. In fact, colonial education never pretended to be value-free. Instead, the adoption of Western values, norms and loyalties were actively encouraged. Another colonial official, Basil Fletcher, endorsed this view. He saw education as a means of:

assisting primitive or Oriental peoples to make a satisfactory mental adjustment to the novel ideas and unfamiliar spirit of... Western industrial life....¹⁶

Similar opinions held sway in the East African Protectorate. As one report stated, educational policy was aimed at giving:

these youth a plain education to lead them to adapt to the modes and habits of civilised life, to train them

¹⁴ This included cultural imperialism, social class bias and concepts of selectivity and quality in education. See S. Jayaweera, *Educational Policies and Change from the Mid-twentieth Century to 1977*. National Institute of Education: Occasional Papers in Education (2). Colombo:nd pp. 1ff Also K.Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education - A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. New Delhi:1991, especially chapter two.

¹⁵ V. Brelsford, "Some Points of Contrast Between Primitive and Civilised Theories of Education in *Oversea Education*. Vol. XV No. 1, 1943. p. 1. (I am grateful to A.M. Yakubu for pointing out, and Mr. A.H.M. Kirk-Greene for correcting, Brelsford's designation, which was incorrectly denoted in this article.)

¹⁶ B. Fletcher, *Education and Colonial Development*. London:1936 p. 4

up as Christians and bring them to adopt such habits
[as] industry and economy....¹⁷

Assimilation, therefore, was the desired result - assimilation to British culture which had very little relevance to indigenous education with its concomitant values and ideology. English-medium schools were the most important vehicles for the transmission of these values. As these schools were administered either by the government or missionaries - whom Kumar has called the "enlightened outsider"¹⁸ - the ideology that was projected was often at variance with the traditions and culture of the local people. They usually encouraged in the students a prejudiced view of their own, and other non-Western communities. In India, Lord Auckland hoped that the upper classes, educated in the English medium, would be the conduit through which their adopted culture would filter down to the masses.¹⁹

There were, however, a few exceptions to this conscious policy of acculturation. Frederick Lugard, as High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria, advocated a secular system of education in the Hausa language for the predominantly Muslim community. This kind of system, he argued in a report written in 1905, would reinforce virtues of patriotism, honesty and loyalty among the populace. He stressed that the Northern people were:

not to imbibe such Western ideas as would cause
them to lose the respect of their subjects, nor should

¹⁷ V.M. Battle (ed.), *Essays in the History of African Education*. New York:1970 p. 36 Quoted in D.N. Sifuna, *Short Essays on Education in Kenya*. Nairobi:1980 p. 8

¹⁸ K. Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education - A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. p. 14

¹⁹ Cited in A. Basu, *Essays in the History of Indian Education*. p. 9

they necessarily forego their religion.²⁰

This policy was not altogether altruistic in its inspiration. It was a reaction against mission-run English language schools in the non-Muslim South, which had, the Northern administrators believed, resulted in the increased demand for political and economic participation and power. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir Hesketh Bell, stated the position bluntly:

the colonial government wanted no transmogrification of the dignified and courteous Muslim into a trousered burlesque with a veneer of European civilisation. We do not want to replace a patriarchal and venerable system of government by a discontented and irresponsible democracy of semi-educated politicians.²¹

In spite of such a dramatic outburst, the British in general adhered to a fairly simple formula in their advocacy of educational policies: the creation of one section of the population, educated through the medium of English to serve as functionaries within the administration. Policies implemented in Ceylon were, for the most part, no exception.

Situating the Ceylonese Experience

The British found in Ceylon²² not only a population diversified by ethnicity, religion and language, but a society that already had ample experience of foreign rule under the Portuguese and Dutch. To mitigate the

²⁰ Quoted by A. Ozigi and L. Ocho, *Education in Northern Nigeria*. London:1981 p. 41

²¹ Quoted by A. Ozigi and L. Ocho, *Education in Northern Nigeria*. p. 40

²² Ceylon became the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in May, 1972. As the issues of this thesis occur before that date, the country will continue to be called Ceylon. Likewise, members of the various ethnic communities will collectively be referred to as Ceylonese.

influence of prior colonial rule, the foremost British priority was to secure a loyal intermediary group of functionaries, sympathetic to their rule. Therefore an English education was offered, but in a circumscribed form. An education in either of the two vernaculars²³ - Sinhala and Tamil - was also made available, inasmuch as very basic instruction in reading and writing (with the aim of securing converts) can be called education. Thus the two-tiered system, as implemented in other colonial societies was introduced in Ceylon: English for a few, destined to be of *elite* status and vernacular education for the rest of the populace. Such a policy resulted not only in the bifurcation of the educational system, but also of society, based on the knowledge of one language. Unlike Fiji, for example, there was no deliberate attempt by either the government or missionaries to favour one ethnic group over and above any of the others. Those who could avail themselves of the opportunity to study in English cut across ethnic boundaries. By the same token, where vernacular education was offered, it did not discriminate against Tamil or Sinhala speakers. It is my contention that as a result ethnic loyalties did not play a determining role in the establishment of colonial educational policies, particularly in the period of British rule.²⁴

The agencies responsible for the formulation of educational policy were all subject to various pulls and pressures of society and politics. The

²³ The usage of the term *vernacular* is not done in a pejorative manner, but rather in keeping with colonial language. *Swabasha* was adopted as an alternative by the nationalists in the 1930s. Sinhala and Tamil will also be referred to as the indigenous languages or individually as the mother-tongue.

²⁴ This is not an altogether popular perspective, especially in light of the current tensions in Sri Lanka. The growth of communal consciousness during the tenure of Governor William Manning in the 1920s did alter perceptions and result in each community seeking concessions for themselves. But this was a consequence more of political developments and elite competition, than any deliberate attempt by the government to sabotage educational advancement for the people.

government was particularly concerned with the creation of functionaries to work within the colonial administration. Relying heavily on missionary organizations to establish English-medium schools, the government indirectly secured two objects of their policy: first as these schools were based in urban areas and charged tuition fees, an education in the official language was restricted to a small minority; and secondly, the missionaries could pursue their own agenda of conversion. Through missionary-administered schools, an anglicized and westernized outlook was instilled, allowing for, what the government perceived to be, a clearer identification of their products with themselves as rulers. Missionary activities were not limited solely to the provision of English education. They, far more than the government, also became involved with education in the vernacular. This, they believed, would lead to large scale conversions. That they failed in this scheme had less to do with their methods than with the fact that schools were so rudimentary.

In general these policies were not unique to Ceylon, although there are some important distinctions that need to be noted. One, education was never used as a means of creating divisions in the pluralistic Ceylonese society by favouring one ethnic group. Two, thanks to its manageable size, opportunities for an education, especially in English, could be provided throughout the Island. Three, political developments in Ceylon, which allowed it to become not only the first colonial country to have elected indigenous representatives (1910), but also the first to have universal franchise (1931), meant that local participation in policy developments was higher than elsewhere. Owing to these three features, the history of education in Ceylon provides in some ways a unique case of

developments in policy within a colonial context.

Review of Literature

The literature on the development of colonial educational policy in Ceylon is extensive. The approach, however, has remained conventional, analysing the formulation of policy from the perspective of either the government or missionary organizations. While these two agencies did play a leading role in educational matters, they did not always do so without some exterior influences, either from the Colonial Office, the home authorities of the various Christian denominations, or even the indigenous leadership. There have been attempts to move beyond these boundaries and discuss the impact and legacy of colonial educational policies in other contexts. In his exhaustive study on the development of colonial educational policies, Jayasuriya accuses the British of not only adhering to their own needs, but, with the collusion of missionary organizations, of deliberately creating a disruptive, elitist and discriminatory system of education with the "enthronement of English and the devaluation of the local languages."²⁵ The privileged English-educated, Jayasuriya argues, did not on the whole involve themselves in educational developments, but were content to maintain the *status quo*. He further argues that it was not until the 1940s that a "handful" of nationalist leaders began to espouse the needs of the entire country in political and educational terms.

²⁵ J.E. Jayasuriya, *Educational Policies and Progress During British Rule in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 1796-1948*. Colombo:1976 p. 540

Sumathipala²⁶ has approached the subject with an emphasis on the contribution made by the former Minister of Education, C.W.W. Kannangara. Consequently, the development of educational policies is assessed as a battle between Christian (as represented by the government and missionary bodies) and Buddhist interests (represented by Kannangara). The actions and reactions of other members of the English-educated leadership are discussed along similar lines, thus highlighting religious cleavages more than ethnic, linguistic or even ideological antagonisms.

Jayaweera argues that educational policies, like other colonial policies were the end products of complex motivations - political power, economic expansion, cultural imperialism, religious fervour and humanitarianism. The thesis that these issues helped determine the shape and focus of policy is forcefully presented, but she stops short of blending into the equation the impact that these issues had on the indigenous population. She does, however, make the point that the colonial government had, at various stages, to accede to local pressures. but these pressures were largely conservative in spirit and as a result, so too was the government's response. The role of the privileged classes is, therefore, seen as part of their effort to preserve their own vested interests, a not uncommon reaction in colonial societies.²⁷

The patterns of colonial education have also been discussed by scholars who have placed their arguments within a wider socio-economic and

²⁶ K.M.H. Sumathipala, *History of Education in Ceylon, 1796-1965*. Dehiwala, Sri Lanka:1968

²⁷ S. Jayaweera, see especially *A Comparative Study of British and American Colonial Educational Policy in Ceylon and the Philippines from 1900-1948*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1966 pp.8ff and 292ff

political context in order to illustrate a specific point. Russell, for instance, has argued that education, like other "aspects of society" was organized on religious and communal lines as a direct result of governmental policies.²⁸ This is an approach that fits well into her general argument that communal divisiveness was deliberately encouraged by the government, especially with the introduction of the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931. Jayawardena, in her extensive study of the labour movement, concludes that it was opposition to the Christian missionaries in particular and the government in general, that shaped local responses to education. She argues that the revival movements were at the vanguard of both public opinion and the growth of nationalism that affected all levels of society. She states that the resurgence of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim identity provided the impetus to attack the bulwarks of colonial rule through denigration of the missionaries and, therefore, the entrenched system of education.²⁹

In contrast to the above approaches to the subject, Wickramasuriya offers a different line of analysis. Instead of seeking to analyze the issues from the perspective of the government or missionaries, he attempts to trace what he calls, "a tradition of radical protest" against the system of English-medium colonial education. He argues that a wide range of prominent men, including missionaries, educationists and nationalist leaders were "unequivocally opposed to the system of education in which English was the sole... medium of instruction

²⁸ J. Russell, *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931-1947*. Dehiwala, Sri Lanka:1982 pp. 287ff

²⁹ V.K. Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*. Durham, North Carolina:1972 especially chapter three, pp. 64ff

in schools."³⁰ He attributes the reason for the opposition to a deepening sense of cultural alienation felt by the English educated themselves. He acknowledges that critics of the system were a minority and that their opinions often went unheeded and unnoticed by the government.³¹ While Wickramasuriya's approach is unique, his focus is essentially on the self-interests and perpetuation of privilege by the elite educated in English.

The conclusions reached by these studies have equated the development of educational policies with the needs of the government helped along by missionary endeavours. Even where the role of the privileged leadership has been discussed, the theme has remained peripheral to the main concerns of these studies, at least for the period preceding the 1930s and 1940s. Besides, Jayasuriya ignores the diversity of nationalist opinion among the multi-ethnic elite. Even Sumathipala's focus on Kannangara has failed to explore the role of the leadership beyond the theme of a confrontation with the government and missionaries, inspired by religious ideology. He himself admits the concern of his book was more to collect, rather than analyze material.³² Wickramasuriya's premise is the most novel, but he has little to say about the interaction between the "tradition of protest" and the evolving nature of educational policies and this proves to be a conspicuous shortcoming in his work.

³⁰ S. Wickramasuriya, "Strangers in their own Land - An outline of the tradition of radical protest against English education in colonial Sri Lanka" in *Navasilu, The Journal of the English Association of Sri Lanka*. Vol. I, 1976 p. 15

³¹ S. Wickramasuriya, "Strangers in their own Land - An outline of the tradition of radical protest against English education in colonial Sri Lanka" p. 18

³² K.M.H. Sumathipala, *History of Education in Ceylon, 1796-1965*. p. viii

The Present Thesis: A New Line of Enquiry

This thesis is an attempt to investigate the growth of colonial educational policies in Ceylon from a different perspective: the mutual interaction between the initiatives of the state, the changing role of the indigenous leadership and the growth of cultural nationalism. By focusing on the participation of the privileged English-educated elite, this work will explore the many dimensions of their concern specifically for creating an equitable system of education. From their earliest representation in the Legislative Council, they took a keen interest in this area. The nature of their involvement and their contribution over time are the central themes of the present study. The formulations of policy began to take into account the needs of the majority of the population as and when the elites' political and social evolution under the impact of burgeoning national consciousness created a sensitivity to their needs. The implications of the educational ordinances have to be re-assessed from the perspective of these changes. The elite-mass dichotomy in educational development is explored in the context of these interactions rather than as a feature of a Third World society.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The prevailing wish also to have their sons acquire the English language as a means of advancement stimulates [a] general disposition with the powerful excitement of personal interest.¹

¹ CO 54/60 Governor Brownrigg to Wesleyan Missionaries, 30 January, 1820.

Composition of Ceylonese Society

Ceylonese society is heterogenous and fits the description of pluralism.¹ It is a country that is multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious. However, as there is always a subjective element in the discernment of pluralism, members of different social and cultural groups may either emphasize similarity or stress diversity in their relationships to one another. Thus, religion becomes the issue in Northern Ireland, language in Canada, ethnicity in Burundi, race in South Africa, or caste, language and religious divisions in India. It must be stressed, however, that none of these criteria of pluralism are mutually exclusive, but may overlap at various points. Pluralism has hence to be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. For the most part, the focus of pluralism in Ceylon has been concerned with the two largest communities on the Island, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Smaller communities, such as the Burghers and Moors, have tended to be excluded, or made peripheral, to the discussion.² Current rivalry between the two main communities stems, *inter alia*, from their differing claims of descent from distinctive racial stock: the Sinhalese

¹ For specific issues regarding pluralism, see especially: J.S. Furnival, *Colonial Policy and Practice*. New York:1956; L. Kuper and M.G. Smith (eds.), *Pluralism in Africa*. Berkeley:1969; C. Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*. Madison, Wisconsin: 1976; S. Smooha, "Pluralism and Conflict: A Theoretical Exploration" in *Plural Society*. Vol. 6 No. 3. Autumn, 1975. pp. 69-89

² For exceptions to this, see especially A.J. Wilson, "Race, Religion, Language and Caste in the Subnationalisms of Sri Lanka" in *CINP*. p. 471; V. Samaraweera, "The Evolution of a Plural Society" in K.M. de Silva (ed.), *Sri Lanka - A Survey*. London:1977. pp. 86-107 and O. Peacock, *Minority Politics in Sri Lanka (A Study of the Burghers)*. Jaipur, India:1989.

from the Aryans and the Tamils from the Dravidians.³

The Sinhalese are themselves divided into two groups, the Low-country Sinhalese and the Kandyans.⁴ Both groups adhere to Theravada Buddhism which has its ties to Southeast Asia, rather than to India. Religion as an ideology, both potent and emotive, was the result of what was believed to be a "special destiny" between the island of Lanka⁵ and the people themselves as keepers of the faith.⁶

The Tamil community is also divided into two groups. The larger group is known as the Ceylon (and now Sri Lankan) Tamils, as opposed to the smaller group of Indian Tamils, with both being predominantly Saivite Hindus. The Tamil language, in contrast to Sinhala - an Indo-Aryan language unique to Ceylon - is widely spoken, not only in the southern Indian state of Tamilnad, but also in Malaysia and as one of four national languages in Singapore.

By the thirteenth century, with the decline of the Sinhalese

³ The issue as to whether the terms Aryan and Dravidian can be used to denote racial groupings is debatable. Both terms are considered to be linguistic categories by various scholars. See especially R. Coomaraswamy, "Nationalism: Sinhala and Tamil Myths" in *South Asia Bulletin*. Vol. VI No. 2 Fall, 1986. p. 23 For a more comprehensive study of origin myths, see J. Uyandgoda, "Review Essay: Reinterpreting Tamil and Sinhala Nationalism" in *South Asia Bulletin*. Vol. VIII Nos. 1&2, 1987. pp. 39-46

⁴ This is essentially a geographical, rather than an ethnic distinction. The traditional homeland of the Kandyans is the highlands in the south-central and central parts of the country. The Kandyan Kingdom had remained an autonomous political unit until it was annexed by the British after a series of battles between 1815 and 1819. The Low-country Sinhalese, from the west coast and southern areas of the country, had traditionally been used as local intermediaries by all three colonial powers. The rivalries that existed between the two communities were primarily based upon access to Western models of mobility and what was perceived by the Kandyans as their adherence to an "unpolluted" faith.

⁵ From the Sanskrit meaning "Resplendent Island".

⁶ The appearance of such an ideology can be traced to the sixth century A.D. See V. Samaraweera, "The Evolution of a Plural Society" p. 87. However, the volatile nature of this ideology did not assume political dimensions until the latter half of the nineteenth century through its greatest propagandist, Anagarika Dharmapala.

civilizations at Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, the geo-political factor entered into the division of the two communities. The Sinhalese moved to the Southern, Western and Central Provinces, while the Tamils established an independent kingdom in the Northern Peninsula, and settled down on the East coast. However, these migratory movements did not bring about the total isolation of the communities from each other. Instead, social and economic ties remained connected by an underlying cultural affinity.⁷

Colonial rule through the centuries had a marked influence on the elaboration of plurality in Ceylon, linguistically and ethnically. In religious terms, Hinduism and Buddhism both lost ground thanks to arduous missionary endeavours. Roman Catholic proselytization under the Portuguese (1597-1658) was less restrained than Dutch missionary activity, but both traditional religions lost their state patronage and were weakened as a result. The Roman Catholics formed a deeply entrenched group that cut across Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic lines. With the arrival of the British in 1796, sectarian Protestantism took root. These new strains of Christianity once again had their followers among both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

An Eurasian community, the Burghers, added to the growing cultural plurality of Ceylon as a direct consequence of colonial rule. The Dutch-Ceylonese Burghers were considered more favourably than the Portuguese-Ceylonese Burghers precisely as a result of their capacity for adaptation and

⁷ V. Samaraweera, "The Evolution of a Plural Society" p. 87

transference of loyalty and allegiance to the British.⁸ Being Christian, English-speaking and miscegenational, the Burghers developed into a distinct cultural group, ridding themselves of the opprobrium of local and European society by their participation in the new structures of power.

Unlike the other communities on the island which are denoted with reference to their ethnic composition, the immigrant trading community was distinguished by their religious affiliation and are called Muslims. The Muslims, like the Tamils and Sinhalese are also heterogeneous. They were comprised of descendants of Arab traders known as the Moors, the Malays brought to the island by the Dutch and the Indian Muslim arrivals in the late nineteenth century. Their visible position in the commercial sector did not necessarily mean that they were equally discernible in other areas of society. Conversely, the Muslims seemed to have acted in a singularly unobtrusive manner. They were viewed by the Portuguese as competitors and rivals in the commercial fields. The Dutch tended to replicate their policy in the East Indies, which resulted in the compiling of a separate code of law for them based on the *Sharia*. It was only under British rule that the community as a whole became more involved in political and social developments, beyond their entrepreneurial activities.

British contribution to the extension of Ceylonese pluralism was a by-product that arose from their interest in first coffee and then tea cultivation. The highlands, in and around Kandy in the Central Province, were chosen for the development of a plantation-based economy. Short of manpower, the British

⁸ See O. Peacock, *Minority Politics in Sri Lanka (A Study of the Burghers)*. pp. 39-41

imported labour on a contractual basis from the Malabar coast of South India to work on the estates. This community, known as Indian Tamils, were indentured to Ceylon as early as the nineteenth century. Their fairly rapid development into a distinct cultural and social group was not unexpected. First, they were ensconced in a predominantly Sinhalese area and therefore unable to develop links of solidarity with the communities of Ceylon Tamils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Secondly, and more importantly, their kinship and cultural ties remained with South India and as a group, they perceived themselves to be temporary sojourners in Ceylon. Thirdly, there was the issue of caste: the labourers being of lower social status than the Ceylon Tamils residents.⁹

If it is accepted that pluralism is defined by diversity, and that ethnicity, language and religion are but determinants of such a definition, then our perception of Ceylon's plurality has to include groups other than just the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. An adequately wide perspective allows for the inclusion of the different groups in Ceylon in all manner of combinations. Thus, the Burghers *could* be included with sections of the Sinhalese and Tamils in the same group if we chose Christian faith as the basis of identity. Similarly, if a language such as Tamil, were to be the basis, members of different religious communities - the Muslims, the Hindus and Christians - would be components of the group. Though the boundaries of linguistic, religious and ethnic identification are not static but fluid, it does not mean that group definitions at a given point in time are not entrenched. As language, religion and ethnicity are

⁹ See D. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, "The Politics of the Tamil Past" in J. Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka - History and the Roots of Conflict*. London:1990. pp.107-121

but shifting determinants of cultural pluralism, their relative importance depends on changing social and political circumstances creating cultural solidarity units. Religion, language or geographical location can be the primary referents of identity at different points in time or in different contexts. Political contingency or cultural movements can induce self-conscious construction of identities emphasizing one or more of the variables.

Acquisition and Preservation of Privilege

A major factor that affected cultural pluralism and the definition of one community *vis-à-vis* another, was the spread of literacy through the education system. Access to and achievement in education was beneficial both to the group and to the individual. For an individual, an education through the language of government was inextricably linked to social mobility and acquired status. Collectively, education was crucial for high recognition in the eyes of other communities. A strong, well educated group was deemed to have a greater capacity not only to defend its interests, but to seek its share of political, social and economic rewards.

Education, as offered by British colonial rule in Ceylon, was not, however, entirely favourable to the ambitions described above. Instead, colonial education undertook a dual role that paid scant attention to community boundaries and solidarities. The first purpose of education was to ensure that amongst the indigenous community there was a class upon whom it could depend. This class had also to be able to wield a certain degree of authority within the community. It was, therefore, in the interests of colonial rule, but not

necessarily of a community's aspirations that several schools were established for the sole purpose of creating a class of intermediate functionaries. As the colonial structure could not support a large number of English-educated personnel, this type of education was limited in quantity, ensuring a cleavage in society between those who could and those who could not avail themselves of such an education. This cleavage was an unintended result of policy.

The second role of colonial education was to equip the mass of the population with a degree of "morality"¹⁰ through rudimentary instruction in the language of the locality. Financial constraints and official disinterest often made the practical provision of mass education untenable, though the ideal remained intact. Neither for English nor for vernacular education, however, did the British deliberately consider ethnicity to determine who would be granted opportunities in education. It was more by default than design that certain groups were able to secure instruction in the language of power, thus acquiring a privileged status in society.

Privileged status in Ceylonese society was not an invention of British, or any other colonial rule. A traditional aristocracy existed well before the arrival in the Island of the Portuguese and Dutch. These members of the elite were not homogeneous, either ethnically or geographically. They included Low-country Sinhalese, Kandyans and Tamils of the North and East. Their status was primarily based on the mutually inter-acting components of religion, ritual and

¹⁰ For a full discussion on the moral agenda of colonial education, see chapter two of K. Kumar's *Political Agenda of Education - A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. New Delhi:1991. pp. 23-46

caste on the one hand and land-holdings and administrative posts on the other.¹¹

As this thesis is concerned largely with the role of privileged and powerful groups in shaping educational policy in Ceylon, it is necessary to enquire into their composition. The term *elite* has been defined as a leadership group that is in possession of qualities or attributes valued by society at large. These attributes can include, individually or in combination, social, religious or political status, power, influence, authority, wealth and skill. Such qualities may be acquired through inheritance or achievement. Roberts,¹² as opposed to Singer¹³ and Fernando,¹⁴ argues that in the early period of Ceylon's history, status within the traditional elite was not so much ascribed, as achieved, through marriages, conflicts and personal skills. The ideology of ascription, he further maintains, is a logical consequence of families and persons attempting to legitimize their positions once high status in social terms had been achieved.

What becomes apparent is that membership of the privileged class requires one or more traits that are held in high esteem. Thus one can identify a range of criteria for defining various categories of *elite* and levels of privilege. A society has place for a traditional elite and an emerging elite under colonial

¹¹ This is especially valid in the Kandyan Kingdom (1591-1815). For a seventeenth century observation, see R. Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*. Ryan's edition, Glasgow:1911.

¹² M. Roberts, *Facets of Modern Ceylon History through the Letters of Jeronis Pieris*. Colombo:1975. pp. 12-15.

¹³ Especially, M. Singer, *The Emerging Elite - A study of Political Leadership in Ceylon*. Cambridge, Mass.:1965

¹⁴ P.T.M. Fernando's unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, "The Development of a New Elite with Special Reference to Educational and Occupational Background." Oxford University, 1968.

rule, as well as a local elite and a national elite. Several of these classifications overlap, so it is possible to have one particular family - the Dias Bandaranaiques, for example - to be valued on the basis of their ascriptive and local elite status for one generation, and their achieved and national elite status for another.¹⁵ Similarly, the definition could include the village school teacher as a member of the local and emerging elite at the same time.

While it has been stated that the colonial powers did not deliberately privilege one particular community over another in their quest for middlemen, inherent conditions saw to it that already privileged groups would continue to maintain their advantages. It was essential for the colonialists to cultivate administrative intermediaries in order to carry out their rule more efficiently. In their quest, they turned first to Sinhalese noblemen, or *mudaliyars*, of the *Goyigama* caste to fulfill this role. The initial requirements for engagement were simple: existing status, conversion to Christianity and proven acts of loyalty. The two latter requirements were often acquired, rather than ascribed, lending weight to Roberts' arguments.

What was considered a privileged status by tradition, was forced to undergo a re-orientation under the colonial powers. The first change derived from the position of dominance that the colonizers assumed, re-assigning the traditional power *elite* to a secondary role. By projecting themselves as an intermediary social group under the new dispensation of power, they ensured that the high valuation of their status as perceived by the rest of society was

¹⁵ This is just one of many examples of *mudaliyar* families that extended and adapted their attributes according to the shifting boundaries of elite status.

maintained. But adapting one's established status to the new opportunities that commanded status was not the sole route to the acquisition of privilege. Mobility, both social and political, was, theoretically, open to anyone who could avail themselves of the new opportunities, thus allowing for the incorporation of new members into the colonial structures of privilege. The relative openness of the road to high status did not, however, mean a swelling of the ranks. The privileged set remained a minority, set apart from the vast population, a vital fact in the basic definition of *elite*. Another point to be kept in mind and following from the first, was that with increasing opportunities for mobility, new occupations began to acquire social status. The most conspicuous examples were those of the doctor, the lawyer, the politician and the Civil Servant.

British rule transformed the traditional social, economic and political structures and its concomitant impact on the traditional class of leaders was profound. Their influence and authority were unable to cope with the crucial changes that were wrought, including the extension of lines of communication, the replacement of customary law by a metropolitan judicial system and most especially, the abandonment of *rajakariya* or compulsory service, based almost entirely on land tenure. The introduction of plantation, commercial capitalism and an export economy further reduced the powers of the traditional elite. The British had no intention of unequivocally accepting the pledges of allegiance of the former chieftains and headmen - their eager acquiescence to the new hegemony.¹⁶ In fact, as a former Civil Servant, John Bailey, wrote to the

¹⁶ The specter of the 1817-1818 Kandyan Rebellion continued to affect the British perception of those that they considered loyal. See G.C. Mendis (ed.), *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*. Vol. I pp. 51-52 and 189-211

Secretary of State: "The policy of our Government has always been to curtail the power of the Chiefs and to destroy that paramount influence which under a despotic Government they naturally possessed."¹⁷

The requirements for acquiring status now derived from the more bureaucratic, stratified form of government as initiated by the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1833. Revenue collection may have still functioned in its traditional way, but new forms of expertise were essential for coping with the demands of the colonial ruler. The most crucial skill now required was fluency in the language of administration: English. Intertwined with an English education, but less fundamental, was an ability to take advantage of, and acquiring prosperity through economic enterprise.

The new recruits tended to emerge from the ranks of the traditional aristocracy, but not without a little compromise. To borrow Kumar's phrase, "their capacity to renovate their repertoire of skills for maintaining status and power"¹⁸ induced them to gain new acquisitions and discard old attributes. Not all the members of the traditionally privileged class were able to make the transition, and for some, the reasons were not entirely self-inflicted.¹⁹ Those that did choose to adapt to the changes started with an advantage: the possession of land through patronage networks which transferred land to *mudaliyar* families before 1833. After that date the British began a series of land sales ranging from

¹⁷ CO 54/471 Bailey to Lord Blanchford, 19 December, 1871.

¹⁸ K. Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education - A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. p. 34

¹⁹ This was especially true of some Kandyan families after the Rebellion of 1817. M. Roberts, *Facets of Modern Ceylon History*. p. 20

under 50 to over 500 acres.²⁰ Not surprisingly, only a small number of non-*mudaliyars* and non-Europeans could take advantage of the purchase scheme. Don Philip Wijewardene (1844-1903) was a classic example of one who attained status primarily through acquisition of land. He bought land not only in urban areas, but in jungle tracts too, from which he supplied timber and logs to construction firms to assist in the building of Colombo. Other indigenous Ceylonese landowners played the development card and re-constituted their land to support the cultivation and growth of cash crops such as coffee, tea, rubber, coconut or cinnamon. Still others mined their land for graphite or plumbago deposits and even gems. Ultimate legitimacy was provided by a mention in Ferguson's *Ceylon Directory*, especially after 1885.²¹

Educational attainments, particularly through the English medium, was one route to privileged status that did not necessarily depend on established rank. That *mudaliyar*, *Goyigamas* - especially in Colombo, Matara and Galle - would quickly exploit this avenue and ensure that their children were in possession of the new skills and knowledge required for a position in the colonial administration was not unexpected. It was an obvious act to maintain their status in society at a time when status could be acquired through achievement and no longer depended solely on ascription. In fact this Low-country elite took to

²⁰ For an in depth discussion of land acquisitions and the private and public land markets, see, M. Roberts, "Elite Formation and Elites, 1832-1931" in *CINP*. pp. 173-177. Also P. Peebles, "The Transformation of a Colonial Elite: The *Mudaliyars* of Nineteenth Century" Unpublished Ph.d. Thesis. University of Chicago:1973. Especially chapter VI.

²¹ Roberts urges caution when referring to the *Directory* regarding the size of land-holdings, for there might have been a tendency for exaggeration since information was supplied by the families being categorized. M. Roberts, "Elite Formation and Elites, 1832-1931" in *CINP*. pp. 176-177.

acquiring an English education with such determination, that by 1863, of the Ceylonese who had entered the Civil Service, half were *Goyigama* Sinhalese. With similar dexterity as shown by the Sinhalese high-castes, their Tamil counterparts, the *Vellalas* also mastered the new language in order to consolidate their status and perpetuate their privileged life-styles. To ensure that their access to educational opportunities would not be curtailed, the *Vellalas* astutely provided financial aid towards the formal establishment of Jaffna College at Vaddukodai in 1872. The Burghers were at the forefront of those able to acquire an education in English, concentrated as they were in cities and smaller towns where English schools had been established. As such, in the early days of colonial rule, they were able to achieve a disproportionate representation in government employment and the professions.

An education in English exacerbated competition amongst the castes. The Sinhalese *Goyigamas* and the Tamil *Vellalas* could not prevent the extension of membership to what they deemed was their exclusive position in society. As a result, their antagonism was levelled against the other castes, the converts and, in some situations, the women, all of whom sought advantage through education. Of those who converted to Christianity, there were representations from all the caste groups (including the *Vellala* and *Goyigama*) but the largest number of adherents emerged from the *Karava*²² caste. As a favoured group in the eyes of the missionary, they were not only granted access to education in English, but were, as a result, able to acquire property too. The

²² The *Karava* were known in Tamil as *Karaiya*.

Karava were also active in the manufacture and sale of arrack, graphite mining and trading, apart from their traditional occupation of fishing and they controlled almost 59% of the plantation economy.²³ By acquiring an education in English, however, they were able to compete with other caste groups for political and social leadership and found openings that had remained closed to them by the traditional caste system.

In the discussion on English education, very often the Ceylon Tamils have been identified as the one community to appreciate fully the opportunities that would arise. That the literacy rate was so high on the Jaffna Peninsula has been attributed to arid lands, over population, competition for limited resources and preferential treatment by the British - all of which, it is argued, led to a great clamour for education. While none of the above explanations stand up by themselves, the support they offer each other may well account for what has been termed the "entrepreneurial nature of education."²⁴ A more stereotypical assessment of the Tamils' achievement in education was offered by Wriggins:

Tamil children were good at figures and their parents goaded them in their academic work for fear of unemployment or hard labour as the price of failure.²⁵

Ceylon Tamils were given a head start in the field of education, especially in English, as the result of zealous activities by the American missionaries who

²³ M. Roberts, "Elite Formation and Elites, 1832-1931" in *CINP*. pp. 199-200. For a more comprehensive discussion on caste, especially the *Durava* and *Salagama*, see B. Ryan, *Caste in Modern Ceylon*. New Brunswick, New Jersey:1953 pp. 107-111

²⁴ R.S. Perinbanayagam, "The Social Foundation of Educational and Economic Activity in Jaffna, Sri Lanka" in *Kailaspathy Commemoration Volume*. Jaffna:1988 p. 88

²⁵ H. Wriggins, *Ceylon. Dilemmas of a New Nation*. Princeton:1960 p. 234

established a number of schools and colleges on the Peninsula. The first school, the American Mission School, was set up in Vaddukodai in 1823 and a Medical College followed in 1847.

Apart from the Northern areas, the largest concentration of literacy in English was in the Western Province, especially in Colombo and its suburbs of Negombo, Kotte and Kalutara, again inhabited by a large number of Ceylon Tamils besides the Low-country Sinhalese and Burghers. Of those educated at the Colombo Academy, the Eurasian community constituted the largest single ethnic group. They later went on to achieve a disproportionate representation and status in government employment and the professions. The largest Sinhalese element which sought an education in English seemed, at first, to be confined to *mudaliyar Goyigama* families and not solely in Colombo. In the Wesleyan schools of Galle and Matara, children of the *mudaliyars* predominated. Among the Ceylonese who had entered the Civil Service before 1863, half were *Goyigama* Sinhalese. By 1890, there were sixty English schools in the Western Province as compared to ten in the North and twelve in the South West, most of them in Galle. Most of these schools were administered by mission organizations. In another area with a large concentration of Tamils, the Central Province, particularly Kandy, there were also twelve English language schools.²⁶ Apart from geographical location, another factor in circumscribing English education was that of expense. To send a child to board away from home was expensive, while government English schools, considered prestigious, charged elementary students a fee of three shillings. By

²⁶ M. Roberts, "Elites, Nationalisms and the Nationalist Movement in Ceylon" in *DCNC*. Vol. I p. xliv

the mid nineteenth century, students at the Colombo Academy had to pay a pound, up from six shillings.

English education, while introduced initially in order to create a subordinate work force, its purpose could not remain so limited forever. A more ambitious objective of colonial education was to reform traditional society, with its beliefs and rituals perceived to be archaic, through modern, scientific, Western knowledge. As a result, professional courses were encouraged which created new skills and services and, at the same time, enhanced the status of those who had acquired such an education. While engineering and accounting became prestigious occupations, medicine and law were accorded the highest status. Their status was enhanced by three inter-connected factors: one, the level of qualification necessary; two, the limited possibilities of acquiring such qualifications on the Island and three, the high cost of sending a prospective lawyer or doctor abroad for training. The difficulty of acquiring such education was somewhat reduced with the establishment in Ceylon of a Medical College in 1870 and a Law College four years later. Even this, however, did not alter the public's perception of either occupation. Private practice in medicine came into vogue only at the turn of the century. Qualified doctors were usually recruited into the Government Medical Service. Conversely, private practice was the mainstay of the legal profession from the outset. Lawyers, advocates and proctors were also able to seek employment within the government judiciary system and join politics. In 1881, there were 268 barristers, advocates and proctors, belonging to the Sinhalese,

Tamil, Burgher and Moor communities.²⁷ It was even possible to achieve, like the Burgher Richard Morgan, the ultimate accolade: the status of Queen's Counsel.

An English education conferred status not simply because it was an essential skill for a job. Even those who had achieved status and wealth through economic enterprise, rather than professions or in the service sector, attached great importance to education, especially for their sons. Don Philip Wijewardene, Don Spater Senanayake and Hannadige Jeronis Pieris did not themselves have the benefit of either an English or higher education, but ensured that their sons went to the best schools in Ceylon and then abroad to enhance their status. The same was done by parents, who could afford it, from the Moor, *Salagama*, *Karava* and *Durava* communities.

English education, more than any other feature of the colonial experience, helped change the character of the privileged sections in Ceylonese society. Apart from the political, social and economic mobility associated with such education, it introduced to the elite a predominantly Christian and Western ethos, even amongst those who did not convert. A contempt for 'native ways' and often mindless imitation of the English life-style were the unacceptable faces of such Westernization. Kandyan marriage customs appalled Jeronis Pieris, who wrote to his brother, "Look how barbarous the Kandyans are still! I wish all of them would soon turn Christian and leave off their old nasty customs."²⁸ Solomon Bandaranaike was described by Lady Daphne Moore, the wife of

²⁷ M. Roberts, *DCNC*. Vol. I. p. xli

²⁸ Letter to Louis Pieris, 18 October, 1854. Cited in M. Roberts, *Facets of Modern Ceylon History through the Letters of Jeronis Pieris*. p. 72

Governor Henry Moore (1944-1947) as "one of the biggest snobs" she had "ever met."²⁹ He had a habit of dressing for dinner, even when alone, "on the chance that a British visitor might drop in unexpectedly."³⁰ The most conclusive evidence of contempt for indigenous culture resulting from such attitudes, was the adoption of English as the language spoken at home, to the exclusion of Sinhala and Tamil.

Western education conferred both material and social benefits on those able to avail themselves of the opportunity. But this privileged group was not homogeneous in race, religion or even caste. In fact it never produced a united coalition of like-minded leaders. They constituted a 'class' or a solidarity group only in the sense that they were marked off by their social, economic and educational advantages from the majority of the population, uneducated in English and in many cases, without any education at all. The English educated also felt morally superior to the underprivileged *masses* and clung to this faith in superiority both to re-assure themselves of their own high status and justify it. In spite of the competition between the various castes and ethnic groups and threats from aspiring outsiders eager to achieve upward mobility, the beneficiaries of an English education remained secure in the knowledge that they had achieved the highest status open to natives.

Ceylonese society was of course not simplistically dichotomized on the basis of command over English education and its absence. Education in Tamil

²⁹ In a private letter to Jan Smuts. Cited by J. Manor, *The Expedient Utopian. Bandaranaike and Ceylon*. Cambridge:1989. p. 15

³⁰ J. Manor, *The Expedient Utopian. Bandaranaike and Ceylon*. p. 15

and Sinhala was also available and those who acquired such an education, constituted an intermediate stratum between the English educated and those who had not benefitted from any education at all. This group wielded considerable power and influence at the local level because they virtually monopolized certain occupations such as school teachers, monks and ayurvedic doctors. As such, their access to the majority of the population was more direct and, therefore, more consequential than that of the English-educated national leaders. This class of local elites did not espouse a Westernized lifestyle. However, they found that the colonial rulers were more sympathetic than their privileged compatriots to their agitations against caste discrimination and various forms of social oppression. These struggles, though older than British rule, mobilized the intermediate group to a far greater extent than the leaders of society at the national level ever appreciated. However, despite the existence of two tiers of privilege, one more accessible than the other, the absolute number of men and women with any claims to social status was very small indeed, but they came to yield power and influence totally disproportionate to their numbers.

Evolving Priorities in Educational Development, 1833-1911

In identifying the priorities of the colonial authority in the development of educational policies, three factors have to be kept in mind. The first involves the changing needs and requirements of the government. The second is their relationship with other educational agencies, most particularly the missionaries and the third factor is their reaction to local response. None of these factors were static. Each evolved over time and were not uniform in relation to

the entire social space. Each was conditioned by contingent circumstances - social and political developments - which forced both the space and course of change.

Education in Ceylon was historically associated with religion.³¹ The *pirivena* schools, started circa 243 B.C., were primarily for the Buddhist clergy to be instructed in the *Vinaya* or code of rules for monks and nuns and the *Dhamma*, the doctrine of the Buddha. Classes were conducted first in Sinhala and then in Pali. There was also a limited number of monastery schools in rural areas open to the laity. However, this education was confined to the elementary level.

In his study of early Buddhist education, Hevawasam concluded that:

Except those aspiring to be astrologers, physicians and perhaps courtiers, no laymen seemed to have entered a monastery school for higher education.³²

Similarly, the early Hindu temple schools of the 9th and 10th centuries were established to spread basic religious education in the Tamil language. By the 15th century, an academy of Tamil literature was founded at Nallur, which predictably attracted a number of Tamil-speaking Hindus.³³ The Muslims too had their own schools before the advent of the colonial powers. Their sole agency for education, the *maktabs*, were closely associated with the mosque and imparted instruction in the Koran, Arabic grammar, Muslim law and mathematics. However, as Arabic was not the mother-tongue of the Muslim population, an artificially constructed language, Arabic-Tamil, more commonly called Arabu-

³¹ See especially H. Bechert, *Religion and Development in Asian Societies*. Colombo:1974

³² P.B.J. Hevawasam, "The Buddhist Tradition" in *EC,CV* p. 1124

³³ S. Arasaratnam, *Ceylon*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:1964 p. 115

Tamil, became the medium of instruction.³⁴ Traditional education was thus restricted to a minority of the population, usually to those of the clerical classes. As such, it was a system that was narrow and closed.³⁵ Further, it was a system that created and consolidated cleavages in society which were both ethnically divisive and supportive of the elite within each community. As the media and content of education differed according to their religious association, they helped fossilize horizontal divisions in Ceylonese society separating the Buddhist, Sinhala-speaking educated groups from their Tamil-Hindu and Muslim counterparts. At the same time, the system of education also consolidated a vertical division between those who were and those who were not literate. This two-fold compartmentalization of society based on the traditional systems of religious education was further reinforced by colonial rule, albeit with some variations.

Colonial Requirements

One of the first demands that colonialism made on Ceylonese society was for indigenous functionaries. The education proffered was, therefore, geared towards this end and the traditional forms of learning had to keep pace or be relegated to a subordinate position on the educational ladder. The Portuguese were aided in their educational endeavours by Roman Catholic fathers, particularly the Franciscans who arrived in 1514 and the Jesuits who came

³⁴ A.M.A. Azeez, "The Muslim Tradition" in *EC,CV* pp. 1149-1151

³⁵ See especially, C.K. Wickremesinghe, "Sociological Implications of Ceylon's Educational Policies since 1947" Unpublished B.Litt. Thesis. University of Oxford:1967 pp. 13-14

in 1602. While the Jesuits did make some effort to impart secondary education, they limited themselves to Colombo, thereby providing the government with easier access to educated intermediaries. The more common practice amongst the Orders - an approach similarly adopted by Protestant missionaries under the Dutch - was to establish parish or village schools. The aim of these schools was the moral uplift of the majority of the population with rudimentary instruction in Catholic (or Calvinist) teachings imparted in the local languages. The few institutions of higher education were accorded full state patronage and therefore came to enjoy, in terms of both status and resources, an advantage over the indigenous religious schools and the education they offered. What these missionaries had created, with the full support and approval of the colonial powers, was a system of education that consolidated societal cleavages on linguistic and religious lines. Those who had been educated through the language of government, assumed positions that had considerable status and privilege.

The importance of missionary endeavours in the educational field, beyond the establishment of elitist schools, derived from the provision they made for "mass" education. By establishing schools in rural areas, the missionaries initiated social reform, no matter how minimal, through the educational opportunities made available to groups normally ignored. These rural schools were also the launching pad for the emergence of local elites. Thus, Ceylonese society came to be marked by a complex pattern of status and privilege, with the Portuguese, Dutch or English educated forming the smallest group.

Under British rule, Protestant sectarianism³⁶ took root and followed in the footsteps of their missionary forebears. Unlike both the Portuguese and Dutch rules where the Church and State were inextricably linked and education was a governmental concern, the British adopted specific policies of withdrawal from educational development and handed over the relevant responsibilities to the Church and mission societies. There was, however, some concern about the American Commissioners. In a letter to Governor Robert Brownrigg (1812-1820), the Colonial Office stated its view,

As it is most desirable not to admit the subjects of a foreign state to situations in the British Colonies, in which they must necessarily acquire considerable authority and influence over the inhabitants...Lord Bathurst [the Secretary of State for the Colonies] does not consider it either necessary or expedient to encourage or admit missionaries proceeding from foreign states.³⁷

This view was to change within the decade. In spite of the inimical reaction to the Americans, the *laissez faire* policy maintained by the government was one that benefited all the mission bodies. It was only after the report issued by the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission³⁸ of 1833 that state intervention in education assumed a more regular and definite form. The Commission was primarily

³⁶ The London Missionary Society was the first to arrive in Ceylon in 1805. It was then followed by the Baptist Mission in 1812; the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1814; the Church Missionary Society in 1817; the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1840 and the Salvation Army in 1885. The American Board of Commissioners, after their ejection from Calcutta in 1812, arrived in the Jaffna Peninsula in 1816.

³⁷ CO 54/59 CO official to Governor, 27 March, 1816.

³⁸ In 1822, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Robert Wilmot, proposed that a Commission of Inquiry be appointed to study the Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius and Ceylon with regard to administration, the judiciary and education. Ceylon was the third colony under review and in 1829 only one of the original Commissioners, W.M.G. Colebrooke, remained. C.H. Cameron joined the party a year later when the study was undertaken in Ceylon.

concerned with the establishment of institutions with English as the medium of instruction. The Commissioners felt that only an English education would allow for reform in the administration and judicial structures. It was also believed that it was the only instrument available to help Ceylon emerge from a feudal into a commercial society.

The teaching of English was a necessity for the new colonial rulers on purely pragmatic grounds but it had to be confined necessarily to a manageable scale. Mass education in a foreign language was not a practicable alternative. On the other hand, mass instruction in Sinhala and Tamil came to be considered equally untenable in view of the changing requirements. In fact, the Colebrooke-Cameron Report recommended the abolition of all vernacular schools.

Neither the local languages nor the traditional network of schools were held in high esteem, for the simple reason that they did not appear to be functional from the view point of the colonial regime. In a study of the educational system, the 97 government and 236 missionary schools³⁹ that were in existence, were judged to be "extremely defective and inefficient", mainly because they taught nothing "but reading in the native languages, and writing in the native character..."⁴⁰

This pronouncement indicates the Commissioners' estimation of the large majority of the population and their culture. It also implied that the local intermediate groups with vernacular education would be peripheral in terms of social status under the new regime. One of the most notable features of both government and

³⁹ R. Ruberu, *Education in Colonial Ceylon*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: 1962 p. 236

⁴⁰ Cited in G.C. Mendis (ed.), *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796-1833*. Vol. I. London:1956 p. 72

missionary schools at this point was the importance given to the propagation of Christianity in the hope of weakening the hold of Hinduism and Buddhism on the people.⁴¹ This, however, was best accomplished in the vernacular languages, it was argued. The Commissioners were more than sympathetic to this point of view, but the contradiction between the view of vernacular education as a sound means of proselytization and that of vernacular education as an ineffectual method of instruction, was not resolved. Proselytization might help resolve the problems of loyalty and acquiescence to a colonial order in so far as a shared faith would modify the 'alienness' of the new rulers in the eyes of the local population. But if this was to be achieved through vernacular education, the latter was not perceived as a possible aid to the task of administration or as a medium for the dissemination of worthwhile knowledge.

Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms

Reform under the Colebrooke-Cameron Report included the establishment, in 1834, of a School Commission composed of the Archdeacon of Colombo, other Anglican clergy and "some of the principal civil and judicial functionaries at the seat of government."⁴² The School Commission brought all government schools under its administration. It had the duty of appointing school teachers with the proviso that all appointees were "required to possess a competent knowledge of English to enable them to give instruction in that

⁴¹ K.M. de Silva, *Social Policy and Missionary Organisations in Ceylon, 1840-1855*. London:1965 p. 144

⁴² G.C. Mendis (ed.), *Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*. Vol. I p. 73

language."⁴³ This clause essentially did away with the indigenous vernacular schools of old, which were based on a parish school system inherited from the Dutch. The Commissioners envisaged the creation of an educational system that would be beneficial to all those who sought career opportunities in the reformed administrative and judicial structures. The assumption behind the theoretical principle of equality of opportunity in government service at all levels, was the availability of an education in English.

In reality, however, the relevant education became available only to a privileged few. This was especially apparent in the reduction of the total number of schools and the further recommendation that all state expenditure on local language education be stopped because the vernacular schools were seen to be a drain on the resources of government. Schools run by missionaries were obliged to fall in line with the governmental policy that emphasized English as the language of instruction. By insisting on state patronage exclusively for schools which offered education only through the medium of English, the Commissioners were unequivocally endorsing the dominant British ideology of the time. The proposals of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission preceded by only two years Thomas Macaulay's famous 'Minute on Education' in India.⁴⁴ Macaulay and the Anglicists in India saw no value at all in the entire tradition of Oriental learning. They maintained the superiority of English over the indigenous

⁴³ G.C. Mendis (ed.), *Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*. Vol. I p. 73

⁴⁴ Thomas Macaulay was a leading figure among the Liberals, who along with the Evangelicals, Liberals and Utilitarians in Britain, was concerned with education in India. It was as President of the General Committee of Public Instruction that Macaulay and the Anglicists in India condemned the entire tradition of Orientalist policy.

languages, which they argued were devoid of utility value and literary or scientific knowledge. They had, however, to contend with the Orientalists in the ranks of the British administrators who questioned such rejection and were anxious not to offend the local population. The Colebrooke-Cameron Commission was not called upon to fight any such battle.

The School Commission established as a result of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission recommendations had a the large proportion of laymen among its membership, but this did not give it a pronouncedly secular approach towards government schools. The missionary schools received unqualified support. This fact highlighted the Commissioners' aim to continue conversions through education. The government was prohibited from establishing its own schools in areas where mission schools already existed. The Commissioners were ardent supporters of missionary work and requested that the Government continue to support these. Highest tribute, however, was reserved for the American missions in the Jaffna Peninsula. The Commissioners expressed their satisfaction that the American missionaries understood, not only the importance of making English the general medium of instruction, but also "the inestimable value of this acquirement in itself to the people." The Report continued:

As the Northern districts of the island are chiefly indebted to these missionaries for the progress of education, the benefits of which are already experienced, it is but just to recommend that they should receive all the encouragement from the government to which their exertions and exemplary conduct have entitled them.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ G.C. Mendis, *Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*. Vol.I p. 74

This commendation of the Americans consolidated not only their position, but the position of those who were products of these schools. By specifically singling out the American effort in Jaffna, the Ceylon Tamils were enabled to bask in the reflected praise, made sweeter by the nation-wide publication of the Report. The Report was not so kind to British mission societies who were thought to "have not very generally appreciated the importance of diffusing a knowledge of the English language through the media of [their] schools."⁴⁶ With such stress on English as a medium of instruction, the Commission's strictures on Buddhist temple schools were inevitable:

The education afforded by the native priests in their temples and colleges scarcely merits any notice. In the interior the Buddhist priests have evinced some jealousy of the Christian missionaries but the people in general are desirous of instruction, in whatever way afforded to them and are especially anxious to acquire the English language.⁴⁷

The unqualified castigation of the system of traditional education did not help enhance the position of the rural elite. Thus the British colonial regime introduced a new criterion for social stratification - the system of education to which people had been exposed..

The proliferation of Christian schools, however, was not universally supported. In a dispatch to the Secretary of State, Governor Edward Barnes (1820-1831) pointed out that in a Christian country such as England, it was inevitable that institutions of learning should also be Christian in nature. His

⁴⁶ G.C. Mendis, *Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*. Vol.I p. 73

⁴⁷ G.C. Mendis, *Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*. Vol.I pp. 74-75

main anxiety was about the establishment of Christian schools in a multi-religious community. He wrote:

... we have, I think very absurdly carried the same system into the schools here, where the people are generally Buddhists or Hindus and one of the greatest defects of our school system is in my opinion that it 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 civilisation.⁴⁸

Criticism from the Governor did not unduly worry the Commissioners, for they knew that the Colonial Office supported their suggestions. Barnes' successor, Robert Wilmot Horton (1831-1837) who lambasted the Commission for its "crude and impractical views" regarding the re-organization of the political system,⁴⁹ was more sympathetic to their proposals on education. He too was partial towards the spread of English education and equally impressed by the standards achieved in Jaffna. He wrote to Goderich:

The attainment of the Young Men at Jaffna may justly be characterized as extraordinary - I propose to attach immediately two of these Young Men who have finished their education, to the Medical Establishment of this Colony as Sub Assistants, and I look with confidence to extreme advantage resulting from Natives so competent to learn, receiving an English Medical Education.⁵⁰

The Commissioners, supported by Wilmot Horton and the Colonial

⁴⁸ Cited in G.C. Mendis (ed.), *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796-1833*. Vol.II London:1956 pp. 31-32

⁴⁹ G.C. Mendis, *Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*. Vol. II p. 40 The Commission advised that the advisory council be replaced by two councils of government, an executive and legislative council to help with administration, which would curtail the Governor's absolute power and authority.

⁵⁰ CO 54/118 Governor Horton to Secretary of State, undated.

Office, were able to secure the abandonment of the small number of Sinhala and Tamil schools administered by the Government and five English schools were established, one each in the major municipalities of Colombo, Chilaw, Galle, Jaffna and Kandy. Thus, the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission Report introduced a utilitarian emphasis in education with a moral undertone. Colebrooke and Cameron believed that an education in English would lead to employment opportunities as available under colonial rule and also facilitate the smoother running of the colony. Their reservations concerning the mission schools teaching in vernacular were modified by their sympathy for proselytization.

The Problems of Language

Such a policy - advocating "English-only" - could be strictly adhered to for only a short time. Local elites, stung by the off-hand manner in which they had been made peripheral, lobbied together with mission societies to re-establish vernacular-medium schools. As a result, the government established four Tamil-medium schools in the Northern Province and one Tamil-medium school for girls in Colombo. No doubt the government was grateful for the intervention of the missionaries and local people of middle-ranking status, for the financial pressures of providing education only through English was increasing beyond the expected limits. But the government continued to manage thirty-five English schools, while completely withdrawing from providing education in Sinhala.

As for the English-medium schools, their position too was not beyond controversy. First, the government had to close its own schools in areas where mission run English-medium schools were already established. Second, the

English schools themselves had their own hierarchy. At the bottom of the ladder were elementary schools which offered basic knowledge of the three R's. Upper-middle rung schools, known as Central Schools, set up in Colombo, Jaffna, Galle and Kandy, offered both practical as well as literary instruction. The government's educational show-piece was the Colombo Academy. The school was established in 1835 as a private institution by the Church Missionary Society, under the guidance of Reverend Joseph Marsh. It came under government control the following year after the Burgher community in Colombo entreated Governor Wilmot Horton to provide assistance "in the formation of a permanent Institution for affording their [Burgher] children the means of a liberal education."⁵¹ There were no rivals to the Colombo Academy, until the establishment of the missionary administered St. Thomas' College in 1851. Missionaries sought the demise of the Academy, which stood in the way of their acquiring the monopoly of quality English-language education. However, the pressure of its alumni saved the school.

The government itself was plagued by doubts on the language issue. As opinion on this matter varied from one Governor to another, implementation of policy remained ambivalent at best. While James Stewart-Mackenzie (1837-1841) advocated education through the vernacular,⁵² his successor, Colin

⁵¹ L.J. Gratiaen, *The Story of Our Schools*. Colombo:1927 p. 9 Cited in K.M.H. Sumathipala, *History of Education in Ceylon*. Dehiwala, Sri Lanka:1968 p. 12 In 1881, Colombo Academy was re-named Royal College.

⁵² CO 54/179 In a letter to the Secretary of State dated 11 March, 1840, the Governor argued that the Ceylonese must be made to "read in their own language" before learning English. See also CO 54/173 Minute of Stewart-Mackenzie to the Executive Council, 14 December, 1839. Enclosed with Despatch to Colonial Office, 16 December, 1839,

Campbell (1841-1847), adhered to the official policy.⁵³ The Colonial Office meanwhile re-affirmed their commitment to the promotion of English:

[It would be] unnecessary for the government to direct its attention to devote the funds available for education to instruction in the native languages and that the preferable plan would be to encourage the acquirement of the English language by conveying instruction in that language to the scholars, both male and female, in all the schools conducted by the government.⁵⁴

This was in spite of economic constraints and local pressures, particularly from the missionaries.⁵⁵ The problem was compounded by the Central School Commission being forced to pass a resolution entreating elementary schools to provide "the means of giving instruction in the native languages so as to afford the necessary preparation for English education"⁵⁶ Developments in India around the same time prompted the government, especially the Governors, to modify their original hostility to vernacular education. By 1847, thirty new vernacular schools were opened. These were schools with a limited curriculum that could not compare with their English-medium counterparts. Acting Governor, Emerson Tennent justified the mediocre standards in a letter to the Secretary of State:

⁵³ CO 54/188 The Governor wrote to the Secretary of State on 26 May, 1841 that it was the duty of the School Commission "by every means in their power, to promote the education in the English language, of their fellow subjects of all religious opinions."

⁵⁴ CO 54/184 Under Secretary of State, James Stephen, to Governor Stewart-Mackenzie, 15 October, 1840.

⁵⁵ CO 54/181 Letters to Stewart-Mackenzie from both the Bishop of Madras (25 May, 1840) and Reverend Gogerly (12 August, 1840) who supported the introduction of vernacular education in Ceylon were included in Despatches to the Secretary of State.

⁵⁶ *Central School Commission Report, 1844-1845*. Cited by J.E. Jayasuriya, *Educational Policies and Progress*. p. 172

I trust the result may be such as to justify the opinion which is gaining ground among thinking people, that education in the vernacular, is likely to do more for the improvement of the character and usefulness of the natives than attempts to impart a knowledge of English in places where there is no demand for it and where the little that is learned at school is soon forgotten on learning it.⁵⁷

It is important to note that the vernacular schools established in 1847 did not initially charge school fees. A retrenchment measure taken the following year introduced fees in boys' schools but not in girls' schools, but this measure was abandoned in 1852. In 1849 a new category of schools was created. These mixed or Anglo-Vernacular Schools epitomized the uncertainties and ambivalence of the government's language policy. They were to provide instruction in the vernacular at the primary level before progressing to English. In practice, however, 'Mixed Schools' functioned almost entirely in English with a serious neglect of Sinhala and Tamil. There were a few exclusively English-medium schools which were centred around urban areas. As they charged fees, access to them was limited and they remained the preserve of the Burgher population whose mother-tongue was English, and of the upper classes in other communities.

Missionary Schools

In spite of shifts and ambiguity in government policy, the one constant was the high status associated with English language schools. Therefore the main agency involved in education was the mission societies, who competed

⁵⁷ CO 54/235 Acting Governor to the Secretary of State. 10 May, 1847.

with each other to establish institutions that measured up to the status imposed on them by policy formulations. They were greatly helped by the Central School Commission's scheme for grants-in-aid. The Commission made their bias towards missionaries known, when in 1852, a request for a grant from an association of Jaffna Hindus was rejected. A typical assessment of mission education described it as "strictly scriptural" with the Bible as "the text book of the schools." Children were taught to "reverence it; not as something which they are at liberty to believe or disbelieve at pleasure, [but] as the only book which points out a remedy for the defects and disorders of the human race...."⁵⁸ St. Thomas' College in Colombo was the earliest and most prestigious of all English-medium mission schools. Established in 1851 by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, St. Thomas' saw its role as one "to bring about a *renaissance* in the new generations."⁵⁹ Reverend Baly, the first Warden, was no less ardent in his views as to the purpose of the College. He wrote in 1854:

The design of this institution is to introduce into Ceylon such a complete system of education, preparatory to the study of particular professions, as may render it unnecessary for young persons who wish to acquire the higher branches of instruction to leave the island.⁶⁰

St. Thomas' was one of the few premier English language schools that actually taught Sinhala and Tamil, even if for a short time. Instruction in the vernaculars was dropped in 1859 when the College became affiliated to Calcutta University.

⁵⁸ J. Selkirk, *Recollections of Ceylon after a residence of nearly thirteen years; with an account of Church Missionary Society's Operations in the Island and extracts from a Journal*. London:1844 p. 348

⁵⁹ W.T. Keble, *A History of St. Thomas' College, Colombo*. Colombo:1937 p. 179

⁶⁰ Cited in W.T. Keble, *A History of St. Thomas' College, Colombo*. p. 181

Another mission school of high repute was Trinity College, Kandy. The school had an inauspicious start. Founded in 1823 by the Church Missionary Society, and known as the Kandyan Collegiate School, it was forced to close in 1863. Less than a decade later, in 1872, the school was re-opened, under a new name, Trinity, by "Christian men to serve a Christian purpose", but that purpose went beyond proselytization. At its inception, Trinity did teach Sinhala and Tamil after school hours, but it was not until the school's most outstanding Principal, A.G. Fraser's arrival in 1904, that such instruction became firmly entrenched. He hoped that if Trinity could base its "education on the Vernaculars whilst teaching English thoroughly...the transition from village schools to college" could be made easier. Fraser firmly believed that fluency in the mother-tongue would produce national leaders,⁶¹ who importantly, would not be "isolated from the masses of their own people by the ignorance of their language and thought...."⁶²

Other important missionary schools included, Kingswood College, also in Kandy, founded in 1891. Unlike Trinity, Kingswood did not find it necessary to teach either of the indigenous languages. The founder, L.E. Blaze, wrote that "Sinhalese did not form part of our curriculum."⁶³ Another missionary school, Wesley College, Colombo, founded in 1874, was proud of its service to all the communities on the Island. At the College's 50th anniversary, Principal Henry Highfield's wife compiled a register of Old Boys (1874-1924), in which she noted with obvious pride, the tolerance of the College, not only

⁶¹ RH Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 283 A.G. Fraser Box II, "Secular Education in India and Ceylon" 9 July, 1908.

⁶² SLNA 25.17/14 *Trinity College, Kandy - Souvenir of the 75th Anniversary*. Kandy:1947 p. 21

⁶³ Cited in W.T. Keble, *A History of St. Thomas' College, Colombo*. pp. 173-174

towards other ethnic groups, but non-Christian religions as well:

Wesley College throughout its long history has served all communities. Sinhalese, Burghers, Muslims and Tamils have all been welcomed. They have all had equal opportunity. Ananda the leading Buddhist College in Ceylon, has been served by two Wesleyites....[and] the present Manager of Zahira, the leading Muslim Boys' College is...[also] an old boy of Wesley.⁶⁴

Roman Catholic education in Ceylon had, under the British, been confronted by the problem of language in two ways. First Catholic education was pioneered by missionaries from non-English speaking countries. Secondly, Catholic schools were established more specifically for the purpose of proselytization, best achieved through the vernacular. With the Government's declaration of English as the official language, the Catholic mission found itself in a quandary: it needed to compete with Protestant English-medium schools which were attracting large numbers of Catholic children - particularly, but not exclusively, Burghers - yet they could not entirely abandon vernacular schools.⁶⁵ The situation was improved by the arrival of Catholic fathers from Britain and Ireland. The two renowned English-medium Catholic schools were, St. Anthony's College in Kandy established in 1853 and its sister institution, St. Joseph's College, Colombo, set up in 1886.

There was an abundance of educational institutions on the Jaffna Peninsula as compared to any other part of the Island equal to it in size and population. The majority of the schools established and administered were by

⁶⁴ SLNA 25.17/10 *The Double Blue - Wesley College, Colombo -Diamond Jubilee Number, 1949.* p. 21

⁶⁵ SLNA 25.17/22 *The Antonian Centenary Number.* St. Anthony's College, Kandy, 1952-1953. p. 37

British missionaries. The most famous exception, not just in Jaffna, but in all Ceylon, was Jaffna College. The forerunner of Jaffna College was the Batticotta Seminary, reputedly one of the first colleges in Asia to offer higher education in English.⁶⁶ It was established on 22 July, 1823 by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, representing the Congregationalists. In 1830, the Seminary requested the government for a charter to award degrees, a request that was turned down. The Seminary continued to thrive for a further twenty-five years, until a deputation from the Mission's Home Office issued a report critical of the institution's perceived move away from religious teaching.⁶⁷ This resulted in the the closure of the Seminary in 1855. Like the Kandy Collegiate School, the Seminary was re-vamped, re-opened and re-named. Jaffna College was formally established in 1872, affiliated to the universities of Madras and Calcutta and authorized to grant degrees.

St. John's College in Jaffna was set up by the Church Missionary Society in 1823. A sister girls' schools, Chundikuli Girls' College, was established circa 1890 by the wife of Reverend Carter, Principal of St. John's. The Methodists established Jaffna Central College and Hartley College, while the Roman Catholics founded St. Patrick's College and Holy Family Convent. As one contemporary observer noticed:

On the Main Street of Jaffna, on a stretch of one kilometer, there are six leading schools; three boys'

⁶⁶ Cited in W.R. Muelder, *Schools for a New Nation: The Development and Administration of the Education System of Ceylon*. Colombo:1962. p. 186

⁶⁷ A. Vimalachandra, *The American Contribution to the Development of Tamil Language in Ceylon*. Mimeographed paper presented at the International Conference of Tamil Studies: University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1966. p. 8

and three girls', all established by the missionaries. Even in Colombo, or for that matter, anywhere else in the world have I seen such a concentration of schools.[sic]⁶⁸

Political Aspirations

The Colebrooke-Cameron Commission Report did more than reinforce cleavages in society through their recommendations on the medium of instruction. It gave vent to competition amongst the privileged by ushering in Ceylonese participation in politics.⁶⁹ The first indigenous members of the Legislative Council were representatives of three communities: the Sinhalese,⁷⁰ the Ceylon Tamils⁷¹ and the Burghers.⁷² There was no distinction made between the Low-country and Kandyan Sinhalese at this point. As only three nominated individuals representing the entire populace of the Island were counter-balanced by a majority of members who were executive officials, the government considered itself in no danger of having its policies undermined by the new political *elite*. The Commissioners also recommended that the indigenous population should be allowed to enter several branches of the public service and

⁶⁸ Private correspondence with Dr. E.S. Thevasagayam, Principal, St. John's College, Jaffna. December, 1990.

⁶⁹ Executive and Legislative Councils were established, with the Executive chamber maintaining governmental authority with the Governor at the helm. The Legislative Council was to consist of government officials and six nominated unofficial members. The most consequential aspect of its composition was that of the six unofficial members, three were to represent the European interests (general, planting and mercantile), while the other three were represent the interests of the indigenous population.

⁷⁰ The first Sinhalese representative was J.G. Philipsz Panditharatne who served until 1843.

⁷¹ Arumugam Pillai Coomaraswamy.

⁷² J.C. Hilebrand.

the lower echelons of the judiciary. The novelty of this approach was not as radical as it seemed at the time. Military rule in Ceylon had ended and the Kandyan Kingdom had been annexed and unified with the maritime provinces in the Island. More importantly, however, the British were in need of reducing expenditure. As Cameron commented, if the object of providing "Native functionaries the skill and integrity necessary to render them fit for becoming Judges..." was successful, then "a very great saving of expense will ensue."⁷³

With the perceived need to have "native functionaries" join all the branches of public service, an education in English acquired fresh importance as a means to achieve and consolidate status because a thorough knowledge of English was the essential pre-requisite for recruitment. Of all the occupations made available, the role of the Civil Servant held the most allure. The Civil Service, because of the difficult entrance requirements, became synonymous with prestige, power and skill - values that were highly prized by society at large. From 1870, entrance to the Civil Service was determined by examinations held simultaneously in London and Colombo, a practice that lasted for ten years. From 1880, aspirants had to compete in London. Under this new arrangement of holding examinations only in London, opportunities for local candidates were severely restricted. The few affluent Ceylonese families, who could afford the expense of sending their sons to England, came to enjoy an undue elevation in their status. The prestige they acquired was far above that of other members in the privileged sections of society. Inevitably, therefore, it became an object of

⁷³ G.C. Mendis, *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*. Vol. I. p. 374

deep resentment to the *less* well-off within their social group. The two scholarships that were made available for deserving English-educated Ceylonese who could not otherwise afford to study in Britain, caused more ill-feelings over these crumbs of privilege for which large numbers had to fight. Arguments for restricting recruitment to those who could make the journey to Britain were not lacking. As Governor James Longden (1877-1883) argued, it was essential that candidates should have a wide perspective. He believed that:

it was impossible for any young man without leaving the Island to shake himself so free of local ties and feelings of caste prejudice and insular narrowness as to acquire any independence of thought.⁷⁴

The procedure of recruitment in London lasted until 1891 when it was again possible to apply for the job in Colombo itself. By 1898, of the 1,084 appointments made in the public services, 894 were held by the Ceylonese.⁷⁵ Indigenous representation in the Judicial Department - as Law Officers of the Crown and on the Bench - and Medical Service was also large. As many of these jobs offered high remuneration by local standards - from £50 *per annum* for the lowest level clerk to £300 *per annum* for clerks in the Colonial Secretary's Office - the clamour for an English education was great.

Thus, in the aftermath of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission Report, the government's commitment to the spread of an English language education was reinforced. Along with local pressures for the spread of English in rural areas, the missionaries were prompted to re-think their position on

⁷⁴ CO 54/524 Governor to Secretary of State Kimberley, 13 October, 1880.

⁷⁵ For further details of the early development of Ceylon's Administrative System, see P.D. Kannangara, *The History of the Ceylon Civil Service, 1802-1833*. Dehiwala, Sri Lanka:1966

education in the vernaculars which had been adopted as the most likely means towards conversion. To induce children to stay away from temple and monastery schools, English as a subject was offered. However, even this minimal teaching of English in rural areas was viewed with some caution by the missionaries themselves. There were also detractors of official policy from among educationists, English-educated Ceylonese and government officials. Their views were best expressed by a Master at Colombo Academy, Walter Sendall. In 1867, he reported that the education system had produced:

a class of shallow, conceited, half-educated youths who have learnt nothing but to look back with contempt upon the conditions in which they were born and from which they conceive that their education has raised them, and who desert the ranks of the industrious classes to become idle, discontented hangers-on of the Courts and Public Offices.⁷⁶

Certain missionaries and government officials based their arguments against the spread of English on grounds of potential dangers to colonial rule. An education in the language of government amongst the "lower classes", they feared, would create social, political and economic aspirations that could not be fulfilled, resulting in frustration and possible revolt. The Archdeacon of Colombo, Reverend S.O. Glenie described the harsh reality, as he saw it, in a magazine article: "[t]he evil of educating individuals *above*, if we may use the word, their probable sphere in life, has been largely experienced already in European countries where education (as in Germany) has been universally bestowed."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Quoted in W.T. Keble, *History of St. Thomas's College, Colombo*. p. 178

⁷⁷ S.O. Glenie, "Hints towards the promotion of Education in Ceylon" in *Ceylon Magazine*. Vol. 2 No. XVII, January, 1842. Cited in E.F.C. Ludowyk, *The Modern History of Ceylon*. London:1966 pp. 127-128

Government Agents also complained, especially in their district reports, of rural youth educated in English abandoning their "paddy fields" for "some small government post the demand for which just now is far in excess of the supply."⁷⁸

Morgan Committee Report

To offset the confusion and contradictions of the language policy, a Sub-Committee of the Legislative Council was appointed on 14 October, 1865, to "inquire and report upon the state and prospects of education... and any improvement that may be deemed advisable to make thereon."⁷⁹ The Morgan Committee Report, as it came to be called, can be considered a landmark in the history of education in Ceylon. For one thing, it was the first time that the English-educated Ceylonese participated in the formulation of an educational policy. Named after the Queen's Advocate, Sir Richard Morgan, the Committee included Surveyor-General A.B. Fyers, J. Parsons the Collector of Customs and two unofficial members of the Legislative Council, Mutu Coomaraswamy and J. Martenz. Further, the Report laid the foundation for a system of education that remained in force until the end of British rule: vernacular education for the masses and an English education for the minority.

To help with their enquiries, the Morgan Committee issued a questionnaire soliciting the opinions of some forty-three persons. The government

⁷⁸ E. Penyquick, Report on Kegalle District in *Administrative Report*, 1876. p. 45 and P.A. Templer, Report on the Puttalam District in *Administration Report*, 1877. pp. 27-18. Cited in L.A. Wickremeratne, "Education and Social Change, 1832-1900" in *UCHC*. p. 181

⁷⁹ *Sessional Paper* VIII of 1867, p. 5

officials, educationists and clergy who were consulted, were asked to comment specifically on the function and desired norms of vernacular education, apart from the extension of grants-in-aid and utility of a Schools Commission. In view of the growing numbers of semi-English-educated unemployed, the respondents were in general agreement that the attempt to use English as a universal medium of instruction had been unrealistic, ambiguous and inadequate. They advocated that vernacular education be expanded and that the government play a greater role in its development. As the Headmaster of Galle Central School, J.E. Anthonisz, stated in his reply:

If the aim of the government... be education of the population of this Island, vernacular education must necessarily form a part of their programme. There is no other language in which the masses of the people could be instructed; and to instruct them, and raise them in their scale of civilization, is clearly both the duty and interest of their ruler to do.⁸⁰

The argument was not so much for a dramatic shift in policy, as for a realistic recognition of the existing state of affairs. By the time of the Committee's appointment, there were sixty-four government schools in which the medium of instruction was either Sinhala or Tamil. The government further administered forty schools that taught in both English and one of the indigenous languages. The premier government English-medium school, Colombo Academy, taught students up to the secondary level - the only government school to do so. The missionaries had control of eighteen English-medium schools, while Buddhist and Hindu temple schools continued to provide basic skills in reading and writing in

⁸⁰ *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*, p. 85

the child's mother tongue.

The Committee welcomed the response of those who urged the spread of vernacular education, arguing that mass education in English was both expensive and impractical. However, vernacular education meant only elementary education⁸¹ "whereby the rudiments of knowledge could be conveyed to the mass of the people in their own tongue." Its object was "a very simple one.... It is to impart primary education, *and nothing beyond this* in the Sinhalese and Tamil languages.⁸² The government envisaged the establishment of vernacular elementary schools throughout the country, charging at best a nominal fee.⁸³ Mission bodies assumed almost total control of English education, while government resources were geared towards the spread of vernacular education. To facilitate the spread of Tamil and Sinhala schools, the government systematically closed its own English and Anglo-vernacular schools which were close to English-medium schools run by this missionaries.⁸⁴ This, it was argued, would allow for the concentration of governmental resources entirely on the spread of vernacular education. Missionary schools charged a tuition fee which the average person found impossible to meet. Anglo-vernacular schools were also to be re-vamped as a result of the Morgan Commission Report.

⁸¹ This legislation in elementary education was based on the principles stated in the Wood Despatch initiated in India.

⁸² *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*, pp. 11-12 My emphasis.

⁸³ This policy was influenced by Lowe's Revised Education Code of 1862 which was directed towards the provision of cheap elementary education for the masses in England.

⁸⁴ Examples of this procedure took place between 1879-1881 when two Kandyan schools, the Central School and the Superior Girls' School, were shut because of Trinity College's thriving condition.

They were expected to "occupy a middle place between the purely vernacular and the purely English Central School, and serve as a stepping stone from one to the other."⁸⁵ Provision of education in English undertaken by the government was restricted to the Central Schools established in Colombo, Kandy and Galle, not excluding the Colombo Academy.

In spite of the avowed policy that vernacular education be made wide-spread, the Committee was reluctant to allow Buddhist and Hindu educational bodies to establish and administer their own vernacular schools. This contradiction between stated objectives and actual policy, led to heated exchanges between the Committee and several government agents posted in areas where monastery and temple schools thrived. In their response to the Committee, the government officials strongly advocated the retention of vernacular education in the hands of the Buddhist monks and Hindu priests. J.W.W. Birch, the Assistant Government Agent at Hambantota, pronounced the following indictment against government vernacular schools:

The vernacular schools as kept up by the Government are generally next to useless and will ever be so under such masters as you in general find in them.

He was more impressed with the Pansalas where "the vernacular is sufficiently well taught."⁸⁶ Birch was supported in his views by Thomas Steele, the Policy Magistrate of Kandy⁸⁷ and the Deputy Queen's Advocate, G.F. Nell.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*, p. 13

⁸⁶ *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*, p. 97

⁸⁷ He noted that vernacular teaching by Buddhist priests was "praiseworthy." *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*, p. 77

The highly anglicized Morgan Committee sharply rejected any implied suggestion that these indigenous schools be retained. It argued that:

[t]here is scarcely any useful knowledge disseminated in such schools, and what ever is taught in them is so intertwined with error and superstition, that the aim and end of all Primary Instruction would be defeated, if it were left to be propagated by the teaching of either Buddhist or Hindu priests.⁸⁹

This prejudiced response illustrated the incongruity inherent in their attitude: wide-spread vernacular education was the stated goal, but it was only to be dispensed by their own agencies. In an effort to attract mission bodies back to vernacular education, the government turned a blind eye to proselytization. This was done by omitting in practice the requirement of a conscience clause. Missionary schools were, thus, offered grants for "secular" instruction. This meant that any religious teaching that was offered was ignored by the government and its inclusion would not hinder its application for a grant. Mission bodies reacted favourably to this offer as financial difficulties had begun to interfere with their educational activities. With government grants, they became the key vehicle of educational expansion, especially in rural areas. The grants were made in spite of increased military expenditure by the government.⁹⁰ In 1869, only twenty private schools received governments grants. By the end of the century, there were 1,328 schools which did so, of which over 1,100 were run by mission bodies.

⁸⁸ Vernacular instruction in Temple schools was commended for being "very efficient". *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*, p. 118

⁸⁹ *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*, p. 13

⁹⁰ Between 1866-1867, £160,000 was spent on the military, while £14,873 on education. cf. J.E. Jayasuriya, *Educational Policies and Progress*. p. 175

The government was also able to argue that state support for proselytization had been withdrawn and that the policy had been replaced by one of purely *secular* education. The recommendations of the Morgan Committee Report were accepted by the Legislative Council in 1868. One specific proposal prescribed the abolition of the Central School Commission and the establishment of a Department of Public Instruction.⁹¹ The new Department was more effective, in that it actively formulated and, to a lesser degree, implemented an Island-wide educational policy.

The Backlash

By February 1869, the Director-elect of Public Instruction, John Stuart Laurie, had arrived in Ceylon. After a four month tour of the Island, he sent Governor Hercules Robinson (1865-1872) a critique entitled, "Special Report on the State of Public Instruction in Ceylon."⁹² The Report was a catalogue of suggestions for change beyond those listed by the Morgan Committee. Out of the more than thirty-five recommendations set out by Laurie, two were quite radical in their implication and had a direct bearing on the notion of privilege as had become established in Ceylon. The first was that potential teachers should be provided proper training and that those who were currently employed be examined for an assessment of their ability. Laurie linked the proficiency of teachers to the payment of grant-in-aid, a suggestion that met with vehement

⁹¹ *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*, p. 25

⁹² *Sessional Paper V of 1869*.

protest from the missionaries. They were supported by the Colonial Secretary who considered Laurie's recommendation both inherently "objectionable" and something that was "likely to provoke irritation on the part of managers of mission schools."⁹³ It would be reasonable to interpret such a strong objection as an indication that there were many poorly qualified teachers who would not only lose their jobs, but prevent mission schools from securing financial aid. Until this point, mission bodies had been the sole authority over their schools. Laurie was instigating what could have been construed as governmental intervention into the running of the mission schools. In spite of the Colonial Secretary's objections, however, a Normal School for the training of efficient teachers was established in 1870 with ten candidates in the English stream and double that number in the vernacular classes.

The second important point raised by Laurie, pertained to the cost of education, especially in relation to the favoured mission schools which taught in English. He was particularly concerned with the disproportionate "extent to which aid is offered by the Government towards the expense of the classes who might reasonably be expected to defray their own expences." In a vitriolic attack, Laurie wrote:

If it be correct to assume (and I am assured by the best authorities that it is so), that the various grades of schools, on the whole, correspond with the various social grades, i.e., the pecuniary status of the community, it follows that the present mode of distributing the public money is altogether in favour of the well-to-do.

⁹³ *Sessional Paper V of 1869*, p. 49

He continued:

Again, unless the subtle idiosyncrasies of Orientalism (of which I have been duly and abundantly forewarned) have nought to do with the domain of logic, I trust I am warranted in repeating the Western maxim (which, after all, came originally from the East) that charity, and especially public charity, should be extended to the poor in preference to the well-to do.⁹⁴

To give clarity to his argument and illustrate the imbalance in government expenditure, Laurie drew up a table⁹⁵ and strongly suggested that the pattern of distribution should be reversed.

The disproportionately large grant made to the government's own school Colombo Academy, Laurie argued, was indicative of the contradictions in the attempt to create a mass education system in the vernacular. He endorsed a plan by which students attending select schools would have to pay increased fees⁹⁶ and with the support of the Colonial Secretary, the plan was

⁹⁴ *Sessional Paper V* of 1869, p. 14

⁹⁵ SCHOOL	AVERAGE ATTENDANCE	COST TO GOVT. PER PUPIL		
		£	sh.	d.
Colombo Academy	49	25	5	3
Superior Boys' Schools	455	3	17	0
English Boys' Schools	589	2	12	7
A-V Boys' Schools	1,222	2	2	3
Vernacular Boys' Schools	2,040	0	18	2

Sessional Paper V of 1869, p. 14

⁹⁶ *Sessional Paper V* of 1869, p. 46

implemented.⁹⁷ The government was obliged, therefore, to make more funds available for the spread of vernacular education. With the reduction of grants to English-medium schools, an education in English became a more scarce commodity as the "elite" schools which dispensed it, now more than ever, depended on the well-off for patronage. In restricting access to a premier English education, Laurie did not differ from the Morgan Committee on essential matters. He too recommended that Sinhala and Tamil be the media of instruction at the elementary school level, at least until the third standard. He argued that the "spectacle of a number of native children studiously labouring" over learning in a foreign tongue, was "bizarre and even painful in the extreme."⁹⁸ In spite of this basic agreement, Laurie's questioning of the education system did not please the government. His proposal for a twenty year plan to establish new government schools every year,⁹⁹ and his recommendation that government grants be offered only to schools with good examination results, infuriated the government. Expectedly, Laurie was replaced as Director of Public Instruction at the end of the year.

As a result of all these discussions and proposals, the three-tiered structure of school education was reinforced. Vernacular and Anglo-vernacular schools remained grant-in-aid, administered by both the government and missionary societies. The standard of English taught in these schools was

⁹⁷ *Sessional Paper V of 1869*, p. 16

⁹⁸ *Sessional Paper V of 1869*, p. 25

⁹⁹ *Sessional Paper V of 1869*, p. 31 Laurie conceived this plan in an attempt to reduce the influence of mission bodies who were, at this time, greatly expanding their educational base.

lamentable. Their aspiration to become fully fledged English-medium schools was doomed to failure because of two inter-related factors. First, Anglo-vernacular schools were a government device meant to offer a "middle ground" between English- and vernacular- media schools; and secondly, the government was openly contemptuous of the education they offered. In fact, government officials were not slow to criticize students who attended these schools. In 1872, the Inspector of Schools, E.A. Helps, wrote:

From the slight and superficial knowledge they [Anglo-vernacular students] have gained, they were really no better human beings than their fellows who have not learnt...English....

He poured scorn on what was perceived as their arrogance, in not pursuing "the trade of their fathers, if they think it derogatory to their dignity." He placed the blame, however, firmly on the parents, who no matter what their caste, class or educational ranking, desired an education for their children in English.¹⁰⁰ English schools, increasingly in private hands, levied fees and were hence accessible only to those who were already of some means. The prestige commanded by English-medium schools as roads to higher levels of education and employment, was augmented by the privileged status of those who had access to them. Vernacular schools, numerically the largest group, were by implication further devalued *vis-a-vis* English schools. Despite subsequent dogged efforts to make Sinhala and Tamil the languages of education, this system remained in force. Even the argument put forward by H.W. Green, Director of the Department of Public Instruction, did not change matters. In his

¹⁰⁰ *Administration Report (DPI), 1872. p. 329*

Administration Report, he stated that, "English should be taught as a language only." He did not advocate its use as the medium of instruction in subjects such as Arithmetic, History or Geography. These, he believed, could be better taught in the vernacular. "I have often observed," he continued, "that a boy in an English school will fail by not properly grasping the English of a question whereas if it were put in his own vernacular he would at once understand and answer it."¹⁰¹ Nothing came of Green's suggestions in spite of the government's concerted efforts at discouraging the spread of English through their own schools. The anxiety over the fact that employment opportunities fell short of the number of English educated youth, did not, however, prevent the government from assisting a few good English schools which followed either the Cambridge or London University examinations.¹⁰² By 1880 there were ninety-three English-medium schools with 8,878 pupils, while in the same year, there were 88,350 pupils in 1,787 vernacular and Anglo-vernacular schools.¹⁰³ Three years later there were a total of 1,821 schools with 106,062 pupils.¹⁰⁴

An immediate effect of the Morgan Report's recommendations was the availability of higher education in the English language, both professional and vocational. Teacher training institutes were set up, the first being the Normal School as recommended by Laurie in 1870. The life of the School was short and due to financial constraints it closed in 1884. The idea of teachers' training

¹⁰¹ *Administration Report (DPI) 1884. p. 27*

¹⁰² Affiliation to these two university examinations was introduced in 1880.

¹⁰³ M. Roberts, *DCNC. Vol. I p. xliii*

¹⁰⁴ *Ceylon at the Census of 1911. Colombo:1912 p. 401*

colleges, however, remained. By 1873, Inspector of Schools, Helps, held the view that the government should "hold out inducements to educating bodies to establish training schools,"¹⁰⁵ and thus relieve the Department of Public Instruction of this particular burden. As a result, various mission bodies set up their own teachers' training colleges. With the establishment of the Medical and Law Colleges, in 1870 and 1874 respectively, professional attainments through higher education were made available. Higher education was also obtainable in agricultural studies, veterinary science and dairy farming through numerous Agricultural Schools established in the 1880s.

Rewards and Responsibilities of an English Education

In spite of the increase in the number of schools and pupils in the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century, those who benefited from an English education, remained a very small minority. Their importance compared to their number was immense. As the Census Report stated, the demand for education, especially in the English language, effected a radical change "in occupations, in caste distinctions, and the distribution of the urban and rural population."¹⁰⁶ It further went on to remark:

The improved standard of comfort throughout the country, the growth of wealth, accompanied by considerable changes in manners and customs, have all produced an enormous demand - which may almost be described as a passion - for education...

¹⁰⁵ *Administration Report, (DPI), 1873. p. 137*

¹⁰⁶ *Ceylon at the Census of 1911. p. 405*

Education points the way to all advancement....¹⁰⁷

The Census Report of 1881 had estimated that 17.4% of the population were literate in either English, Sinhala or Tamil.¹⁰⁸ By 1901, the literate population numbered 773,193 and in 1904 there were 3,007 schools with 246,669 pupils.¹⁰⁹ Literacy was concentrated in the Western and Northern Provinces which were inhabited predominantly by Low-country Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamils.

By the turn of the century, the leaders of Ceylonese society (not a homogeneous or unified group by any means) and their politics were involved very actively in the various debates on the formulation of policy. Their approach to the education scheme was developed in the light of their own interests, while they projected, in some measure, a genuine concern for the community at large.

As Ponnambalam Arunachalam, Superintendent of the Census, observed:

During the last ten years we have been able to open new schools at the rate of five a year. This can hardly be said to be a satisfactory account of the education condition of the first of the Crown Colonies. There is undoubtedly much headway to be made in elementary education and this demands urgent attention.¹¹⁰

The philanthropic approach was projected with special attention to the needs the low-caste *Rodiya* community¹¹¹ and the children of estate labourers.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ *Ceylon at the Census of 1911*. p. 399

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in R. Kearney, "Nationalism, Modernisation and Political Mobilisation in a Plural Society" in *CINP*. p. 444

¹⁰⁹ *Ceylon at the Census of 1911*. p. 401

¹¹⁰ *Ceylon at the Census of 1901*. Colombo:1903. p. 373

¹¹¹ The *Rodiyas* were a severely depressed group, considered outcasts in Sinhalese society. With regard to the efforts made towards their educational alleviation, see CO 57/159 *Sessional Paper* III of 1905.

While the *Rodiyas* did not receive any particular benefits despite a public enquiry into their condition, the issue of the "coolie" children's education was taken far more seriously. This was due to a memorial from the East India Association to Secretary of State Alfred Lyttleton in 1904. It pointed out that immigrant labour had contributed greatly to the wealth of Ceylon yet the government had not compensated them by providing adequate education for the children of the plantation workers. Out of 1,857 estates, education was provided on only forty-three,¹¹³ almost entirely in Tamil. After a vigorous debate, it was decided that far more education had to be provided for these children, but at the expense of the planters and not the government. The recommendation was mainly a measure to placate India, the source of migrant labour and in line with other welfare policies adopted towards this community.¹¹⁴

As to the indigenous population, the Ceylonese leaders were particularly concerned with compulsory education and, more crucially, its funding. One goal of compulsory education,¹¹⁵ apart from the stated obvious, was to expand vernacular education among the population. The indigenous leadership assumed a role of *provider* to the masses - a replication of the colonial authorities' self-projection in relation to their social class. Of the schemes

¹¹² See CO 57/159 *Sessional Paper IV* of 1905.

¹¹³ Of these two were administered by the government, five were private and the remaining thirty-six were run by missionary agencies. CO 57/159 *Sessional Paper IV* of 1905, p. 1

¹¹⁴ These policies included free housing and medical benefits under the establishment of the Ceylon Labour Commission in 1904.

¹¹⁵ By most assessments, compulsory education was instituted by the Village Committees Ordinance - Ordinance XXIV of 1889. See L. Macrae, "Compulsory Education in Ceylon" in *Overseas Education*. April, 1930. p. 95

adopted during the early part of the century, the Ellis¹¹⁶ and Wace¹¹⁷ Committee Reports and the Ordinances of 1906¹¹⁸ and 1907¹¹⁹ stand out.

The Ellis Committee Report first recommended that:

the government should take steps to compel parents to give their children a good vernacular education.¹²⁰

To ensure that this decree be carried out, the Wace Committee Report agreed that compulsory attendance should be enforced by Village Tribunals which had the authority to inflict fines on offending parents.¹²¹ By Ordinance V of 1906, an attendance officer was appointed "to require the occupier of any premises to give full information with regard to the children residing in such premises." He was further empowered to enforce the provision "made for their instruction and if necessary to produce such children before him for inspection."¹²² Parents were held accountable for the non-attendance of their children at schools. But punishment was not limited to the parent. Male children could be whipped under the Flogging Regulation Ordinance of 1904 or sent to a remand school for between three to six months.¹²³ The effectiveness of the Ordinance was

¹¹⁶ *Sessional Paper XXVIII of 1905.*

¹¹⁷ CO 57/159 Ordinance XXVIII of 1905 - *Report of the Committee of Elementary Education in Ceylon.*

¹¹⁸ Ordinance V of 1906 - *Town Schools Ordinance.*

¹¹⁹ Ordinance VIII of 1907 - *Rural Schools Ordinance.*

¹²⁰ *Sessional Paper XXVIII of 1905, Appendix X.*

¹²¹ The powers granted to the Village Tribunals were by Ordinance XXIV of 1889.

¹²² Ordinance V of 1906. Section 11

¹²³ Ordinance V of 1906. Section 15

curtailed by the difficulty of enforcing compulsory attendance with local authorities reluctant to assume the responsibility. Schools did not join voluntarily and after years of wrangling, the Legislative Council had to pass a resolution to force all Municipal and Local Board towns within the operation of the Town Schools Ordinance to join.¹²⁴

The Rural Schools Ordinance was implemented to apply to areas not covered by the Town Schools Ordinance. The District School Committees were also empowered through by-laws to require:

the parent of any child between the ages of six years and twelve years, or in the case of Mohammedan and Tamil girls between the ages of six and ten, residing within such school division to cause each child to attend one of such schools, unless he has made other adequate and suitable provision for the education of such a child.¹²⁵

The major difference between the two Ordinances, was that under the Rural Schools Ordinance, unlike the Town Schools Ordinance, a boy could not be flogged nor be enrolled in a special school because of habitual truancy. Education for the children of labourers employed on estates was also dealt with. Going beyond the Burrows Report¹²⁶, the Rural Schools Ordinance decreed that:

It shall be the duty of the superintendent of every estate to provide for the vernacular education of the children of the labourers employed on the estate between the ages of six and ten, and to set apart and keep in repair a suitable schoolroom.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ *Hansard* (LC) 12 July, 1916.

¹²⁵ Ordinance VIII of 1907. Section 20

¹²⁶ CO 57/159 *Sessional Paper* IV of 1905.

¹²⁷ Ordinance VIII of 1907. Section 29

The anomaly in these acts was that neither the Town Schools Ordinance nor the remainder of the Rural Schools Ordinance placed on any individual, organization or agency the onus of responsibility to ensure the provision of education for other categories of children. Obligatory attendance was enforced only on estate children. If there was a deviation from this arrangement, the Director of Public Instruction was vested with the power to make suitable provision and recover the expenditure from the estate. The Rural Schools Ordinance, unlike the Town Schools Ordinance, was able to achieve a limited amount of success. There was an undoubted expansion of educational provision in the areas served by it, albeit with continued contradictions.

Funding was another issue that caused great concern amongst the Ceylonese political leaders in general, and the government officials in particular. A curtailment of expenditure on education was not feasible, especially after the Census of 1901 had pointed out the many inadequacies in the existing system. The Ellis Committee Report argued that a proportion of the cost of education should be borne by the locality. Further, the Report suggested for the purposes of educational administration, the division of the island into areas corresponding to those under Villages Committees. Each area was "compelled to provide for its own education, half the cost being met from general revenue, and half from a local fund." The fund was to consist of a fixed sum of money collected from the population. Contributions were based on the level of prosperity of the individual based on a governmental classification of "the rich, the moderately well off, and the poor." The most significant aspect of the Ellis Report was that grants in vernacular schools were to be increased, while those for English language schools

were to be lowered.¹²⁸ Neither recommendation, understandably, received an enthusiastic response from the powerful Ceylonese leadership, especially in Colombo. Their unsympathetic public response was based on the fact that they had more interest in English education, and were not in favour of increased taxation to support vernacular education. The Wace Committee Report did recommend that local authorities were to be made more responsible for the financial maintenance of schools. Cash from local taxes, such as the road tax, and from village funds would be diverted for the purpose. This new policy of sharing the burden of expenditure on education with the local authorities became law with the Ordinances of 1906 and 1907. But with the objections from the indigenous leadership undiminished, the government was forced to amend these Ordinances once again to exclude the Colombo Municipality, thus legally recognizing the political reality that the city would not take on the responsibility for vernacular education.¹²⁹ The government was unable, though, to subsidize education in any appreciable measure, and the meagerness of local resources acted as a brake on educational development.

What becomes apparent, by this brief survey of educational developments between 1833 and 1911, is that there was no *one* policy. The language issue was dominant, yet it was ever shifting. From an English-only policy to instruction in Sinhala and Tamil, to a mixed system of Anglo-vernacular schools, the government, along with the various missionary agencies, were forced

¹²⁸ *Sessional Paper* XXVIII of 1905. Appendix X.

¹²⁹ The Director of Education was given the authority for education in the Municipality of Colombo. Ordinance XLIII of 1916.

to grapple with all the complexities that arose at each stage. As indigenous participation increased, the issue did not become any clearer and English as the key to upward mobility, status and privilege became entrenched. In spite of the plethora of ordinances passed and other issues discussed, the modest amount of action that followed was wholly inadequate in establishing any socially equitable system of education.

**CHAPTER TWO:
LANGUAGE OF PRIVILEGE, LANGUAGES OF EDUCATION,
1912-1926**

...the false principle underlying the education system [is] the treatment of non-English speaking children and English-speaking children as if their needs were identical.¹

¹ CO 57/181 Final Report of the Educational Committee, 1912.

Introduction

As the introductory chapter has shown, the media of instruction in schools had become the most dominant educational issue confronting the government, missionaries and the indigenous political leadership alike. It was no longer possible simply to divide the education system on the basis of language: English schools versus Sinhala and Tamil schools. Further, the Anglo-vernacular schools had not bridged the gap in any appreciable way. Frustration levels were high. Many products of English schools felt alienated from those they professed to lead, while the vernacular educated remained marginalized from almost all the avenues of upward mobility. The unstated question that begged to be answered was whether English could be extended into the vernacular schools or Sinhala and Tamil introduced into the English-medium schools.

Between 1910 and 1926, the ordinances that were introduced and the committees that were appointed, were all, therefore, geared towards the language issue in general and the possibility of bilingualism in particular. This period was marked in particular by three enquiries into the educational question. The Mcleod Committee, appointed to inquire specifically into the state of higher education, and also to assess the quality of Sinhala and Tamil teaching in English schools, initiated the first enquiry. The second was facilitated by the Board of Education in England sending an Inspector, J.J.R. Bridge, to assist the Mcleod Committee. And the third followed from the enactment of Ordinance No. 1 of 1920 which saw

the government assume more direct control over educational developments and move away from the *laissez faire* attitude of the past. As the object of these three enquiries differed, so too did their conclusions. It is the purpose of this chapter, then, not only to trace the relevant developments, but ask how and why the perceptions of the language issue changed over a period of about twenty years.

Political Ambitions

The first two decades of this century were a period of dramatic political changes that were affected by, and in turn affected, developments in education. In 1910, an elective (albeit conditional) principle was introduced in the constitution of the Crown Colony.¹ Of the four elected members, one was to represent urban Europeans, one the Europeans in rural districts, one the Burgher community and the fourth the "Educated Ceylonese". The last mentioned seat was not restricted to a Tamil, Sinhalese, Kandyan or Muslim, but was open to all. There was one negative stipulation: the candidates could not be government employees. The all male electorate was divided on community lines - European, Burgher and Ceylonese - and the suffrage was based on various income and educational qualifications.² For the Burghers³ and Ceylonese, proven literacy in English was a requirement, with a minimum pass at the Junior or Senior

¹ By Ordinance XIII of 1910, the number of unofficial members in the Legislative Council would be increased by two, to ten. Of the ten, six would continue to be nominated by the Governor, and four were to be elected. Communal representation would remain the basis on which nominations were to be made. The six unofficial members were to represent the Kandyans with one seat, one seat also for the Muslims and two seats each for the Low-country Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

² The minimum requirement for the Europeans was that they draw an annual salary of not less than 1,500 rupees. Ordinance XIII of 1910. Part II, sections 12 and 13.

³ The Burghers also had to prove European descent. Ordinance XIII of 1910. Part II, section 11.

Cambridge Local Examination the statutory required qualification for the latter.⁴ All the voters, irrespective of their communal affiliation, had to be over the age of 25.⁵ The one essential qualification for election to the Legislative Council, was, however, an education in English.

Two important points that emerge in connection with the elections of 1910 had repercussions on later educational developments. The first was the British accusation that the educated Ceylonese represented no-one but themselves⁶ which resulted in their first elected representative to the Council being received under that name. The educational and other qualifications restricting the right to vote meant that, those who did vote, voted for someone who they believed could best look after their interests. Altruistic concerns for the less privileged sections of society may not have been absent in the thinking of these early leaders - and indeed it was not - but self-interest and self-preservation of their social group was certainly central to their political agenda.

The second point is the heterogeneous character of the indigenous leadership. Despite the colonial government's conscious effort to lump all educated Ceylonese together into one homogenous body, they were in fact divided along sectarian lines. The elections for the "Educated Ceylonese" seat

⁴ Ordinance XIII of 1910. Part II, sections 14 and 15.

⁵ Ordinance XIII of 1910. Part II, section 16.

⁶ Governor McCallum had warned the Secretary of State for the Colonies that those who petitioned the Colonial Office for constitutional reform, were nothing more than "well defined classes of the native population - classes, which moreover, represent a very small minority of the whole." He went on to state that further their minority status was the result of having "assimilated an education of a purely Western, as opposed to Oriental type, and who are to be regarded not as representative Ceylonese, but as a product of the European administration of Ceylon on lines approved by British tradition." Despatch from the Governor to Secretary of State, the Earl of Crewe, 26 May, 1909. Quoted in *HCNC*. p. 58

were overshadowed by caste rivalries - a legacy of earlier representation to the Legislative Council which favoured the dominant caste groups. Sinhalese members were drawn from the Low-country, *Goyigama-mudaliyar* section of the community; while the Tamil members were primarily *Vellalas*.⁷ In fact, from 1860 until the end of the century, certain families dominated representation to Legislative Council amongst both the Sinhalese⁸ and Tamils.⁹

Tired of the familial and caste domination of the *Goyigamas*, the *Karavas* agitated for their own representatives to the Council, to speak out for their interests. They nominated a landowner and doctor, Marcus Fernando, a Low-country Sinhalese member of their own caste group, as their candidate. His opponent was the Tamil, P. Ramanathan.¹⁰ The contest was in a predominantly Sinhalese constituency and Ramanathan emerged the victor. In a lengthy despatch fifteen years later, Governor Hugh Clifford explained the reasons for this result. It was due, he stated:

to the fact that as a high caste man he [Ramanathan] could command the support of the *Vellala*, *Goigama*, or "Cultivator" vote among, not only his own

⁷ The Tamil equivalent of the high caste *Goyigama*.

⁸ Only E.H. Dehigama, member from 1865 to 1875, had no direct ties to the Dias-Bandaranaike and Obeyesekera families which had a monopoly of the Sinhalese representatives. H. Dias, member between 1861-1865, James Alwis (1875-1878), J.P. Obeyesekera (1878-1881), A.L. de Alwis (1881-1888), A. de Alwis Seneviratne (1888-1900) and S.C. Obeyesekera (1900-1911) were all members from the same extended family.

⁹ Mutu Coomaraswamy (1861-1879) was the son of A. Coomaraswamy Pulle, the first Tamil to be nominated to the Legislative Council. Mutu Coomaraswamy's nephews, the Ponnambalam brothers, followed him into the Council; P. Ramanathan served between 1879 and 1891, with P. Coomaraswamy serving from 1893 to 1898. Dr. W.G. Rockwood (1898-1905) was the first non-*Vellala* to represent the Tamil community in the Council. There was no Tamil representation from 1836 to 1838 and 1848 to 1851.

¹⁰ By 1910, Ramanathan had retired from politics after serving in various capacities for the previous three decades. Residing in Kodaikanal in South India, he had to be persuaded to return to Ceylon and stand for election.

countrymen, but among the Sinhalese also.

Fernando, on the other hand, was a:

Karawe - viz. Fisher caste - and that fact sufficed to render him unacceptable to the Sinhalese *Vellalas*, or even the *Kalagamas*, or Cinnamon-Peelers, all of whom preferred to be represented by a man of a different race, rather than by one of a lower caste.¹¹

Absent from Clifford's analysis, however, was the bitter animosity that accompanied the long campaign, from August 1910 until November 1911, for the "Educated Ceylonese" seat.¹² The apprehension regarding the *Karavas* was caused by the high educational attainments of the group which the higher castes found threatening. The irony, lay in the fact that the *Goyigama*, who were against the election of a *Karava* member, did not put up their own candidate. Instead, as Clifford astutely noted, they were willing to support a high caste *Vellala* from a different ethnic group and "be represented by a man of a different race, rather than by one of a lower caste."

Jayewardene's tactics in maligning Fernando did not go down well with all non-*Karavas*. An open letter in the newspaper accused him of being "largely responsible for vulgarising the contest for the Educated Ceylonese seat into a factional scramble..."¹³ As Governor McCallum, the entire episode reinforced his enmity towards the English-educated leadership in Colombo. He

¹¹ CO 537/692 Clifford to Secretary of State Amery, 27 November, 1926. p. 82

¹² Hector Jayewardene, an outstanding lawyer and member of the prominent Jayewardene family of Colombo, (he was the uncle of J.R. Jayewardene) led the opposition to the *Karava* challenge. Jayewardene was himself not a member of the "first class" *Goyigama* caste group, but was reacting to the 1905 *Karava* agitation, which was seen as a threat to the whole caste group.

¹³ *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 6 November, 1911.

wrote to the Colonial Office that the *Goyigamas* "were not of sufficient strength to secure the educated Ceylonese seat for one of their own caste by election..." and had therefore supported Ramanathan "rather than accord a vote for Dr. Fernando, a Sinhalese who belongs to the Carawe [sic] caste."¹⁴ Of the 2,626 votes cast, Ramanathan won the seat with a majority of over six hundred: 1,645 votes to 981. Ceylon thus became the first British colony to have non-European elected representatives, Ponnambalam Ramanathan as the "Educated Ceylonese" joined by H.W. Van Cuylenburg, the elected Burgher member.

This episode was important not so much because of the personal conflicts which it had brought to the surface, but because it highlighted the intensity of competition amongst the English-educated precluding possibilities of unity. That the conflict was based on caste and not communal loyalties, indicated that even amongst the privileged set, there continued to exist a hierarchy of which sub-group *could* - or, in this case, *should* - wield power. This fact had a significant bearing on future developments of educational policies, because caste attitudes determined the way in which certain leaders - especially Tamil - reacted to the extension of educational opportunities to the masses, that is, the lower castes, in their own communities.

Attitudes to Vernacular Education

The vernacular language issue received a boost when Governor McCallum (1901-1913), stressed the importance of using the local languages as

¹⁴ CO 54/590 McCallum's confidential despatch to Lord Crewe, 24 January, 1912.

media of instruction. In the opening session of the Legislative Council in 1908, he stated, "the main part of the general education of the country must necessarily be carried on by means of vernacular schools,"¹⁵ thereby reiterating the conclusions of the Morgan Committee Report. In 1909, he was able to report back to the Legislative Council that 85% of the children in schools were in vernacular schools and that 70% of government expenditure on education was spent on vernacular education.¹⁶ The contradiction in the system, however, was not resolved. In spite of the substantial expenditure on vernacular schools, English remained the language of administration, commerce and higher education, and hence, English schools maintained their distinct advantage over Tamil and Sinhala schools. The government restricted curricula development in vernacular schools, while actively discouraging the establishment of Sinhala and Tamil secondary schools. Juxtaposed against these limitations, the government's prescription of a liberal curriculum for English secondary schools enhanced the existing discrepancies. The system of grants to assisted English-medium schools further aggravated the discrimination against vernacular schools.

The Anglo-Vernacular schools represented the government's attempt at bridging the gap to meet the demand for English yet restricting its supply. The Director of Education wrote in 1922 that the development of Anglo-vernacular schools, especially in rural areas, was more appreciated than the establishment of government elementary schools. The Director informed the public that:

¹⁵ *Hansard* (LC), 26 August, 1908.

¹⁶ *Hansard* (LC), 10 November, 1909.

Steps have been taken in consultation with the District School Committees to increase in suitable centres the number of anglo-vernacular schools in preference to English schools.¹⁷

These schools, however, remained an unwanted feature of the education system. Linked to such ambivalence was the fact that Sinhala and Tamil found no place in the curricula of either government or assisted English schools. An article that appeared in the *Jaffna College Miscellany* stated the problem succinctly:

While it is permissible for a Ceylonese boy, under certain conditions, to undergo a short period of instruction in the Vernacular, before attempting to learn English, it is practicable to commence the study of the two languages simultaneously.

It continued:

Nothing would be a greater calamity in education, than to neglect the study of the vernacular. Tamil and English, for instance, are two distinct languages, and they should be taught as such. Any attempt at amalgamation is disastrous. Import no English into the vernacular class, and no Tamil into the English class. The hybrid that so beautifully flourishes in our English schools is neither ass nor horse.¹⁸

Anglo-vernacular schools offered English in the afternoon session from the third standard on payment of a small fee. However, the lack of good teachers and the failure to provide useful education in either language precluded them from making a significant contribution to the educational system. The failure of the policy pursued by the government with regard to the language issue and the different levels of educational achievement in English and vernacular schools were

¹⁷ *Administrative Report* (DE), 1922. p. 9

¹⁸ CML 50/D9 J.K. Chanmugam. "The Anglo-Vernacular," *Jaffna College Miscellany*. Vol.XX No.1 March, 1910. pp. 9-10

products of both general colonial policies and a poverty of resources. The difference between elementary and secondary education was based on the medium of instruction, an unfortunate dichotomy compounded further by the fact that fees were payable for an English education, while vernacular education was free. The language policy, therefore, reflected and reinforced the social and economic stratification of the local population. Those who could not afford to pay fees could at best hope for a vernacular education confined to the primary level. English schools, and, hence the opportunities for which an English education was a *sine qua non*, were open only to the small numbers able to pay.

Both Governors Blake and McCallum were strongly in favour of vernaculars as the media of instruction. There were, however, basic differences in their approach to the subject. At Royal College's Prize Day in 1906, Blake admitted that earlier he was not in favour of making instruction in the vernaculars compulsory, but was now prepared "to consider very seriously the question of placing within the reach of students of this college, of adding to their curriculum, vernacular education, either Sinhalese or Tamil."¹⁹ What Blake was advocating was in line with what some nationalist Ceylonese reformers were calling for: the introduction, to some degree, of instruction in the vernacular within the confines of an English-medium school. He was not suggesting that Sinhala- and Tamil-media schools be extended in any way: neither secondary education, nor the teaching of English were to be any part of their task. The 'nationalist' lobby had argued that lack of knowledge of the vernaculars had

¹⁹ Quoted in *Journal of Ceylon University Association*. Vol. I No. 2. October, 1906.

alienated those who had been educated in English from the country's traditions. The greatest impetus for identification with the traditions of the Island had come from the Ceylon Social Reform Society founded in 1905. The aim of the Society was explicitly stated in its Manifesto. It was "to encourage and initiate reform in social customs amongst the Ceylonese, and to discourage the thoughtless imitation of unsuitable European habits and customs."²⁰ The Reform Society drew its membership almost entirely from the Ceylonese English-educated political and social leadership, who now urged the study of Sinhala and Tamil. Such pleas, however, were usually accompanied by a rider. As Ananda Coomaraswamy stated in his Presidential Address on 17 April, 1906:

It is not, of course the teaching of English to which we object, but the neglect of the mother-tongues. Do not think that I am at all opposed to the study of English in addition to the mother-tongue, on the contrary....²¹

The reformers were also supported by missionary educationists sympathetic to their cause. A.G. Fraser, for twenty years the Principal of Trinity College in Kandy, was just one of many non-Ceylonese who recognized the cultural estrangement of the youth. He championed fluency in the mother tongue, which, he argued was "indispensable to true culture of real thinking power." It would be to Trinity's great shame, he asserted, to produce men:

who are isolated from the masses of their own people by ignorance of their language and thought [and who] can never fulfil the part of educated citizens or be true leaders of their race. Men of the East trained

²⁰ "Ceylon Social Reform Society Manifesto" in Supplement to *Ceylon National Review*. No. 2 July, 1906. p. 2

²¹ A. Coomaraswamy, "Anglicisation of the East" in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 2 July, 1906. pp. 184-185

along Western lines can produce no originality of thought; and this is the great failure of education in the East.²²

At this juncture, it appeared that the agenda of the government, reformers and missionaries was the same. The implementation of what appeared to be a common object of policy proved to be more complicated, however, because other competing concerns were brought to the fore.

In 1908, at another prize distribution ceremony, this time at the Committee of Oriental Languages, McCallum reminded his audience that, everyone could not be educated in English. This was because:

It is not for everybody to belong to the professions, nor to take up those occupations in which a knowledge of English is imperative.

McCallum's comments were not simply a re-emphasis of his distrust of the English-educated, but a valid critique of economic realities. Opportunities, he reminded them were "limited, and in certain directions, I am not at all certain at the present moment, whether they are not overstocked already..."²³ This was the key issue. Seven months prior to the Governor's prize day speech, the *Times of Ceylon* ran an editorial drawing the public's attention to the growing number of English-educated unemployed. The paper urged people to put more emphasis on technical, scientific and agricultural education to alleviate the situation.²⁴ Other publications also called for a more practical approach to education that would result in employment opportunities. An article expressing some anger,

²² SLNA 25.17/14. *Trinity College, Kandy - Souvenir of the 75th Anniversary, 1947*. p. 21

²³ Quoted without reference in *Ceylon National Review*. Vol. 2 No. 7 August, 1908. pp. 292-293

²⁴ *Times of Ceylon*. 15 January, 1908.

raised the following point:

There is really no reason why the country that contributes materially to the rubber supply of the world should not manufacture its own rubber goods.²⁵

The debate had moved beyond the boundaries of language as an issue *per se*. The practical applications of education had become an urgent question and had to be addressed. Among the opponents of practical or occupation-orientated education, there were those who pleaded that specific technical training would not be beneficial for the children of Ceylon, in either the vernacular or English medium streams. To those who objected that the educational system was "not utilitarian enough", the most common response from the opponents was "that [it was] a mistake to consider the school as an office or workshop."²⁶ Even the Chilaw Association was obliged to comment that they considered:

commercial and industrial instruction and manual training to be out of place and altogether inappropriate in the secondary schools of the island.²⁷

What emerges from the cross-currents in the debate is the complexity of the questions at issue, especially those concerning language. On the one hand, Blake was concerned with the inclusion of Sinhala and Tamil in the curriculum of English-medium schools; and on the other, McCallum's preference was for a reduction on the emphasis placed on English and a stress on technical education. Educated Ceylonese opinion, however, was not uniformly in favour

²⁵ Quoted without reference in *Ceylon National Review*. Vol. 1 No. 3 January, 1914. p. 10

²⁶ *Journal of Ceylon University Association*. Vol. 2 No. 8 October, 1910. p. 334

²⁷ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper XX* of 1912. Appendix D. p. 227

of a utilitarian bias. The debate both at the official and unofficial level suffered from a serious blind spot. Everyone appears to have assumed that the requirements of the entire Ceylonese community were the same. The varied and specific needs of the different social strata and language groups were not considered. Alternatively, when these *were* taken into account, the possibility of devising a system which would close the door to upward mobility in the face of the vast majority and restore the cultural links between the privileged and the masses was never mooted.

Mcleod Committee Report

The informal debate on the functional aspects of a purely vernacular education had one positive result. Governor McCallum was obliged to investigate the practicality of introducing Tamil and Sinhala into an essentially English medium curriculum. Hugh Clifford, the Colonial Secretary, was all in favour of introducing the two languages as subjects in the English-medium schools. He wrote to the Board of Education that, without knowledge of the mother tongue, "there had grown up in the Island a class of persons who were to a very considerable extent Europeanized."²⁸ This was a sentiment that had been acknowledged even by those he was criticizing. The Mcleod Committee was to be assisted by J.J.R. Bridge, an inspector with the Board of Education in England. At the end of the enquiry, two reports,²⁹ with differing points of view were

²⁸ SLNA 25.35/2 Education Department Circulares. Letter dated 28 July, 1910.

²⁹ The Bridge Report was tabled as *Sessional Paper XXI* of 1912 and the Mcleod Report as *Sessional Paper XIX* of 1912.

produced.

On the issue of language, the Mcleod Committee consulted ninety-eight persons as to whether Sinhala and Tamil should be made compulsory in English schools. Forty-nine responded favourably, of which twenty-two said that such instruction should be maintained until the fifth standard; eight wanted the vernaculars to be offered in lower standards and nineteen said that instruction should be continued in higher classes. Thirty-three respondents were opposed to the vernaculars being made compulsory and sixteen were undecided.³⁰ Expectedly, the most vehement opponents were the principals of two leading English schools. Their prejudiced reaction was informed by their perception that somehow standards would be lowered in their schools if Sinhala and Tamil were introduced. Rev. W.S. Stone, Warden of St. Thomas' College, Colombo, claimed that "so long as Englishmen have control of education in Ceylon, they must reject Tamil and Sinhalese as means of higher education."³¹ Father Lytton, Rector of St. Joseph's College, Colombo, was more vitriolic in his disapproval:

I would most strongly protest against either the vernaculars or Oriental classics being substituted in any way, whether optionally or compulsorily for the classical and modern languages of Europe in the higher parts of the curriculum of secondary schools....

He disparaged Tamil literature as something that:

not only does not elevate the mind but degrades by its obscenities with which it is replete.... For the last 14 years not a word of Sinhalese or Tamil has been

³⁰ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper* XIX of 1912. p. 25

³¹ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper* XX of 1912. Evidence before the Mcleod Committee. p. 35

taught and we do not want to begin now.³²

Of all those in favour, Rev. A.G. Fraser, of Trinity College, Kandy, was the most supportive of instruction in Sinhala or Tamil. In response to the Mcleod Committee's queries, he stated:

The exclusion of the vernaculars favours the tendency to think all local knowledge and local problems are unworthy of respect.³³

J.W. Small, Principal of Richmond College in Galle, also stressed the importance of a knowledge of the mother-tongue. He warned that, "the Ceylonese should not be strangers on their own soil and be more ignorant of their own languages than Europeans."³⁴ Caught in a bind between what was ideologically correct and the social reality, Charles Hartley of Royal College, was forced to veer towards the side of opposition. He acknowledged that while no boys from Trinity College, Kandy, had actually left the school because the institution had introduced instruction in the vernaculars, "on the contrary, many have come back because of it,"³⁵ Hartley had to bow to parental demands. Royal is hindered, he said, by a "universal ill-will [with] which the proposal to introduce the vernaculars as a substitute for Greek or Latin had been received." Parents had vowed to empty the classrooms if Sinhala and Tamil were made compulsory,³⁶ believing that such substitution would lower the standard of instruction. Those who wanted the

³² CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper XX* of 1912. Evidence before the Mcleod Committee. p. 57

³³ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper XX* of 1912. Evidence before the Mcleod Committee. p. 2

³⁴ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper XX* of 1912. Evidence before the Mcleod Committee. p. 10

³⁵ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper XX* of 1912. Evidence before the Mcleod Committee. p. 6

³⁶ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper XX* of 1912. Evidence before the Mcleod Committee. p. 6

vernaculars to be a part of the curriculum wanted them to replace Greek and Latin rather than be an addition to the subjects taught. It was on account of this assessment that opposition to the issue was so strong. The supporters of the scheme felt that colonial education could not replicate the curriculum from the mother country, simply because children had to sit for an English School Leaving Certificate Examination.³⁷ The educationists who pushed for the introduction of Sinhala and Tamil joined the ranks of the nationalists on this question without compromising their own positions as pedagogues.

The Mcleod Report chose to ignore the positive responses to their question. Instead of seeking a compromise between those who supported and those who objected to the teaching of Sinhala and Tamil, the Report preferred not to disturb the existing equilibrium. The teaching of Latin, Greek and French, it was recommended, should remain, as they were crucial subjects for school-leaving examinations, while Tamil and Sinhala were to be excluded from the curriculum. Meanwhile, it was decided that the "compulsory requirement in the vernaculars should not go beyond the fourth standard," but the actual teaching of any Sinhala and Tamil would be left up to the discretion of the individual school.³⁸ The Committee also stated:

That in dealing [with] the vernacular-speaking children the teaching of English reading and writing should in every case be preceded by a course of oral instruction in reading and writing in the mother-

³⁷ The questionnaire had asked whether the vernaculars should be made optional for the English School Leaving Certificate Examinations to which forty-two said yes and forty-six answered negatively.

³⁸ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper* XIX of 1912. p. 25

tongue.³⁹

The Report was a conservative document in that it recommended that the system remain basically unchanged. The manner in which it advocated the perpetuation of the *status quo* was at best confusing. While allowing for the introduction of some vernacular teaching, the Report stated categorically that Sinhala and Tamil could not be officially included in the curriculum. Thus, it forced any instruction in the national languages to the periphery of the school timetable. There were at least three reasons as to why the document appeared so unwilling to alter the existing system despite the clamour for change. First, to introduce Sinhala and Tamil as subjects for a school leaving examination, the experts would have to restructure the entire curriculum as well as the school leavers' examinations. This would involve over-hauling the English-medium system of education as a whole. Secondly, it would involve locating and training qualified language teachers who were scarce because the relevant skills were not in demand. Thirdly, limiting the amount of English that could be learnt in a vernacular school would ensure that the monopoly of opportunities and status enjoyed by certain powerful social groups would remain intact. The impassioned hostility of parents to any change in the curriculum at Royal College was the other side of the same story. Some people evidently wanted the line of demarcation between their own privileges and those of the masses to be sharp and clear. The Government's educational policy had to take note of such powerful sentiments. All in all, substantial expenditure of government funds to overhaul an essentially working system did not appear

³⁹ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper* XIX of 1912. p. 13

to be warranted.

The Bridge Report

The Bridge Report, as it came to be called, was considered revolutionary in the context of colonial educational reforms in view of the changes it advocated. The Report highlighted the fact that the existing system had failed to perform the role for which it was originally intended. The primary shortcoming of the English-medium school system, Bridge concluded, was that it catered for "that section of the community that was either Europeanized or was bound to become so...."⁴⁰ The system, he argued, failed:

signally for the many and succeeds but partially for most of the few...[because of] the false principle underlying the whole - the treatment of non-English speaking children and English-speaking children as if their needs were identical.⁴¹

The result of such a system, unpragmatic and out of tune with prevailing conditions in the country had, Bridge continued, produced an "excessive degree of competition...being indiscriminately extended to include practically the whole population that wishes to learn English."⁴²

Bridge argued that there was an "over supply" of English education, through the competition of denominational missionary organizations, which had resulted in the lowering of standards. He was also not insensitive to

⁴⁰ *Sessional Paper XXI of 1912. p. 17*

⁴¹ CO 57/181 *Final Report of the Education Committee appointed to make a general survey of Education, 1912. p. 23*

⁴² *Sessional Paper XXI of 1912. p. 17*

the debate over the cultural alienation of children educated in English schools. It had to be recognized that the effect of an English medium education, if, "successfully and efficiently conducted, must be one of denationalization." But a distinction had to be drawn between, what Bridge called, "genuine and real denationalization [which] is tolerable", and the intolerable: "a mere veneer of Europeanization added to the vigour and vitality of nationality."⁴³ Bridge firmly believed that the solution did not lie solely in the provision of vernacular education. It lay in the responsibility of the educationists to ensure that English succeeds "in the work that it sets out to do."⁴⁴ This could only be achieved through the reorganization of the system in existence, which Bridge stressed, did not simply mean an extension of English schools. What he had in mind was an English language school system that would exist for the:

Europeanized section of the community [and to] meet the needs of that section of the native community which for purposes of employment and so forth wishes to become Europeanized....⁴⁵

He recommended that secondary education should be limited and that schools differentiated according to occupational needs and social classes. A three-tiered system of education was proposed to include secondary, elementary and Anglo-Vernacular schools, with the mother-tongue being the sole medium of instruction in all elementary schools. He advocated an end to the Cambridge Board

⁴³ CO 57/181 *Final Report of the Education Committee appointed to make a general survey of Education, 1912.* p. 21

⁴⁴ CO 57/181 *Final Report of the Education Committee appointed to make a general survey of Education, 1912.* p. 21

⁴⁵ CO 57/181 *Final Report of the Education Committee appointed to make a general survey of Education, 1912.* pp. 21-22

Examinations at secondary school level and called for the establishment of a local university. A local university, Bridge believed, would end the "Europeanization" of the youth that was accompanied by a sense of denationalization and alienation.⁴⁶ In spite of his advocacy for an indigenous examination board and a stress on vernacular education, his views reflected the prevalent British preference for selective secondary education. Such preference implied an acquiescence to existing hierarchies of status, with higher levels of education being accessible only to those able to pay for it. Negatively, it implied that the aspirations of others who were not from well-off families would be frustrated in the vast majority of cases. For the first time, however, an official government-sponsored study had specifically enumerated the limitations of the existing system of education. By detailing the need for different schools for separate classes within Ceylonese society, Bridge evidently wanted to ensure that class boundaries would remain entrenched. His scheme, in fact, would perpetuate the handicaps of the under privileged who sought elite careers and occupational opportunities by restricting access to certain types of schools. This was nothing novel in colonial educational policy. His recommendations were unique, however, in that they paid some attention to the occupational needs of the less privileged.

The final outcome was that the colonial government favoured the Mcleod Report while the British Board of Education accepted Bridge's recommendations. The Colonial Office supported the government's view and so the system of education in Ceylon remained intact. That the Bridge report was

⁴⁶ CO 57/181 *Final Report of the Education Committee appointed to make a general survey of Education, 1912.* p. 13

accepted by the Board of Education in England and not by the government, had more to do with the pragmatism of politicians, than with an intrinsic shortcoming in his proposals. It was easier for the Colonial Office and the government in Ceylon to allow a continuation of policy than to carry out serious modifications throughout the entire system on the basis of one report. But the Bridge Report did not go unrecognized. In less than a decade, by 1919, Sinhala and Tamil were included as optional subjects for the three major examinations, the Junior and Senior Cambridge and London Matriculation examinations.

Both the Mcleod and Bridge reports had emphasized the need for a university as a means to reduce the dependence on British school leaving examinations. The proposal voiced the concerns of the privileged in Ceylonese society - the potential patrons and clientele of any institution of higher learning to be established in the future. In a despatch to the Colonial Office, McCallum summarized the objectives of both reports for the creation of a university college. Quoting extensively from both reports, he explained that Bridge and Mcleod seemed primarily concerned about the availability of higher education in Ceylon itself, especially for those unable to send their sons abroad. A residential institution was a necessity, McCallum quoted, "[in] view of the large development of a fairly opulent class," for whom "it [was] desirable that there should be some more adequate provision for [their] continued education...."⁴⁷ The Governor was not altogether displeased by the latter argument. He was in favour of establishing an institution of higher learning on the Island, which he saw as a

⁴⁷ CO 57/188 *Sessional Paper XXVI* of 1913: System of Education in Ceylon - Continuation of Sessional Papers XIX and XX of 1912. p. 3

means to "obviate the present dissipation of higher educational forces." A local university would also in his view, "provide the necessary mental equipment of future generations of teachers...."⁴⁸ This was an important point in view of the government's anxiety to save money spent on hiring foreign teachers. For this reason, he dismissed the objections to the scheme based on the fear that a university would cost a "considerable sum of public money". The opponents argued that such an expenditure should not be undertaken solely for "the sons of those parents who, though fairly well to do, are not sufficiently wealthy to send their boys to an English University."⁴⁹ As for those who did have the financial ability to send their children to England, there was no guarantee that they would not continue to do so, even with a university in Ceylon. But for McCallum, and the Executive Committee which decided the issue, these negative arguments were easily outweighed by the positive advantages of a local university. Nothing, however, came of McCallum's support. In fact, the matter was to be debated over the years, but successive governments were not to be hurried into establishing a university.

Dichotomized Realities

The chief weakness of the language policy during this period, lay in what appeared to be a lack of clear purpose. In spite of minor changes introduced by government fiat over the years, elementary schools remained an

⁴⁸ CO 57/188 *Sessional Paper XXVI* of 1913 p. 3

⁴⁹ CO 57/188 *Sessional Paper XXVI* of 1913 p. 3

attenuated form of education in the vernacular, but was the only option open to the majority of the population. English education, on the other hand, was not only accorded a position of advantage, but was the only avenue to secondary education. Knowledge of English led to social and economic mobility, while vernacular education allowed for only limited options. The Mcleod Report of 1912 showed clear awareness of the disparities in occupational opportunities and the gap between economic aspirations and economic reality so far as the vast majority was concerned. But it required less effort and money to uphold the *status quo*⁵⁰ than to overhaul an entire system. Besides, the most powerful sections of local society were not keen on restructuring the existing system.

The government may have been content to let the system remain as it was, but for those who felt trapped by the vernacular-media schools, it was increasingly unacceptable. Aspiring sections of urban and rural middle classes, who could not afford the high fees in the English-medium schools, initiated several movements for a reform of the system. They began to advocate that, as a compromise, English be introduced into their schools. The proposal implied much more than just a mere duplication of the already existing Anglo-vernacular schools, because the agitators wanted a more comprehensive curriculum to be part of the change. The government was most unsympathetic to these proposals. As the Director of Education wrote in 1919:

It is also not proposed to give the same amount of English education to everyone. In the first place it would be impossible to do so. It is extremely difficult to get English teachers now for government

⁵⁰ *Sessional Paper XX of 1912. Appendix K.*

and grant-in-aid schools in the English medium, outside the towns, and it will be many years before qualified teachers can be obtained.⁵¹

The government had no alternative but to stick to their old policy for two simple reasons; one, inadequate teaching staff; and two, the inability of rural parents to pay fees for English schools, though the government admitted, "there is no class whose wage earning capacity will not be increased by a knowledge of English."⁵² The result was that in some vernacular schools the most talented pupils left disillusioned. The government tried to prevent the minor exodus by providing economic incentives for those in vernacular schools. In 1918 a Vernacular School Leaving Certificate Exam was introduced and preference was given to holders of the certificate for appointment as headmen and registrars.⁵³ In reality, however, there was no appreciable improvement in the economic fortunes of the vernacular educated. In spite of all the difficulties, the greatest advance made by early developments in colonial education policy, was that of literacy in general. By 1911 the literacy rate, among persons five years of age and over, taking the three languages together stood at 31 per cent. In 1881, it had been 17.4 per cent.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Administrative Report (DE)*, 1919. p. 7

⁵² *Administrative Report (DE)*, 1919. p. 7

⁵³ SLNA Lot 71. Director of Education to Colonial Secretary, 18 May, 1918.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Robert Kearney. "Nationalism, Modernisation, and Political Mobilisation in a Plural Society" in *CINP*. p. 444

Consolidated Ambitions

Education, the pattern of economic opportunities and political development all helped consolidate the position of the English-educated leaders in the early part of this century. The British themselves now felt the power of the elite, so significant had they become both in number and influence. One telling example of the newly acquired self-confidence of the privileged sections in Ceylonese society was provided by the complaint from a local government official to the Secretary of State. In requesting a standard of living increase, the nameless official claimed that the "rapid access to wealth" gained by both the Europeans and Ceylonese, had affected the cost of living for public servants like himself. With increased wealth acquired through economic enterprises, sections of the privileged groups were moving into the residential areas of the capital. Their influx into Colombo began to affect the availability of cheap accommodation for the British officials. As the official commented, the rich Ceylonese were now making "a practice of occupying houses which in the past they have been accustomed to let to others." The British public servants could, as a result, no longer afford to live in Colombo without a subsidy. In fact, the letter griped, it was now considered preferable to seek a posting to the 'outstations' where:

the possibilities of having a little shooting when on circuit more than compensate for the doubtful pleasure of associating as a poor man with members of a wealthy mercantile community.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ CO 54/744 Letter from Officer Administering the Government to Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State, 12 July, 1911.

The leadership were also able to assert a degree of political autonomy outside the confines of the Legislative Council. Numerous organs were now available for the expression of dissent as well as anger and opposition to the government. They also provided the means for cooperation, support and solidarity amongst the indigenous leaders themselves. However, the agitation mounted against the British was in effect an accommodation with the colonial power, especially in the field of education. The antagonism was restrained and never really implied a threat to the existing order. The demands were for concessions: increased Ceylonization of public services and greater availability of jobs. There was, however, no emergence of a movement towards independence.

In 1882 the Ceylon Agricultural Association was founded by C.H. de Soysa, a *Karava* entrepreneur and landowner. Essentially, the aim of the Association was to safeguard the interests of Ceylonese planters. Six years later, the name was changed to the Ceylon National Association with broader aims. Its political activity was primarily concerned with lobbying the Governor for 'suitable' representatives to be nominated to the Legislative Council. The government did not pay much attention to the Ceylon National Association. Similarly, the Chilaw Association - composed of Ceylonese landowners and led by the Corea brothers - was not considered a threat, despite its more overtly political nature. These organizations could be ignored because they were limited in terms of ideology and nationalist sentiments and were unable either to secure mass support or develop a convincing strategy. Even within these limitations, the political leaders acted in a cautious manner, especially during (and soon after) the first world war. Ponnambalam Arunachalam claimed that some members of the

political elite considered the Ceylon National Association to be "seditious", while for others the preferred course was "to ingratiate themselves with the Ceylon Government."⁵⁶

The Ceylon National Association, the Chilaw Association and the Ceylon Reform League were among the organizations that joined forces in 1917 to establish the Ceylon National Congress. It was those who advocated constitutional reforms who had control of the Congress, rather than those only concerned with special interests, such as the plantation economy. The members of the Congress were not only educated in English, but covered the spectrum of elite occupations: lawyers, planters, doctors and businessmen. The Congress was thus far from representative and served as a forum for privileged politics by the privileged. The leadership of the Congress reflected its general make-up. The first eight Presidents of the Congress included a Civil Servant, one rubber-planter, one teacher and five lawyers.⁵⁷ Even the sentiments expressed at this forum had the unmistakable stamp of privilege. In his speech as President of the Congress, Ponnambalam Arunachalam waxed eloquent. "To me," he stated, "the Congress is the fulfillment of dreams cherished from the time I was an undergraduate at Cambridge."⁵⁸

Of all the issues besides constitutional reform, education was the most popular topic for discussion by both the President and members of the

⁵⁶ P. Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings*. Vol. I Colombo:1936 pp. 111-112

⁵⁷ HCNC. p. 194

⁵⁸ RH 910.13r. 25(8) *The Presidential Address of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam at the First Session of the Ceylon National Congress*, 11 December, 1919. p. 1 (Henceforth, *Presidential Address*)

Ceylon National Congress. At its inaugural session, Arunachalam laid out the details of what he saw as the reasons for his contemporaries' dissatisfaction with the system of education. On their behalf he stated:

We can no longer consent to leave it to the pleasure of officials who flit across the stage of the Education Department with scarcely a policy and are permitted under our strange system of administration to change at will solemn declarations of Governors and Secretaries of State.⁵⁹

What Arunachalam wanted was for the indigenous leadership to have more control over educational developments, free from the habitual reliance on the shifts in administrative policies. But he also had to acknowledge that there was a divergence of opinions amongst the leadership themselves. There were some who continued to pass disparaging remarks about vernacular education. This was both a strategy of self protection and a way of expressing disdain for the lower classes. Yet there were also some members who agonized over their alienation from the masses owing to their ignorance of the vernacular. Both groups, however, were reluctant to have Tamil or Sinhala introduced into their old schools. As E.W. Perera, an eminent advocate of constitutional reforms, stated:

In my opinion, the vernacular languages are of no value in the education of the classes which attend English schools, elementary and secondary, I think it will be a decided disadvantage for Ceylonese boys to be taught the vernacular in such schools.⁶⁰

Their formation of alliances based on a common language - English - was justified on the grounds that they, as English-educated, would be able to achieve more

⁵⁹ RH 910.13r. 25(8) *Presidential Address*. p. 11

⁶⁰ CO 57/181 *Sessional Paper XX* of 1912.

participation in the political process under the British, than would those educated in the vernaculars. Evidently, if the vernaculars were to be encouraged as part of the curricula, this should happen strictly outside the charmed circle of privilege where no contamination of native culture was yet to be tolerated.

By the 1920s a most dramatic change had occurred: the emergence of a new class of urban labourers, more active and politicized than at any previous time. Though as yet unorganized, they posed a threat specifically to the indigenous capitalists and more generally, the Ceylon National Congress. The Ceylonese pioneers of capitalist enterprise had accumulated their riches primarily through the plantation economy. By the second decade of the twentieth century they had diverted their wealth into other forms of economic enterprise to include investment in urban property, industry and mercantile ventures. This spread of investment not only consolidated their affluent status, but made the capitalists a powerful lobby. They tended to be politically conservative and equated any threat to their vested interests with a threat to political stability and balanced development. It was not in their interest to have strong trade union activity and they brooked no dissent from their labourers. D.R. Wijewardene, a newspaper proprietor,⁶¹ was a classic example of the new breed of indigenous capitalists. Born into a wealthy home and educated at St. Thomas' College and Cambridge University, Wijewardene was an active participant in the reform societies of the earlier part of the century, having been Secretary of the Social Service League and

⁶¹ Wijewardene was the founder of the *Ceylon Daily News* in 1918 and was the Managing Director of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited, commonly known as the Lake House Group. Also published by Lake House were the *Ceylon Observer* and a number of Sinhalese and Tamil dailies.

an office bearer of the Ceylon National Congress. He was also involved with the movement for constitutional reform. In 1929, when printers at Lake House threatened to strike if not granted a wage increase, Wijewardene dismissed the workers that had presented him with the petition. Through his newspapers, Wijewardene was able to agitate publicly against trade union activities. There were similar setbacks in attempted strikes at the railways, the harbour and the Galle Face Hotel.⁶²

The early leaders of the labour movement were also products of premier English schools in Ceylon and British universities, which placed them firmly among the privileged sections of the country. They were, however, of a younger generation and more politically radical than their forefathers. Many of them were also members of the Young Lanka League founded in 1915.⁶³ One of the founder-members of the League was A.E. Goonesinha (1891-1967).⁶⁴ Goonesinha was a member of the Ceylon National Congress, but also one of its sharpest critics. He accused them of paying little heed to labour issues. In 1922, he became Vice-President of the Ceylon Labour Union which soon emerged as the leading trade union in Ceylon. Its transformation into the Labour Party in 1927 saw Goonesinha's exit from the Congress and the end to a radical voice in the

⁶² See V.K. Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*. pp. 321-331 and E.F.C. Ludowyk, *The Modern History of Ceylon*. London:1966 p. 151

⁶³ Though the League did not play an active role in the formulation of educational policies, its importance lies particularly in the mobilization of the urban working class. As a consequence of the League's agitation, the government was forced to respond with welfare policies that did influence developments in the educational field.

⁶⁴ He was educated at Dharmarajah College, Kandy and his political outlook was shaped by Theosophist doctrine. After early employment as a railway clerk, he joined the staff of *The Searchlight*, an English weekly.

organization, both for constitutional reform and for labour activities.⁶⁵

Despite these divergences in political perceptions among different groups of the political elite, the Ceylon National Congress retained its premier position.⁶⁶ In ten years, the Congress had grown in confidence and acquired a considerable aptitude for political negotiation. Their top priority, however, continued to be constitutional reform and increased Ceylonese representation in Government. A new Constitution in 1920, which swelled the number of nominated members to the Executive Council, with a parallel increase in the number of elected members to the Legislative Council, was seen as insufficient. Constitutional reform dominated Congress proceedings while the leadership reacted to social and economic developments with unimaginative rigidity. The Congress had made no attempt to broaden its appeal and it was no surprise that issues concerning labour were rejected by the conservative wing as irrelevant or subversive. The younger activists found the pace of change within the Congress too slow and soon the discordant voices grew louder. Various Youth Leagues were organized who believed that strategies adopted by Indian leaders were more likely to induce drastic change, a point of view rejected by Congress stalwarts who saw this as too confrontational.

Far more serious than any confrontation between the old guard and

⁶⁵ Other union organizers from the ranks of the elite included Colin R. de Silva and N.M. Perera, graduates of the London School of Economics, Dr. S.A. Wickremesinghe, M.G. Mendis, Philip Gunawardena and Leslie Goonewardene who attended an English Public School. Together they formed the *Suriya Mal* Movement out of which was born the Marxist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) in December, 1935.

⁶⁶ For a full discussion of the political heterogeneity of the elite, see V.K. Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*. Durham, North Carolina: 1972 pp. 72-79

younger activists, was the developing communal rift amongst the leadership of the Congress. Political manoeuvrings over the allocation of seats had heightened communal tensions and the dispute over a special seat for Tamils in the Western Province brought the issue to a head. The Tamil members were outraged that the Low-country Sinhalese appeared so unsympathetic. In protest the former President, Ponnambalam Arunachalam, left the Congress and formed the Tamil Mahajana Sabha in 1921.⁶⁷ The Kandyanans too were unhappy with the Congress's reluctance to allow Kandyans alone to stand for elections in the Kandyan provinces. In their frustration, they denounced the leadership as "Colombo reformers". Four years after the Tamils' departure, the Kandyan wing followed and formed their own Kandyan Nationalist Assembly.⁶⁸ The remaining leadership of the Ceylon National Congress denounced "the introduction of caste and religion in connection with the elites..."⁶⁹ but they did nothing to reduce the anxieties of the minorities and prevent their exodus. The Congress was left in turmoil and finally reduced to an organization of primarily Low-country Sinhalese membership, a far cry from the inter-communal body founded in 1919. These dramatic changes, further enhanced by the constitutional

⁶⁷ For a further discussion of these issues, see K.M. de Silva's two articles: (i) "The Ceylon National Congress in Disarray, 1920-1: Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam leaves the Congress" in *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*. Vol. XI:1 and 2, 1972 pp. 70-102 and (ii) "The Ceylon National Congress in Disarray II: The Triumph of Sir William Manning, 1921-1924" in *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*. Vol. III (New Series), 1973 pp. 16-39

⁶⁸ In 1927, the Kandyan Nationalist Assembly put forth its demand that the Kandyan provinces be granted regional autonomy within a federal state.

⁶⁹ HCNC. p. 608

reforms in 1924⁷⁰ and 1931⁷¹, resulted in the further splintering of unity amongst the political leadership. In due course, these communal divisions were reflected in their approach to the many social and economic changes of the following years, especially with regard to educational matters.

The Ordinance of 1920:

As a result of the many ordinances that were passed between 1869 and 1919, education made dramatic strides. Yet the basic contradictions and inadequacies system were not rectified. There were many loopholes in the actual implementation of policy. The most glaring omission was the lack of a comprehensive law on education. Then there was the persistent ambiguity as to the role of mission schools within the system. Denominational schools were the principal administrators of education, but they were entirely independent of any control or criticism by external authorities. The government's policy was one of non-interference with mission schools and they had even gone so far as to not establish schools in areas where mission schools already existed. This meant that, in certain instances children had no choice but to attend missionary institutions. Governor William Manning (1918-1925) was particularly sensitive to the criticism against these schools, especially by the burgeoning nationalists. Ponnambalam Arunachalam, in an address to the Ceylon National Association on 2 April, 1917,

⁷⁰ By the Constitution of 1924, the composition of the Legislative Council was once again altered. The number of unofficial members was increased to 37 of which 34 were to be elected, 23 on a territorial basis, with 11 communally. The Legislative Council was now a "Representative Legislature" with at least half of its members elected.

⁷¹ For more details on the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931, see Chapter four.

had stated the general attitude of the nationalists. The perception was that:

the Christian schools were really disguised instruments of proselytisation, stumbling blocks to real educational expansion and an excuse for government inactivity and laissez faire policy.⁷²

The nationalists' reaction was understandable in the context of the revival movements and associated expansion of non-Christian schools. A memorial from the Ceylon Reform League addressed to the Secretary of State, Walter Long, asked that special attention be paid to the "vital question of education" arguing that it had a "subordinate place and receives scanty attention." When the Memorial accused the Government of shifting responsibility to, "private bodies and individuals, too often ill-equipped for the discharge of their important duties,"⁷³ the Governor was forced to act. The first intimation that change was imminent came in a speech to a gathering of school managers on 31 October, 1919:

Except in the cases of such schools as had a majority of pupils of the particular denomination, it was the policy of the government gradually to replace denominational by Government schools.⁷⁴

A month later, on 20 November, 1919, the Attorney-General, made a statement supporting the Governor. H.C. Golan stated:

The State is now provided with machinery of its own. And it would be inadvisable to seek for any remedy except a system of state education in areas other than those where the large majority of the inhabitants are

⁷² The speech was entitled, "Our Political Needs". Quoted in P. Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings*. Vol. 1. p. 29

⁷³ CML 50/D-9 Memorial signed by W.A. de Silva, to Secretary of State, Walter Hume Long, 20 June, 1917. Quoted in *The Yearbook of the Ceylon Reform League, 1917-1918*. p. 41

⁷⁴ Quoted in the *Ceylon Daily News*, 11 February, 1920.

Christian.⁷⁵

He thus ensured that mission schools in Christian majority areas would remain undisturbed, but, with the establishment of more government schools, Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu children would be provided with the option to attend non-denominational schools. These pronouncements were followed by the introduction of a new Education Bill in the Legislative Council, eight years after the Bridge and Mcleod Reports. The object of the Bill was stated somewhat blandly in its Preamble: "to make better provision for education and to revise and consolidate the law relating thereto."⁷⁶ The Ordinance was not implemented until 1924.

The Educational Ordinance of 1920 was a minor milestone in the history of education in Ceylon. Since the Morgan Commission Report, there had been no legal provision either for a Directorate of Education or an office for the post of Director, a fact remedied by the Ordinance.⁷⁷ A Code was also promulgated which framed the regulations for a Board of Education.⁷⁸ This comprehensive enactment on education resulted in a U-turn in governmental policy. Moving from a system of *laissez faire*, the government now took virtual control of all developments in education in its own hands. Inevitably, the

⁷⁵ *Hansard* (LC), 20 November, 1920. My emphasis.

⁷⁶ CO 54/949-9 Preamble of *Education Ordinance* No. 1 of 1920

⁷⁷ CO 54/949-9 *Education Ordinance* No. 1 of 1920. Section 1

⁷⁸ CO 57/212 *Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Education Codes*. The Board was to consist of at least sixteen, but not more than twenty members. For the first time, two members of the Board had to also be Members of the Legislative Council. See CO 54/949-9 *Education Ordinance* No. 1 of 1920. Section 6

relationship between the government and private agencies underwent a change. As a result, religion began to overshadow language as the main issue in the education debate.

In the nineteenth century the State and private agencies, especially mission bodies, were in partnership. By the early twentieth century the relationship had become somewhat ambivalent. The 1900 Department of Public Instruction Administrative Report noted that the situation that existed was one where:

the machinery of administration was all government but the actual provision of education was largely in the hands of the Missionaries and other private agencies.⁷⁹

The Bridge Report too had been aware of and criticized this entanglement. The Report had stated, "it is time for the State to call a halt to the unplanned expansion of denomination schools as being highly detrimental to efficiency and entirely prejudicial to the economy."⁸⁰ When the Ordinance of 1920 threatened to curtail the expansion of denominational elementary schools in towns and villages, the missionaries were incensed. One mission body wrote to its Home Office:

This is a serious matter for all Missionary Societies working in Ceylon, for the policy is quite revolutionary. It will ultimately lead to a closing of a large number of our schools.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Administrative Report (DPI)*, 1900. p. 12

⁸⁰ *Sessional Paper XXI* of 1912 p. 18

⁸¹ Report of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, July, 1920. p. 32. Cited by C.S.V. Jayaweera, "Educational Ordinance No. 1 of 1920" in *EC, CV*. p. 552

The fear was that the government would increase the number of its own schools to the detriment of mission schools. The Bill, however, did not envisage the complete abolition of denominational schools. One clause provided that, if denominational schools had a majority of pupils who were of the same religion, they would be allowed to continue and receive government grants. As the Attorney General stated:

When there are schools in existence or which are brought into existence whether Christian or not and which serve the needs of a district, there is nothing in the Bill which prevents aid being given.⁸²

In spite of this assurance, the proposal did not meet with universal approval. The Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim associations especially, along with the Anglicans, Wesleyans and American Congregationalists welcomed the policy. Opposition came from the Roman Catholics, who sent a petition to the government entitled, *The New Education Policy of the Ceylon Government*. It argued that the policy was inimical to the liberty and rights of Roman Catholics:

Our right to Catholic Schools, staffed by Catholic teachers under Catholic management, wherever the number of Catholics is insufficient to enable us to open such schools, and our right to such share in the funds of the Colony which are set apart for education as the number of children attending our schools and the results obtained in the examinations held by Government entitle us to.⁸³

As a result, the Government felt obliged to deliberate the contentious issue of religious education. To appease the majority, after over a

⁸² *Hansard* (LC), 20 November, 1919.

⁸³ This was published by the Catholic Messenger Press, Colombo:1919 p. 40

century of unhindered proselytization, an anti-discriminatory clause was introduced. Section 13 of the Ordinance stated that no child could be barred from admission into any assisted school on the basis "of the religion, nationality, race, caste or language of such applicant or of either of his parents."⁸⁴ At first sight the fact that the Ordinance did not limit itself in restricting admission solely on the basis of the child's or parents' religious affiliation was impressive. However, even with the provision regarding nationality, race, caste and language, this clause was limited in its application to assisted schools and did not affect either government, or English-language schools. By excluding religious - that is, Christian - instruction from the regular curriculum in grant-in-aid and vernacular medium schools, the government hoped to ensure parental acceptance since the children would no longer be exposed to Christian religious instruction on a compulsory basis. Assisted schools could, however, offer religious instruction, provided it was conducted outside school hours.⁸⁵

This provision, unlike the Town and Rural Schools' Ordinances - which made the conscience clause applicable to vernacular schools only - was applied to all assisted schools, both English and vernacular. As religious instruction was now outside school hours, parents could withdraw the child for that period. The government was anxious to avoid any criticism on the ground that religious instruction formed part of the curriculum in government schools. The Ordinance hence projected the view that it was not the responsibility of the

⁸⁴ CO 54/949-9 *Education Ordinance* No. 1 of 1920. Part III, Section 13

⁸⁵ CO 54/949-9 *Education Ordinance* No. 1 of 1920. Part III, Sections 14 and 15

government to offer any education in religion. It therefore prohibited such instruction being offered formally in any of the state-supported schools, either English- or vernacular-medium.⁸⁶ There was, however, a 'right of entry' clause. This meant that facilities were granted to a particular religious body to provide religious instruction to pupils of government schools who belonged to the same denomination and who hence required such instruction. By offering this service, the government argued that it maintained a neutral stance on religious education. There was some doubt as to whether the 'right of entry' referred only to Christian missionaries, or included Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim teachers as well. It probably did not help that with the formation of the Board of Education, only five out of twenty members represented the local religious groups.⁸⁷ As was expected, the Hindus and Buddhists were not happy with the interpretation of the conscience clause. The government's financial assistance to religious instruction, they argued, should cover their denominations too, by specifically stating that Hinduism and Buddhism would be taught.

The vague pronouncements on the issue of the conscience clause found its way to Westminster. D.N. Pritt, Member of Parliament, on behalf of his friends in Ceylon wrote to Secretary of State Ormsby-Gore, voicing his concern over the proposed amendment to Section 13 of the Ordinance. The original clause had stated that:

No school will be registered where there already exists a school of the same class and grade within

⁸⁶ CO 54/949-9 *Education Ordinance* No. 1 of 1920. Part III, Section 15

⁸⁷ One Hindu, one Muslim and three Buddhist representatives. *Hansard* (LC), 25 February, 1926.

one mile of the new school without some intervening obstacle unless the average daily attendance of the new school for the previous twelve months exceeds thirty.⁸⁸

The amendment wanted to insert the words "pupils of the same denomination as the managing body" after the last sentence. Pritt's concern was two-fold; first, that a large number of pupils in Christian schools were of non-Christian backgrounds, and second, that the Buddhist community felt that Buddhist children should receive a Buddhist education. Pritt wrote:

It is alleged that the Buddhists are using their political strength as the majority community in endeavouring to make it impossible for Christian schools to compete with State-aided Buddhist schools, and that the principle of governmental religious neutrality in matters of education as [laid] down in the Education Code has been violated as Buddhism is now taught in government schools whereas the Code lays down that 'religious instruction shall not form part of the instruction to be given in any government school.'⁸⁹

The Christian minority remained unconvinced and they feared that the amendment would carry further the campaign against their educational activities. The Government wrote back to the Colonial Office that Pritt had no cause for anxiety. The amendment had been misunderstood by the various Christian denominations, the letter stated. Christian children had always asserted their right to go to Christian schools and non-Christian children had historically attended mission schools in great number only because there were so few schools under non-Christian management. Now the position had changed. The non-

⁸⁸ CO 54/949-9 *Education Ordinance* No. 1 of 1920. Part III, Section 13

⁸⁹ CO 54/949-9 Amendment to Clause 13 of Ordinance No. 1 of 1920. Letter from Pritt to Ormsby-Gore, 21 July, 1937.

Christians now claimed for themselves the same right which the Christian Missions had claimed on behalf of Christian children.

The growth of community consciousness, as well as the extensive use of school grants by foreign missions in the cause of proselytism, had resulted in the Buddhists and Hindus wanting to establish more schools under the management of their respective communities. As the entire cost of vernacular education was now borne by the State, the provision of separate denominational schools, where a minimum number of children of the relevant denomination did not attend, could not be contemplated if unnecessary expenditure through duplication of staff and buildings was to be avoided. It was anticipated that schools under Christian management which had a majority of Buddhist children would not thrive so long as the greater part of the Buddhist children were expected to leave as soon as a Buddhist school was established in the vicinity. Such fears, however, had little basis in reality. In a large number of Christian schools where the majority of the pupils were non-Christian, attendance would be ensured, not only because of the relative excellence of the institution, but simple considerations of convenience. A Government official wrote to the Colonial Office, that he could not, however, "concur... that the principle of Governmental religious neutrality in matters of education has been violated." These matters had already been taken into consideration. "It is quite in order for ministers of any religion to apply for permission to impart religious instruction to children of their denomination." Anyway, the amendment would not affect existing schools. The letter continued:

I understand that there is a large body of Christian

opinion here which considers the amendment not obnoxious in itself but regards it as a precursor of more drastic changes in educational policy.⁹⁰

The fears so described proved to be entirely justified. Further, the government was satisfied by the assurances of the Minister for Education that grants would not be offered on a denominational principle because such discriminatory measures were not in the interests of his Department.

The move away from a *laissez faire* policy meant that every Municipal and Local Board authority became a separate educational district. Each district had to have a committee of not more than nine. Of the nine, two could be nominated by the local body and the rest by the Government for a period of three years.⁹¹ The Town Schools Ordinance under which the local authority had acted as the educational authority was thus abrogated. The new system resulted in a minimized role for the local authority while granting more power to the centre. The endorsement of the policy by the Legislative Council meant that local bodies were also relieved of their financial burden. The Government was now empowered directly to influence educational growth, particularly the expansion of English and vernacular education.⁹²

The Ordinance of 1920 did not live up to expectation, though it did achieve some noteworthy results. Local authorities were no longer held

⁹⁰ CO 54/949-9 Amendment to Clause 13 of Ordinance No. 1 of 1920. Letter from Officer Administering the Government to Ormsby-Gore, 14 September, 1937.

⁹¹ CO 54/949-9 *Education Ordinance* No. 1 of 1920. Section 1

⁹² The repercussions of this increased financial burden on the Government were soon felt and necessitated the formation of a Commission in 1923 to report on whether other services, such as communications and public health should be supported by public or local services. *Sessional Paper IV* of 1924. Report of the Financial Relations Commission.

responsible for vernacular education, as the Government assumed total control over educational expansion and expenditure. This assumption of control was not without its drawbacks. The unlimited expansion of mission schools was regarded as a hindrance to the establishment of government schools. By virtue of its new authority under the Ordinance, the Government could tackle the problem and close down some of these schools in order to prevent a duplication of institutions in particular areas. The Board of Education, however, still had considerable clout and with constant pressure from the mission lobby, were able to impede any action by the government. The position of missionary schools remained unaffected, while there was only a haphazard increase in the number of government-sponsored schools.

The Ordinance's pronouncements on religious instruction were also not as forthright as they could have been. The declaration on government neutrality was nebulous at best. While stating that the teaching of religion could form no part of the curriculum of government schools, missionaries were given a 'right of entry' to carry out such instruction, even if offered after school hours. To add to the vagueness of the policy, the government continued to support denominational schools with the provision of grants. The greatest shortcoming of the Ordinance was its failure to tackle the language issue. By saying nothing, the Ordinance of 1920 silently re-affirmed the government's policy to provide mass education in the vernacular free of charge, while limiting English education to people of means.

**CHAPTER THREE:
CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND
ELITE ATTITUDES TO EDUCATION**

The production of [a] bilingual facility in our schools would be good for Ceylon....¹

¹ P. Ramanathan, *Hansard (LC)*, 1926. p. 378

Acquiring an education served numerous social purposes of which one emerges distinctly: the distancing of its beneficiaries from the population at large. For those educated in English, opportunities in various occupations were available. These included public and leadership roles, as Legislative Councillors and Civil Servants, in the professions as doctors, lawyers and even as entrepreneurs. While certain restrictions were placed on those who had been educated through the medium of either Sinhala or Tamil, their quest for upward mobility was not stifled altogether. They were able to seek opportunities within their localities that afforded them a degree of prestige as notaries, teachers, ayurvedic doctors, monks and priests. Despite such a range of opportunities which conferred status, it must be remembered that the number of people who could be described as the truly *privileged elite*, remained disproportionate in relation to the larger group who could be distinguished from the masses by virtue of their education and occupations. Thus, amongst the English educated, there were clerks and other intermediate level functionaries, as there were Tamil and Sinhala educated labourers and farmers. The rarity of high privilege was a natural consequence of a three-tiered system of education geared towards the needs of a hierarchical society. While despite the inter-personal and inter-group competition, there was a certain homogeneity in the world views of similarly educated people. But there was a gulf that existed between the privileged at the local and national levels, which was enhanced by what has been termed as a

"distance of cultural aspiration."¹ In other words, for the social leaders at the two levels, the perception of their needs for their respective communities differed very considerably. While both groups of privileged Ceylonese sought better employment opportunities, their goals differed. The battle for the vernacular educated elite was simply to extend the possibilities open to Sinhala and Tamil speakers, while the English educated sought parity with the colonizer in direct competition for jobs, as, for example, within the Civil Service.

From this one example it becomes clear that a vast majority of English-educated Ceylonese were attempting to enact two mutually supporting roles. The first was obvious: to place themselves on par with the British in a manner visible to all and second, to thus further emphasize the distance between themselves and the rest of society, especially those educated in Sinhala and Tamil. Preparation for the two roles was encouraged and nurtured primarily in mission schools, where knowledge of English was dispensed with heavy doses of Christian doctrine and Western values. The manifestations of such a world view took on overt and covert forms in dress, speech, habit, manner, attitude and intellectual concerns. At the same time, the education received emphasized democratic traditions and concepts of loyalty and fair play. What emerged was a group, hybrid in thought and action. While they had clearly identified their aspirations of sharing power and privilege with the colonial government, they were equally eager for social reform, to be wrought by their own perceived role as moral and intellectual superiors *vis a vis* the rest of the populace. The inherent

¹ Kumar uses the term to discuss local and national, Brahminical and non-Brahminical elites in India. K. Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education - A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. p. 97 and pp. 98-99

contradictions between the political ideology of the English-educated and the wider context of their lives resulted in varying expressions of discontent and anxiety, both individual and collective. At one level they were powerless to achieve their political and career aspirations except as gifts from the colonial power. At another they were in no position to reform a society from which they were largely alienated. The formation of societies and associations such as the Ceylon Reform Society, the Ceylon University Association, the Ceylon National Association, the Chilaw Association and even the Ceylon National Congress, allowed a fusion of ideas to be presented to the government (and population at large) in a coherent form indicating strength of purpose and group solidarity. The diversity of their opinions was more apparent at the individual level. Attitudes to reform depended less on a shared social background, than on personal intellectual and cultural predilections. Thus the Anagarika Dharmapala could advocate religious revivalism, while Ananda Coomaraswamy urged cultural reassertion and Ponnambalam Ramanathan demanded political reform. In spite of such differences, however, as individuals or a group, they all saw education to be the key to any strategy for social transformation.

So far as the privileged in indigenous society were concerned, there was a conflict between actual preferences and ideologically inspired protests, given the harsh reality of the times: without an English education, upward mobility, social status and material success were inaccessible. Protest against the system, however, was an essential element in the nationalist agenda, for reasons both positive and negative. Negatively, as perceived by the British, it was used

as a means to channel anti-Christian, anti-government sentiment. Yet, protest also implied a positive attempt to reclaim the indigenous tradition through the agenda of religious revivalism. There were, however, several contradictions in this new nationalist agenda on education. First, without alternatives on offer, English-medium schools, especially mission schools, would continue to be patronized. Secondly, at most, the privileged class was attempting to supplement their own education with a knowledge of Sinhala or Tamil and 'tradition', which, they believed would provide them with a training appropriate to their nationalist aspirations without their giving up the advantages of their English education. As Ramanathan stated in the Legislative Council:

I should like a Tamil or Sinhalese man born here to know English as well as his own language. Thus, we may be great co-operators in the work for the good of this Island. The production of this bilingual facility in our schools, would be good for Ceylon and for the rest of the Empire.²

This new aspiration went hand in hand with the denial of English to the vernacular school, a typical contradiction in the nationalist movement.

Religious Revivals and their Fall-out in Education

Compromise was inevitable in the context of such deep rooted contradictions and the religious revivals of the nineteenth century were the most telling examples of such compromise. The schools that were established as a result of these revivals, were in many cases imitations of the missionary schools. They taught in English, adopted a similar curriculum and, in some cases, charged

² *Hansard (LC)*, 25 February, 1926. p. 378

fees which restricted admission. The element of protest and nationalist self-assertion lay in the claim that they inculcated in their pupils a deep sense of pride in the local heritage, tradition, language and, most importantly, religion.

These religious revivals made no distinction between Protestant and Catholic endeavours, but targeted the Christian monopoly in education. The impetus for the relevant action stemmed from a deep sense of being handicapped in the race for economic and social mobility. To this was added the other feeling of inadequacy - the feeling of alienation from local tradition. The new educational programme was also one method by which the Ceylonese could assert the right to control their own educational institutions. Non-Christian schools were ineligible for grants if established in the vicinity of mission schools. Cosmetic grants were periodically awarded, as to Vidyodaya Pirivena, a seat of Buddhist learning. But even this act of generosity could not obscure the difficulties faced by the Buddhists and Hindus in setting up other schools, especially in urban areas. The campaign strategy of the revival movements, hence, took on a distinctly anti-Christian tone, protest, not just against proselytism, but against adopted Western values, life-style and manners. The Buddhists were by far the more politicized of the three movements, while the Hindus and Muslims, hindered by their minority status, preferred to refrain from overtly political pronouncements. The important factor linking the three lay in the promotion by the leadership of each movement of educational reform through an increased awareness of the Island's traditional religions. Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) was the champion of Buddhist education, Arumuga Navalar (1822-1879) the proponent of Tamil Saivism and M.C. Siddi Lebbe (1838-1898) the main leader of

the movement for Islamic education.

Buddhist Revival Movement

The origins of the Buddhist revival movement lay in the celebrated public debates between Christian missionaries and Buddhist monks. The debates were held at Udanvita (1866), Gampola (1871) and Panadura (1873), the last being the most famous of the three. The language of the exchanges was sharp, but the debates were conducted in a peaceful manner. A Wesleyan missionary, the Reverend S. Langdon, was impressed by the people's reaction. He commented:

I question if a controversy of that kind could be held in the presence of so many thousands in any country in Europe without some disturbance.³

It was the distinguished oratory of a charismatic monk, the Venerable Migettuwatte Gunananda *Thero*, which attracted the attention of the American Theosophist, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott. The Colonel described Gunananda *Thero* as "the most brilliant polemic orator of the island, the terror of the missionaries...more wrangler than ascetic."⁴ On the invitation of Gunananda *Thero* and another monk, the Venerable Kikkaduwe Sumangala *Thero*, Colonel Olcott, accompanied by Madame Helena Blavatsky, arrived in Ceylon in 1880.

Olcott and Blavatsky were renowned Theosophists who had organized the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875 with three main objectives that included, the formation of a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood of

³ S. Langdon, in *Ceylon Friend*. September, 1873. Cited in W.A. de Silva, "A Cycle of National Progress" in *Buddhist Theosophical Society Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, 1880-1940*. Colombo:1940

⁴ H.S. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*. Second Series, Madras:1929 p. 157.

Humanity, the encouragement of studies in Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science, and the investigation of the unexplained laws of Nature and powers latent in man.⁵ In order to muster support for their endeavours, Olcott stressed the theosophists' tolerance for other religions. In a speech delivered in Colombo soon after his arrival, he declared, "the Theosophical Society is not a Buddhist, any more than it is a Parsee, a Hindu, a Jain or a Christian propaganda. [sic]"⁶

But Olcott saw himself and his companion as:

the first white champions of their religion, speaking of its excellence and its blessed comfort from the platform in the face of the missionaries, its enemies and slanderers.⁷

Olcott and the Theosophists did not create the Buddhist revival, they simply harnessed and directed its organization to make it more broad based. Until this point the Buddhist revival movement was concentrated in the predominantly Sinhalese areas of the Western and Southern Provinces. The involvement of the two foreign Theosophists was seen as a crucial lever for extending the Buddhist movement into Kandyan areas without exacerbating caste rivalries.

To enforce change in Ceylon, one of the first tasks that Olcott undertook was a survey of the educational scene. His assessment led him to conclude that a network of Buddhist schools was essential to counteract the influence and impact of Christianity. The Christians, he lamented, "spend millions

⁵ Cited in D.H. Panditha Gunawardene, *F.L. Woodward: Out of His Life and Thought*. Colombo:nd p. 9

⁶ Lecture on Theosophism and Buddhism, 3 June, 1880 in, H.S. Olcott, *A Collection of Lectures on Theosophism and Archaic Religions Delivered in India and Ceylon*. Madras:1883 p. 27

⁷ H.S. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*. Third Series. Madras:1929 p. 165

to destroy Buddhism; we must spend to defend and propagate it."⁸ For this to be achieved it became necessary to co-ordinate the resources of the various Buddhist societies and educational facilities, and establish a central organization. The Buddhist Theosophical Society, founded on 17 June, 1880, was the result. The dramatic impact of the Society was evident from support from quarters that were neither Sinhalese nor Buddhist. Sympathetic individuals included, among others, the Burgher, A.E. Buultjens, and foreigners such as C.W. Leadbeter, F.L. Woodward and Mary Museau Higgins - all of whom were to play a leading role in educational developments in Ceylon. One Sinhalese youth that came under the influence of the Theosophists was Don David Hewavitarne. He became better known in his adult life as the Anagarika (the homeless one) Dharmapala (the guardian of the doctrine).⁹

The 1840s saw Buddhist education at its lowest ebb. After the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission Report of 1832, all the government-run Sinhala schools were closed. Schools that were maintained through private means were able to survive, but these were few in number. The Venerable Dodanuwe Payaratna Tissa Maha Nayaka *Thero* was a pioneer in the establishment of non-governmental Buddhist schools. His school at Degalla, was founded in 1869, a

⁸ H.S. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*. Fourth Series. Madras:1931 p. 120

⁹ One point of interest regarding Dharmapala's life, is that his first job after leaving St. Thomas' College, was in the Department of Education, where he started as a clerk at the age of eighteen. For more biographical details, see especially G.D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka - Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response*. Columbia, South Carolina:1988 pp.53-61 and A. Guruge (ed.), *Return to Righteousness - A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*. Colombo:1965 pp.681-706. Obeyesekere has also argued that Dharmapala's background proved to be the catalyst in the re-definition of identity of all Sinhala Buddhists, not just of himself. See G. Obeyesekere, "The Vicissitudes of the Sinhala-Buddhist Identity through Time and Change" in *CINP*. pp. 295 ff

full decade before the arrival of Olcott and Blavatsky.¹⁰ In 1872, a Buddhist college, the Vidyodaya Pirivena, was founded in Colombo by another monk, the Venerable Sumangala. The college was devoted to the study of Pali and Buddhism. It was the first school of its kind to be recognized by the Government and in 1878 received a grant of six hundred Rupees.¹¹ This was followed in 1876 with the establishment of Vidyalankara Pirivena at Kelaniya by the Venerable Dharmaloka. By 1880, the government had awarded grants-in-aid to four Buddhist schools.¹²

The establishment of the Theosophical Society Educational Fund in 1881 ushered in a new approach in the development of Buddhist schools. Two striking features in this new strategy were, first, the use of English as the medium of instruction, and second, the active instruction in Buddhist doctrine and philosophy¹³ - two tactics copied and adapted from the missionaries. The Fund began by setting up nine Sunday schools in the Colombo area in 1881. The first English medium school opened under the aegis of the Galle branch was the Galle Theosophical Buddhist School, set up on 15 September, 1880. The school suffered a fate similar to that of many early missionary schools and was closed within the year owing to an insufficient number of pupils. This was followed by the inauguration of the Pettah Buddhist English school in Colombo on 1 November,

¹⁰ K.D.G. Wimalaratne, *Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*. Maharagama, Sri Lanka:1985 p. 11

¹¹ *Administrative Report* (DPI), 1878 Section C pp. 60-68

¹² This included a school at Koratota which had received its first grant in 1873. *Administrative Report* (DPI), 1873 p. 190

¹³ It is important to make note of the fact that the Buddhist teachings were not of the traditional Theravada doctrines, but of reformed, Protestant Buddhism. See especially, G.D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka - Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response*. pp. 50-52 and pp. 63 ff

1886. C.W. Leadbeter was installed as the first Principal of this school, which later evolved into the prestigious Ananda College on 17 August, 1895.¹⁴ There were other Buddhist schools of comparable calibre. They included: Vijaya College in Matale; Anuradha College, Nawalapitiya and Jinaraja College in Gampola. In Kandy, Dharmaraja College was set up on 30 June, 1887 as a possible rival to Trinity.

In 1886, Dharmapala returned to Ceylon after a two year training programme at Adyar, Madras. He took over the management of the Buddhist section of the Theosophical Society and took an active role in educational developments. He was particularly opposed to the English-educated leaders of Ceylon, whom he accused of having "done nothing for the welfare of the Sinhalese race." To call them social and political reformers would be a gross exaggeration. They were, Dharmapala argued, as products of a "missionary civilization" useless entities, for whom the "greatest bliss consists in attending a Queen's House Ball, or a Governor's Levee."¹⁵ Dharmapala's exile in India between 1915 and 1922 led him to believe that education in Ceylon was backward and simplistic. He wrote in 1922 that "the education that we get in our local scholastic institutions does not make us men, but ill-paid clerks." He urged the youth to strive towards higher education which was impossible in Ceylon. "The quicker you abandon the local schools and go to India," he exhorted, "the better

¹⁴ Leadbeter was Principal from 1886-1890. He was succeeded by A.E. Buultjens, who was Principal from 1890-1899.

¹⁵ "On Buddhist Procession" in *The Buddhist*. Vol. IV, October, 1892. Quoted by A. Guruge (ed.), *Return to Righteousness*. p. 525

for you if you wish to be men."¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Galle Theosophical School was re-opened on 21 February, 1891, but it did not get off the ground until the arrival of Dr. Bowles Daly as its new Principal. Daly re-named the school Mahinda College on 1 March, 1892 and set about making it competitive with the missionary run Richmond College. Daly's ambitions were clear. He stated:

I shall make it a point of the first importance that every boy will be grounded in the principles of Honesty, Truthfulness and Justice, which had been laid down by the Lord Buddha in his precepts and solemnly accepted in theory but grossly denied in practice in every town and village in the Island.¹⁷

Daly's tenure was short lived. Two years later he resigned due to the community's negative reaction towards Mahinda. The College was, for the next nine years, administered by four different Principals, but to no avail. Olcott was called in to find a suitable replacement. His choice was a young American, F.L. Woodward, who was persuaded to leave his position at Stanford University. Woodward arrived at his new post on 1 August, 1903 and distinguished himself as one of Mahinda's most dynamic Principals.¹⁸ One of the first changes that he made was in the school motto. For the Latin - *Nihil est amabilius virtute* (Nothing is more lovable than virtue) - Woodward substituted a Pali saying, *Khippam Vayama Pandito Bhava* (Strive earnestly and be wise).¹⁹ Woodward was

¹⁶ *A Message to the Young Men of Ceylon*. (Pamphlet published in Calcutta, 1922) in A. Guruge (ed.), *Return to Righteousness*. pp. 517-518

¹⁷ Quoted by D.H. Panditha Gunawardene, *F.L. Woodward: Out of His Life and Thought*. p. 13

¹⁸ F.L. Woodward was Principal from 1903 to 1919.

¹⁹ *The Island*. 13 April, 1990.

a passionate proponent of fluency in the vernaculars, especially amongst those who claimed political and social leadership in Ceylon. He told the story of a young man, who after studying in England, returned to Ceylon and could not speak to his father or mother without the assistance of an interpreter. "If you cannot read the very language in which your nationality is enshrined," Woodward concluded, "or speak the tongue which reflects its underlying life, you become at once a pariah."²⁰ Stories such as this, combined with Dharmapala's critique of the elite, as products "of a bastard education without a solid foundation,"²¹ ensured that both Tamil and Sinhala were subjects of instruction, along with Buddhist philosophy in all Theosophical Society schools. As a result, Buddhist schools grew fast in the two decades since the establishment of the Theosophical Society in 1880.²²

Year	Number of Schools	Number of Students
1880	4	246
1885	8	734
1890	18	1761
1895	54	6261
1900	142	18700

One immediate consequence of the Buddhist revival was the

²⁰ Quoted without reference in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 2, July, 1906. p. 222

²¹ *A Message to the Young Men of Ceylon*. (Pamphlet published in Calcutta, 1922) in A. Guruge (ed.), *Return to Righteousness*. pp. 517-518

²² K.D.G. Wimalaratne, *Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*. p. 13

increased interest in Sinhala literature. From the end of the eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, translations of Western books into Sinhala dominated the literary output in the language. Most of these works were religious in content and included numerous translations of the Bible.²³ By the end of the 1880s, fiction began to make an appearance, again translations from European works.²⁴ Early original Sinhala fiction was written by Christian converts who used the novel as a means of religious instruction. The themes were simple: good versus evil, where good triumphed in the guise of a Christian protagonist or a soon-to-become Christian convert.²⁵ Piyadasa Sirisena (1875-1946), attempted to redress the imbalance. He was an active leader in the Buddhist revival and temperance movement. Because of this activity and his close association with Dharmapala, he was jailed by the government during the 1915 riots. His work, unlike those of his predecessors, was avowedly anti-Christian.²⁶ He started his own journal, *Sinhala Jatiya*, which targeted the Westernized Ceylonese besides the missionaries. The "brown Sahib" was criticized for his anglicized ways and abandonment of his religious and cultural heritage.

²³ In 1780 the Dutch translated the New Testament into Sinhala. The first translation of the entire Bible into Sinhala was undertaken by a British Civil Servant, William Tolfrey, in 1817. The Kotte version of the Bible in 1833 was not accorded much respect due to its colloquial idiom which was deemed to be "undignified".

²⁴ *Pilgrim's Progress* was translated in 1886 by Solomon Fernando and published by the Wesleyan Mission Press. This was followed by *Gulliver's Travels*, translated by A.J.W. Marambe in 1888 and *Arabian Night's Entertainment*, translated by Albert de Silva in 1894.

²⁵ There are two outstanding examples. The first L.I. de Silva (1844-1907) who wrote *Pavul Deka - Two Families* - which appeared in serial form in a Sinhala magazine, *Maldama* from 1866 until 1883. The second was written by the Reverend H. Kannangara, whose work, *Grama Pravrttiyak - A Tale of Village Life* - was published by the Ceylon Religious Tract Society in 1876. Cited by E.R. Sarachandra, "Sinhala - Language and Literature in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in *UCHC*. p. 348

²⁶ Sirisena was born Pedrick de Silva and was educated in English-medium Catholic schools.

This refrain formed a continuous theme in Sirisena's novels too. More important was the projection of the 'good, secular' Buddhist, active in social reform offering an alternative role model to the ascetic monk. The genre was copied from English models, a fact that Sirisena himself acknowledged, "I learnt the usefulness of writing fictionalised accounts by reading English novels."²⁷ These activities, while creating an identity for the Buddhist nationalist, also created a chasm between themselves and Ceylonese of other faiths - with ominous implications for the country's political future.

Hindu Revival Movement

The Hindu revival movement had started a little earlier than the Buddhist movement, but the two were contemporaneous for the most part. Sri Arumuga Navalar, the leader of the movement, had an educational background similar to that of Dharmapala. He started his education in a Tamil-medium primary school, before progressing on to the Methodist Central School in Jaffna, where he was taught in English. Navalar began his career as a teacher at his Alma Mater. He also worked closely for over a decade with the Reverend Percival, the Methodist Head of the Northern Province as a translator of the Bible. Thus, Navalar was steeped in the aims and practices of a missionary society. Though he himself was never converted, he accepted in principle the missionary methods of organization. He also agreed with the missionaries in the value of religious education, but maintained that it should be an indigenous religion. He

²⁷ Translated and Cited by S. Amunugama, "Ideology and Class Interest in one of Piyadasa Sirisena's Novels. The New Image of the "Sinhala Buddhist" Nationalist." in *CINP*. p. 323

violently opposed their practice of using education as a vehicle for the provision of Christian instruction and its concomitant value system.

Missionary societies had been active in the Northern Peninsula as early as 1814 with the Wesleyans leading the way. The American Board of Commissioners followed two years later, but they established themselves beyond the boundaries of Jaffna city in the rural areas that had been hitherto ignored. They chose the town of Tellipalai, eight miles north of Jaffna, in which to begin their work. The Americans were particularly concerned with education, which they saw as a natural means towards progress. Their approach to the issue was quite different from that of the British missionaries. First, the curriculum that was offered went beyond mere rudimentary instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic.²⁸ Secondly, the Congregationalists did not charge a tuition fee in day schools and thirdly, the establishment of girls' schools was actively pursued. In 1816, at Tellipalai, the first free school was started offering instruction in arithmetic, geography, religion, as well as Tamil literature and poetry. All classes were conducted in the Tamil medium. Four other schools followed, being set up at Vaddukoddai, Uduvil, Pandattarippu and Manipay. By 1848 over a hundred Tamil medium and sixteen English medium schools had been established throughout the Peninsula. The town of Tellipalai was also the site of the first girls' school, but it was Uduvil Girls' School, founded in 1824 by Mrs. Harriet

²⁸ There were a great many translations of, especially scientific and lexicographic, works into Tamil. Dr. S.F. Green was the most well known translator. In 1857 he translated *Mausell's Obstetrics*, in 1867, *Druit's Surgery* and in 1872, *Gray's Anatomy* was made available in Tamil.

Winslow, the wife of Reverend Myron Winslow²⁹, that attracted the most attention. It was the first boarding school for girls to be instituted in Asia. By 1912, over 2,500 girls had received an education in one or other American mission school.³⁰ The Congregationalists were also responsible for the founding of Jaffna College which developed a rich tradition in offering Tamil grammar, literature and Hindu astronomy in its syllabus,³¹ as well as other subjects in the English-medium.

Because of this rich background, it was not surprising that the Tamils of the Northern Province placed a high premium on the acquisition of education irrespective of the medium. There had never been a wholesale neglect of Tamil-medium education in the Northern Province as there had been a neglect of a Sinhala education in predominantly Sinhalese areas after the arrival of the British missionaries. In spite of this emphasis on the Tamil language, and probably helped by that very fact, the education system remained infused with Christian culture. Navalar was responsible for spearheading the campaign to establish Hindu schools in the Northern Province. He was also a renowned scholar hailed as the father of modern Tamil prose.³² His first effort was the Vannarponai Saiva Prakasa Vidyasalai at Jaffna in 1849. The school taught through the Tamil medium, but was opposed by the missionaries who did not

²⁹ Reverend Winslow was responsible for putting together *A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary of High and Low Tamil* in 1862.

³⁰ A. Vimalachandra, *The American Contribution to the Development of Tamil Language in Ceylon*. Mimeographed paper presented at the International Conference of Tamil Studies: University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1966. pp. 5 and 7

³¹ A. Vimalachandra, *The American Contribution to the Development of Tamil Language in Ceylon*. p. 7

³² G.C. Mendis, *Ceylon Under the British*. Colombo:1944. p. 66

relish the competition for State aid, and as a result, the school failed. In fact, for a short period, the school did receive a government grant, listed as it was as a vernacular school.³³ Navalar was not to be dissuaded. His second attempt was, audaciously, also at Vannarponai. The Saivagala Vidyasalai was founded in 1872 and set the pace for Hindu education. This time the medium of instruction was English, while classes in Saivite doctrine were also held. Two other schools were established in Inuvil and Kopay. The intention was to create a chain of Hindu schools to either replace Mission schools, or at least to stop their further expansion.

These schools came under the management of the Hindu Board of Education, also known as the *Saiva Vithya Vriththi Sangam*. The Board was in fact the opposite number of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, and held as its general objectives the establishment, maintenance and encouragement of Hindu education, including Tamil literature, art, music and drama.³⁴ Two years before the establishment of the Buddhist Theosophical Society and shortly after the death of Navalar in 1878, the Jaffna *Saiva Paripalana Sabhai* was organized. Its main objectives were to promote the Saivite religion, education and Tamil literature, as well as to maintain and safeguard the interests of the Saiva community.³⁵ Like schools established by the Buddhist Theosophical Society Educational Fund, many of the schools initiated by the Hindu revival used English as the medium of instruction. The most prestigious of these schools was Jaffna Hindu College,

³³ *Administrative Report* (DPI), 1872 p. 381

³⁴ CO 56/19 Ordinance No. 23 of 1926 - to incorporate the Hindu Board of Education

³⁵ CO 56/17 Ordinance 17 of 1931 - *Saiva Paripalana Sabhai* Ordinance

founded in 1889, by the Jaffna *Saiva Peripalana Sabhai*. 1888 saw the formation of another organization: the Society for the Propagation of Saivism which was followed by the establishment of the first Ceylonese branch of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1902, in Colombo.³⁶ Both of these organizations were also keen to counter the impact of Christian proselytization by the active promotion of a Hindu-based system of education. The Vaidyeshwara Vidyalaya was an example of this. Established by the Ramakrishna Mission in 1913, it held as its underlying philosophy, the education of Tamil children in "Hindu schools by Hindu teachers in a Hindu atmosphere."³⁷ The missionaries did not take kindly to this activity. They were by and large supported by the Department of Public Instruction. With the increasing number of Hindu schools applying for grants, eligibility restrictions were imposed. In one instance, the Director of Public Instruction demanded that a school in need would have to require its teachers to accept "Mission management as the sole condition to receiving Government aid."³⁸ The Hindu Board of Education totally rejected any such proposal. The point of Hindu revival schools would be nullified if missionary teachers were to be the only instructors.

With all this activity, the growth of Hindu schools in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was inevitable.³⁹

³⁶ The Ramakrishna Mission in Colombo was organized by Pundit Mailvaganam who took on robes as Swami Vipulananda. Missions were also established in Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa.

³⁷ SLNA 25.17/18 *Vaidyeshwara Vidyalaya Souvenir*. Jaffna, August, 1953. pp. 2-3

³⁸ *Administrative Report* (DPI), 1880. p. 21

³⁹ K.H.M. Sumathipala, *History of Education in Ceylon*. Dehiwala, Sri Lanka: 1968. p. 32

Year	Number of Schools	Number of Students
1880	1	167
1885	4	378
1890	6	661
1895	30	4600
1900	45	5000

Thus in the 86 Hindu schools that were established between 1880 and 1900, there were over ten thousand pupils, whereas there were 26,706 pupils in the 226 Buddhist schools over the same period. These impressive educational developments amongst the Ceylon Tamil population gave rise to the incorrect notion that they were the colonial government's favoured community and preferred over the Sinhalese.

Muslim Revival Movement

The catalyst for the Muslim revival movement was provided by an Egyptian exile, Arabi Pasha, who arrived in January, 1883, after a failed revolt against the British, a year earlier. Arabi Pasha was to spend nineteen years, 1883-1901, in Ceylon and during that period became the most venerated Muslim leader in the country. This was ironic in that Arabi Pasha was not an active initiator of change. He had, in fact, expressed his avowed reluctance to participate in political reform. His charismatic personality, however, was exploited by various Ceylonese Muslim activists who used his heroic exploits at Tal al-Kabir as their point of reference. They projected Arabi Pasha as a natural counterpart of Dharmapala and Navalar and were thus able to activate parts of the Muslim

community. The fact that the Muslim revival was able to compete with other religious movements of the time was due to the skill of M.C. Siddi Lebbe.

Siddi Lebbe was an outstanding member of the indigenous Muslim community. Coming from Kandy, he was an early Muslim product of a missionary, English education and in 1864 became the first Muslim proctor to be admitted at the Supreme Court. In December, 1882, Siddi Lebbe started a Tamil newspaper, the *Muslim Neisan*,⁴⁰ which strongly advocated the establishment of Islamic schools. These schools were not to be of the traditional, *maktab* variety, but English-medium, competitive schools with Arabic and Tamil taught as compulsory and optional languages respectively. Even more than Dharmapala and Navalar, Siddi Lebbe experienced great difficulty in trying to persuade members of his community to become active in educational reform. The Muslims had been indifferent to the education, perceived to be Christian-oriented, that was offered by both missionaries and the government and they had sunk into a smug, self-protective, apathetic stance.

Through sheer persistence and constant reference to the advances made by Hindus and Buddhists in establishing their own schools, Siddi Lebbe was able to generate a modicum of interest in the development of similar schemes for the Muslims. With the financial backing of A.M. Wapchi Marikar, a renowned building contractor⁴¹ and philanthropist, and with the inspirational support of

⁴⁰ The life of the paper was short, only five years from 1882 until 1887. Siddi Lebbe was also responsible for starting a bilingual weekly, *Muslim Friend* and a monthly, *Torch of Wisdom* -both of which urged the study of Tamil and Arabic.

⁴¹ Some of the buildings that Wapchi Marikar (1868-1925) was instrumental in constructing include the Colombo Museum, the General Post Office, Galle Face Hotel, the Clock Tower, the Town Hall in Pettah and a number of mosques.

Arabi Pasha, Siddi Lebbe established the first Anglo-Mohammaden school in Maradana in November, 1884. The school, Al-Madurasthul Khairiyathul Islamiah, was unable to gain the support of the community and as a result quickly declined. Undeterred, the three crusaders, together with I.L.M. Abdul Azeez,⁴² organized the Muslim Educational Society in 1891 on principles similar to those of the Buddhist Theosophical Society Educational Fund and the Hindu Board of Education. The first institution established under the aegis of the Educational Society was the Colombo-based Al-Madurasathuz Zahira, founded in 1892. The school, known later as Zahira College, was, like the Buddhist and Hindu revival schools, also modelled on Christian mission schools and was to become the premier Muslim educational institution.

Until a larger section of the Muslim community was willing to back the movement, the Muslim Educational Society was in a financially precarious position. The only viable option was to apply for assistance through government grants. The first Muslim application was received by the Department of Public Instruction in 1891 from the Mohammaden Boys' School in Kandy. In 1894 Zahira registered with the Department as the Maradana Mohammaden Boys' School. Another boys' school, this one in Gampola, also applied for registration. All three schools were now eligible for grants-in-aid. In spite of these gains, English schools set up by the Muslim Educational Society were constantly plagued by

⁴² Abdul Azeez (1867-1915) was educated at Pettah Boys' Government English School, but also studied Arabic and Tamil at home with his father. He became the editor of *Muslim Friend* in 1889. He was a publisher in his own right. An Arabic/Tamil journal, *Assawaap* appeared in 1898, followed by the Tamil language *Muslim Guardian* in 1901 and the Tamil/English newspaper *Al-Muslim* in 1907. He was also the first President of the Moors' Union in 1900.

intra-community dissensions.⁴³

There were essentially three types of oppositional groups; first, those that were hostile, convinced that a knowledge of English would somehow erode deeply entrenched Islamic traditions.⁴⁴ The fact that Arabi Pasha was educating his son in a missionary school did not help remove public suspicion.⁴⁵ Others remained doubtful that education would necessarily outdistance business enterprises as a means of acquiring privileged status. This latter concern did not endure, especially because of increasing governmental regulations on trade. The third group was well aware of the benefits of English, but they rejected the idea of an alternative system of education, which was seen as communal, and preferred instead to send their children to already established missionary schools in the Island.⁴⁶ Education for girls was not neglected by Siddi Lebbe and the other reformers. However, as tradition dictated the isolation of women in society, the girls' schools made slow progress. In 1887, there were six Mohammedan Government schools set up for the education of young girls. By 1903 the number remained the same. This included the Muslim Girls' School, Kandy founded in 1893 under the patronage of Lady Havelock, the wife of Governor Arthur Havelock (1890-1895). All these issues combined to hinder the progress of Muslim schools and the Educational Society had to struggle hard to carry out its

⁴³ See the various *Administrative Reports* (DPI), especially 1892 and 1893, sections D.

⁴⁴ See M. Jalaladeen, "The Educational Plight of the Moors, Malays and other Muslims of Ceylon" in *Moors' Islamic Cultural Silver Jubilee Souvenir, 1944-1969*. p. 75

⁴⁵ Arabi Pasha argued that until Muslim, English medium schools were established, and if one was well grounded in the Koran, then mission schools were no threat. Quoted in *Times of Ceylon*, 12 January, 1883.

⁴⁶ *Sessional Paper XX* of 1912 p. 37

objectives. To compound the problem, there was also some difficulty about hiring teachers. The Department of Education was reluctant to sponsor schools that were led by persons well versed in Koranic doctrine and Arabic, while not matching the standards of proficiency of other teachers in general subjects.⁴⁷ Because of the insufficient numbers of Muslim candidates, teachers were often recruited from Hindu Tamil schools.

The Muslim revival had managed to establish only one major educational facility - Zahira. In spite of this lack of success comparable to that of the Hindu and Buddhist movements, the Muslim revival managed to extend awareness of educational possibilities and new opportunities. The number of Muslim students, especially boys, at these institutions increased during this period, even though the growth was not very substantial. Along with the promotion of knowledge in English, the revival movement indirectly initiated the development of a number of cultural and literary societies. The oldest of these was the Muslim Young Men's Association formed in 1910.⁴⁸ The period also saw a boom in the newspaper industry.⁴⁹ Most of the papers were either published solely in Tamil or were bilingual, but strongly advocated the acquisition of an English education. These two institutions - societies and the media - played a leading role in fostering the growth of, not just an Islamic identity, but general political consciousness as well.

⁴⁷ *Administrative Report (DE)*, 1894. Section D p. 20

⁴⁸ The MYMA is the longest surviving Muslim association. The well known Moor's Islamic Cultural Home which also laid emphasis on culture, tradition and religion was founded in 1944.

⁴⁹ The *Ceylon Muhammeden* was started in 1900 and *Ceylon Muslim Review* was inaugurated in 1914. See also footnotes 40 and 42 above.

The religious revivals of the 1880s cannot be simply described as a knee-jerk reaction against the dominance of the Christian missionary. Rightly or wrongly, the missionaries were seen to be inextricably linked with colonial rule, and the attack on them was also a surrogate attack on imperialism in general. Choosing the missionaries as targets served two purposes. First, Christianity was the known weak link in the hierarchy of colonial ideology and institutions, because the state was uncertain as to the ideal stance in relation to religious faith; and second, the point was being made that culture, tradition and language could not be usurped by any institution or belief system associated with foreign rule. It was also a tactic that the government did not perceive to be particularly seditious.⁵⁰ The missionaries themselves, though, were very aware that the anti-Christian sentiment that prompted these actions were also anti-British. They were also conscious of the nationalist fervour that guided the religious revivalists. This form of nationalism, they contended, "is almost inevitably anti-British and pro-Hindu and... pro-Buddhist...The anti-British feeling becomes anti-Christian feeling...." With special reference to the Buddhists, they noted:

one of the most serious aspects of the Buddhist revival is the attempt to identify Buddhism with patriotism and to urge upon people that loyalty to the country implies loyalty to the religion....

The Buddhist revival, the missionaries concluded, "is hostile to Christianity,

⁵⁰ In 1911, the Attorney General refused to prosecute Dharmapala for an act of rebellion, declaring that Dharmapala used "the language of religious fanaticism and not of sedition." This was met by the curt response of the Governor who wrote, "He [Dharmapala] is stirring up sedition under the veil of religion." Quoted in A.Guruge, (ed.), *Return to Righteousness*. p. LVII

representing it as alien, and Buddhism as national and patriotic..."⁵¹

The revival movements, while mobilized around shared concerns, sought to re-discover a sense of pride in the indigenous religions and cultures. Education was the mechanism by which an effective transformation of values could be achieved. This was a goal shared by all the revival movements. The establishment of educational institutions run by them was meant to counteract mission schools, not just through the curriculum offered, but also in the production of an influential section of the population educated in English, yet not infused with Christian, and therefore, it was hoped, Western values. It was further expected that children from the revival schools would be the pioneers in a new generation of politically conscious leaders. What the revival schools actually achieved was the end of the Christian monopoly of secondary education.

The nationalism, as projected by the three movements, was, however, not identical. The Buddhists were more organized and combined their educational progress with an ideology that had divisive connotations. An exclusive, communal ideology, professing that Buddhism and Ceylon had special claims on each other, and that the Sinhalese people had inalienable rights as the only true Ceylonese, had not yet been incorporated into their agenda. They remained, however, more vocal and activist than the other two movements. The Muslims could not afford to raise politically sensitive issues and chose instead to focus on educational endeavours. Their level of competition was curtailed by the

⁵¹ An extract from the reports of the World Missionary Congress of 1910. Quoted in M.T. Price, *Christian Missions and Oriental Civilizations*. Shanghai:1924 pp. 152-153. Cited in K.M. de Silva, "The Government and Religion: Problems and Policies c1832-1910" in *UCHC* p. 212

lack of support from within the community, coupled with weakness in numbers. They were also plagued by intra-community antagonisms, between the Moors, Malays and Indian Muslims. The Hindus too did not take an overtly political stand *vis-a-vis* the government. The separation of educational aspirations from politics can be explained by the high degree of their representation in the administrative and professional cadres. Along with communal representation to the Legislative Council, the Tamils, and therefore, Hindus, must have thought that their minority status was protected under the British and saw no need to upset it.

In their attempts at establishing institutions of learning, the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist societies were confronted by two common hurdles. The first obstacle encountered by all three was the apathy within each community. None of the movements questioned the high standard of education offered by the secondary schools under missionary control. This was not surprising given the experience, influence and financial resources which helped the missionaries secure an entrenched position in the educational system. The realization that they offered the best option for upward mobility was evident in the conduct of the movements' leadership. The communities, therefore, saw the revival schools as nothing more than communal and insular institutions, which might hinder rather than assist the various groups in their career aspirations. Useful contacts, for example, through the 'old school-tie' network would come to an end if they sent their children to the revivalist schools. The novelty of the schemes failed to attract significant numbers among the privileged sections of the community and parents who could afford it continued to send their children to established

mission schools.

The second obstacle was even more fundamental. The movements were constantly in financial difficulty. As the communities in question were initially not sympathetic, the fund raising potential was always very limited. This meant that on many occasions schools were either shut down, or had to rely on grants from the government. State aid was usually accompanied by certain conditions - relating to the religious affiliation of teachers, for example - with which the schools were often not inclined to comply. The Muslims suffered the most in this respect. Many of their teachers were co-opted from Tamil-medium schools and not necessarily of the Islamic faith. In spite of such drawbacks, a number of schools set up by the Buddhist Theosophical Society Educational Fund, the Hindu Board of Education and Muslim Educational Society managed to thrive and, if not causing the demise of mission schools, did themselves become a part of the educational establishment of Ceylon by the twentieth century.

Cultural Nationalists: Coming to Terms with Contradiction

Setting the Scene

The revival movements illustrate the nature of widespread social concern for the educational system. For those who were educated in English, especially those who had attained a position of power and privilege, either within or outside the political arena, the entire system of education in Ceylon was a subject for scrutiny and heated debate. As discussed earlier, the issues that attracted the most attention were those of language and religion, the basic components of plurality in the country. In 1867, some respondents to the Morgan

Committee questionnaire had argued that an English education imparted with a Christian ideology was alienating and unproductive for the society at large. Monsignor Christopher Bonjean of the Roman Catholic Mission in Jaffna, for example, had stated that in his opinion the existing education system constituted both a social evil and political danger. The chief cause, he believed, was the "exaggerated importance accorded to English and the exclusion given to vernacular education."⁵² In spite of these warnings, the system had remained intact, and if anything, became further entrenched, with an English education remaining the ultimate basis for upward mobility and high status in indigenous society. In 1906, when Ponnambalam Arunachalam wrote that while English educated children knew all about the Norman Conquest and Peloponnesian War, they were in "blissful ignorance" of local history and geography,⁵³ he articulated a very real concern of his own class: their evident illiteracy of their own culture.⁵⁴ The movements for cultural and religious revival had sharpened their awareness of alienation. Coupled with the ignorance of one's own culture was the imitation of metropolitan modes of thought and behaviour. Such attitudes and life-style, *Passé* contended, were simply the "natural accompaniment of the language which had taken root in Ceylon," seeing as how the English education of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an extension of the

⁵² *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*, p. 474

⁵³ P. Arunachalam, "Sketches of Ceylon History" in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 1, January, 1906. p. 75

⁵⁴ This idea is borrowed from Kumar's description of Tagore's critique of colonial education. *Introduction to Tagore*. Santiniketan:1983 p. 26. Cited in K. Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education - A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. pp. 111-112

system in vogue in Victorian England.⁵⁵ These were sentiments that Ananda Coomaraswamy echoed: "We lived in caricatured English villas, and studied the latest fashion in collars and ties," he complained, while striving to "preserve our respectability by listening to gramophone records of the London music hall." Thus Ceylon "had become a mere suburb of Birmingham and Paris."⁵⁶

That the social and political elite aped Western behaviour patterns was not unique to Ceylon, but a feature common to most Afro-Asian societies subject to European rule. The tendency was, in fact, encouraged by both government and some missionary agencies. In 1884, Ponnambalam Ramanathan had commented that missionary schools contributed to a certain feeling of shame amongst the Jaffna Hindu school children. "The holy ashes put on at home during worship are carefully rubbed off as they approach the Christian school,"⁵⁷ he stated. But it was the yearning for education that allowed for the continuation of such hypocrisy in some cases, while leading to total acceptance of "Western ideas"⁵⁸ in others. Jeronis Pieris, for example, had a great "enthusiasm for the English way of life" which made him revere the "anniversary of Her Majesty's birthday as a hallowed event."⁵⁹ If a Government Agent could

⁵⁵ H.A. Passé, "The English Language in Ceylon" Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University of London: 1948. p. 76. Passé wrote of fancy dress balls, club activities, meetings at the races, morning coats and evening dresses. For a very interesting anecdotal narrative on the same theme, see Y. Gooneratne, *Relative Merits*. London:1986.

⁵⁶ A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi*. Madras:nd pp. 14-15

⁵⁷ SLNA 25.17/12 Quoted in *Manipay Hindu College Golden Jubilee Number*. Jaffna:1960 p. 20

⁵⁸ This point was made in *Ceylon at the Census, 1911*. Colombo:1912 p. 157

⁵⁹ Letters from Pieris to his nephew, C.H. de Soysa, 10 May, 1895 and to his brother, Louis, on 10 June, 1854. Quoted in M. Roberts, *Facets of Modern Ceylon History through the Letters of Jeronis Pieris*. Colombo:1975 p. 37

state, even in jest, that Ceylon was run like a public school, with the administration modelled on the game of cricket,⁶⁰ it could not but be expected that the indigenous Anglophile would revere all things English.⁶¹ It is no wonder then that they felt so estranged from society at large.

But what led them to play such an active role as nationalist reformers? The answer appears to lie in the contradictions of their own life-style. The Anglicized elite had made such an effort to assimilate themselves to the Western values of the colonialists, yet they had been denied comparable privileges of status. Raised to be patriotic, loyal British subjects, they often found themselves the target of criticism from those they had sought to emulate. In particular, Governor Henry McCallum (1907-1916) was singularly unimpressed by their efforts. In a lengthy despatch to the Earl of Crewe, he wrote:

It is precisely the acquisition of European ideas and the adoption of European in preference to Ceylonese civilization that differentiates this class of the Ceylonese from their countrymen, and while they bred in them certain political aspirations... they have also caused them to become separated by a wide gulf from the majority of the native inhabitants of the Colony.⁶²

They reacted, therefore, as an "aggrieved and deprived people"⁶³ eager to

⁶⁰ RH Mss. Ind. Ocn.s. 174 ROHP: Interview with H.E. Newman, 1 December, 1965.

⁶¹ M. Ondaatje writes of his grandparents moving to Nuwara Eliya from Colombo during the "hot months of April and May" with loaded trunks of "books and sweaters and golf clubs and rifles". *Running in the Family*. London:1984 p. 39

⁶² Despatch from the Governor to Secretary of State, the Earl of Crewe, 26 May, 1909. Cited in HCNC. p. 58

⁶³ M. Roberts, "Nationalism in Economic and Social Thought, 1915-1945" in *CINP*. He argues that their "cognitive perception, or at the very least their rhetorical pronouncements" were the result of their bitterness at not being granted more power. pp. 393-394

demonstrate political skill and leadership to the colonial government in particular and the Ceylonese population in general. They continued to adhere to the values they had acquired through Western education - in spite of judgments such as those of McCallum - though for them these were replete with contradiction.

To be a product of an English-medium mission school like Trinity or St. Thomas' (or even the government's Royal College) was to be accorded a status in society even without the benefit of actual achievement in any sphere. Such ascription was based entirely on what was perceived to be the best that the education system could offer. The components of what exactly was *best* was not clearly defined, but factors such as the age of the institution, examination results and the accomplishments of the alumni, helped contribute to the overall notion of high quality. The first contradiction recognized by the emerging social reformers, themselves products of these schools, was between the language of instruction and the cultural and pedagogic context in which it was offered. While knowledge of English was equated with privilege, mobility and status, education through the medium of English insisted on what C.F. Andrews called "a wholesale imitation of purely Western habits [that] led to a painful confusion of ideas."⁶⁴ Another missionary, George Pettit wrote of the great "evil" that a lack of knowledge of the mother-tongue induced.⁶⁵ For the indigenous Ceylonese,

⁶⁴ C.F. Andrews, *Letters to a Friend*. p. 14. Cited in W.T. Keble, *A History of St. Thomas' College, Colombo*. Colombo:1937 p. 177

⁶⁵ In 1851, Pettit wrote to C.M.S. headquarters, "Another concomitant evil has been the neglect of their own language by those who have been so highly educated in English." Cited by S. Wickremasuriya, "Strangers in their own Land" in *Navasilu, The Journal of the English Association of Sri Lanka*. Vol. 1, 1976 p. 19

such opinions were not so different from their own. Louis Nell had reported to the Morgan Commission in 1867 that, in his opinion, "The change of ideas acquired in English schools loosens that attachment to the soil which acts like a great principle, in regulating the physical and moral happiness of a people."⁶⁶

W.A. de Silva accused the English-educated of "losing... a common interest with the masses" which took away "the natural bonds of fellowship and sympathy that should exist between the educated men and the people."⁶⁷ Arunachalam wrote more critically:

It is deplorable that, in Ceylon, English education has so multiplied our wants, increased the complexity of our life and demoralized us, that those who ought to be indefatigable and devoted in her service spend the greater part of their time in earning money for the supply of those wants and spend their leisure not in intellectual culture or public works but in trivialities.⁶⁸

Only Ananda Coomaraswamy suggested a remedy: the only way towards progress was to develop the people's intelligence through the "medium of their own national culture."⁶⁹ But the idea to rid the system of English altogether was never considered. Arunachalam, himself critical of the educational system, was alive to the political reality. "A knowledge of English," he wrote, was "necessary for the earning of a living, but more important, still is our only avenue

⁶⁶ *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*. p. 459

⁶⁷ W.A. de Silva, "Public Policy and National Progress in Ceylon" in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 2, July, 1906. p. 210

⁶⁸ RH 910.13r 25(8) *The Presidential Address of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam at the Second Session of the Ceylon National Congress*, 13 December, 1919. p. 11

⁶⁹ A. Coomaraswamy, "India and Ceylon" in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 4, July, 1907. p. 20

to Western culture."⁷⁰ English had become a commodity of high value. The attitude of the English educated to the question of language was marked by bizarre contradictions. Sinhala and Tamil should be learnt, but English could be neither dropped from their favoured schools nor taught to the wide population without access to these elite institutions. As Arunachalam's elder brother stated, "I for one cannot condemn the deeper study of the English language," though he did concede that "the local language, Tamil or Sinhalese should be taught to the same extent."⁷¹

Certain colonial officials and educationists were also aware of the alienation of the English educated from those otherwise educated partly as a result of official policy. Yet, they yoked this perception to their own purposes. The gulf between the leadership in Colombo and the rest of society, in their view, was a solid argument against the granting of constitutional reform. They argued that as the elite were not representative of the people, the reforms for which they hankered were superfluous. This was ironic in that the change in attitude towards the collaborating class reflected the changing needs of the colonial power. The introduction of English to produce local functionaries was, *inter alia*, a measure intended to lower the cost of colonial administration in the early days of British rule. Now education had developed far beyond the level necessary to produce rudimentary skills of reading and writing in English. The professional class had grown and become intellectually sympathetic not only to the modernizing impact of colonial rule, but also to the ideals of representative

⁷⁰ P. Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings*. Vol. I. Colombo:1936 pp. 260-261

⁷¹ *Hansard* (LC), 25 February, 1926. p. 378

government and political liberty. Governor McCallum's constant criticisms notwithstanding, the government officials were now forced to adjust their perceptions to this emerging reality. McCallum wrote in 1909:

Their [the English-educated elite's] ideas, their aspirations, their interests are distinctively their own, are all moulded upon European models, and are no longer those of the majority of the countrymen. Accordingly, any claim of this class... to speak for those from whom their whole training and education has sought designedly to divorce them is, in my opinion, altogether inadmissible.⁷²

As for those who were directly involved in dispensing English education, there was also a great divergence of opinion. It was not in the interests of missionary organizations to denounce the teaching of English. For, apart from a very few schools established by the Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim Boards of Education, and one Government school, Royal College, all the other secondary, English-medium schools were administered by the various missionary agencies. There were a few teachers in these schools, however, who, while not censuring English education *per se*, did question the way in which it was imparted as also its pedagogic basis. A.G. Fraser, Principal of Trinity College, Kandy, was the most well-known critic of the education system. He wrote in 1906:

We cannot imagine the youth of Ceylon becoming a better administrator, judge, doctor or pleader, through his study of German or French or Greek whilst he is unable to read or write his own tongue. We do not require a more Western, but a more Eastern education.⁷³

⁷² Despatch from the Governor to Secretary of State, the Earl of Crewe, 26 May, 1909. Cited in HCNC. p. 59

⁷³ A.G. Fraser, "Madras or London?" in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 1, January, 1906. p. 37

He was supported in this opinion by the Roman Catholic priest, S.J. Perera, who stated that the denationalization caused by the education system had reduced the English educated to, "a minority out of touch with the great mass of their countrymen."⁷⁴ The Principal of the foremost Theosophical school, Mahinda College in Galle, saw the issue a little differently. F.L. Woodward wrote that "the knowledge of English in Ceylon, to the exclusion of that of the vernacular, has become a sort of fetish...." He continued:

Young Sinhalese (especially) and Tamils, who have acquired a knowledge of English, seem to me to be ashamed to be heard conversing in their own language.⁷⁵

Such opinions were, however, atypical. The more usual position was represented by an early Principal of the Colombo Academy, Reverend Barcroft Boake, who expected that education in missionary schools should be more than instruction in English and combined with Western culture.⁷⁶

Efforts at Bridging the Gap

Several individual members of the privileged English-educated class also worked for the transformation of society by focussing primarily on the educational system. One of the early exponents of a policy of re-structuring the method of teaching was Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy (1834-1879) who came from a

⁷⁴ Quoted by W.T. Keble, *A History of St. Thomas' College, Colombo*. p. 178

⁷⁵ Quoted without reference in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 2, July, 1906. p. 222

⁷⁶ See M. Roberts, *Facets of Modern History through the letters of Jeronis Pieris*. pp.29-30

background of traditional privilege.⁷⁷ Coomaraswamy was educated at home by English tutors before attending the Government-run Colombo Academy. While a student, he distinguished himself academically and was awarded the prestigious Turnour Prize as the best student in Greek, Latin and the English classics.⁷⁸ He retained and pursued his scholastic interests throughout his life.⁷⁹ A Sinhalese contemporary of Sir Mutu was James Alwis, also educated at Colombo Academy and trained as a lawyer.⁸⁰

Both Coomaraswamy and Alwis used their positions as nominated officials to advocate change in the educational system. Their opinions - given the prevailing policy of providing entrenched English education for a select few⁸¹ - were unique, but only up to a point. Coomaraswamy was a staunch advocate of scientific education for all. This was, he believed, the decisive means through which Ceylon would progress and which would rid the populace of "superstition,

⁷⁷ For biographical details, see S.D.R. Singham, *The Life and Writings of Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy*. Singapore:1973 In brief: His father, Arumugam Pillai Coomaraswamy (1783-1836), was the first Tamil member of the Legislative Council appointed in 1833 as a result of the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms. For a brief period, Sir Mutu was a member of the Ceylon Civil Service, a position he acquired through his appointment as a cadet. He rose to the rank of Assistant Government Agent in Mullaitivu, a district in the Northern Province. He was then articled under Sir Richard Morgan as an apprentice lawyer. He was nominated as the Tamil representative to the Legislative Council in 1861 and remained in that position until his untimely death in 1879. In 1874 he was knighted, the first Ceylonese to be so honoured.

⁷⁸ The Turnour Prize was named for Sir George Turnour, a Civil Servant, who first translated the *Mahavamsa* from Pali to English.

⁷⁹ Sir Mutu translated a Pali text into English - *Dathavansa* or *The History of the Tooth Relic of Guatama Buddha* - with accompanying notes which was published in 1874. He also translated a Tamil drama - *Arichandra* - into English - *The Martyr of Truth* - and wrote tracts on the sermons and discourses of the Buddha, as well as books on Hindu philosophy.

⁸⁰ Alwis started his career as a court-appointed interpreter, a short-lived endeavour that highlighted the defects in his education. On his first appearance in court, he was unable to keep up with the translations and was forced to resign. He returned to his family business and earned his living from extensive land-holdings of coconut groves. In 1875, he was nominated to be the Low-country Sinhalese representative in the Legislative Council, a position he held until his death in 1878.

⁸¹ As advocated by the Morgan Commission Report.

ignorance and false pride." In a speech to the Council, he asked if the Legislators would perpetuate the existing system which had led to degeneration "and not give us the advantages of European civilization, aye its very life blood, which flows in the dissemination of scientific knowledge."⁸² Alwis, meanwhile, was concerned with the relationship between pedagogy and the social milieu of the child. In giving evidence to the Morgan Commission in 1867, he argued that:

the quality of education imparted in this Island... is not, in my opinion, such as is adapted to the circumstances of this colony, or the condition of its native population. It is not productive of any real good to the great mass of the Sinhalese.⁸³

The humiliation he had experienced through his failure to qualify as an interpreter owing to his ignorance of local languages was no doubt a factor in his denunciation of the system of education as "most pernicious."⁸⁴ Yet, Alwis also believed that the British were the herald of modernity in Ceylon guiding the indigenous population away from the paths of barbarism into civilization. In 1841, he wrote:

In the interior parts of Ceylon, "where the white man's foot never trod", the people live in the rudest and most barbarous manner possible.⁸⁵

The inconsistency of his beliefs did not set Alwis apart from other English educated Ceylonese concerned about the state of education on the Island. The

⁸² Quoted by S.D.R. Singam, *The Life and Writings of Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy*. p. 91

⁸³ *Sessional Paper VIII of 1867*. p. 508

⁸⁴ A.C. Seneviratne (ed.), *James Alwis, Memoirs and Desultory Writings*. Colombo:1939. p. 17. Cited by S. Wickramasuriya, "A Generation of Spiritual Bastards and Intellectual Pariahs" in *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*. Vol. 1 No. 2, 1976 p. 5

⁸⁵ J. Alwis, "Marriage Customs of the Singalese" in *Ceylon Magazine*. Vol. 1:7, March, 1841 pp. 278-281. Cited in M. Roberts, *Facets of Modern Ceylon History through the Letters of Jeronis Pieris*. p. 28

assumption that education was to serve as a means of moral uplift was an echo of the colonial rhetoric that they themselves had absorbed. It highlighted the proximity between them and the rulers, while at the same time, emphasizing the chasm between themselves as the *educated elite* and those who did not enjoy the same level of privilege. While pressing for reform, the two men - like countless others after them - maintained their cultural identity within the confines of Anglicized society. To James Alwis, Westernized lifestyles were but a mindless imitation of what was considered *proper*. As he confessed in his autobiography, he and James Dunuwille would go to public meetings, the law courts and churches, just to improve their English accents.⁸⁶ Speech was one detectable feature of privilege. It was written of Mutu that he combined "grace of diction, with fluency of speech... with hardly a taint of [a] foreign accent."⁸⁷ Mutu Coomaraswamy secured access to the aristocratic class in England, not just by virtue of his Knighthood, nor by his being the first non-Judeo-Christian to be called to the Bar (in 1863), but through his range of achievements. His combination of Oriental scholarship and Western lifestyle were not seen as contradictions, but rather, as an exceptional achievement that were rare amongst his contemporaries. His overtly Westernized lifestyle prompted his son, Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy, to comment twenty-seven years after his death:

Had he lived, I cannot doubt that (like my cousins, Messrs. Arunachalam and Ramanathan, who also at one time trod the same path) he would have seen

⁸⁶ Cited by H.A.J. Hulugalla, "The National Movement and its Influences on Education" in *EC,CV* pp. 485-486

⁸⁷ Quoted in *Ceylon Review*, Vol. 3 No. 2, October, 1894. Cited by S.D.R. Singam, *The Life and Writings of Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy*. p. 9

that we were liable to overshoot the mark and he would have been the first to preserve and protect the nationalist ideals and Eastern tradition with which our lives and those of our forefathers are inextricably bound up.⁸⁸

Ponnambalam Ramanathan was, like his uncle Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy,⁸⁹ and James Alwis, a beneficiary of an English education. Like them, he admired the British way of life, which, he announced, had taught him the benefits of "justice, humanity, mercy and honour." Even the name of England moved him. "England," he was quoted as saying, "my heart melts at the sound of England."⁹⁰ At the same time, like his forebears, Ramanathan was a passionate advocate of educational reform.

Ramanathan was the second of the three Ponnambalam brothers,⁹¹ all of whom distinguished themselves in public service for over fifty years. The brothers were raised in affluence and young Ramanathan was sent to Royal college in 1861. Four years later he and his older brother were sent to Presidency College, Madras. Their father, *Gate Mudaliyar* Arunasalam Ponnambalam (1814-1887), was distressed at the state of education in Colombo. He was convinced that what was on offer was not suitable for his children. As Ramanathan recalled,

⁸⁸ Speech at Jaffna Hindu College, 28 May, 1906. Quoted in S.D.R. Singam, *Ananda Coomaraswamy in Ceylon. The Apprentice Years in his Ancestral Home, 1877-1917*. Singapore:1973 p. 15 (Henceforth: A.C. *Ancestral Home*)

⁸⁹ Ramanathan's mother, Sellachi, was Mutu Coomaraswamy's sister.

⁹⁰ Quoted in S. Wickramasuriya, "Something More Than A Knowledge of Perishable Things of Life" Publishing information unknown. p. 92, foot-note 12. (Henceforth: S. Wickramasuriya, "Perishable Things of Life")

⁹¹ Coomaraswamy and Arunachalam were his older and younger brothers.

his father told the boys:

Sons, you are in great danger in Colombo. You must go out of Ceylon to a country where many more things are to be learnt than could be learnt in Colombo.⁹²

The education that the two elder Ponnambalam brothers received in Madras was dissimilar to the education that they might have received in Royal College. Apart from standard subjects required for examinations, they were also instructed in Indian history, religion and languages. Ramanathan excelled at Presidency College, but left soon after his Intermediate Examinations. Once back in Ceylon, he was apprenticed, like his uncle Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, to the Attorney-General, Sir Richard Morgan, to study law. Two years later, in 1873, he was called to the bar and went to work for Morgan's firm. His tenure as a practicing lawyer was short. At the age of twenty-eight, he was nominated to the Tamil seat in the Legislative Council by the Governor on the death of his uncle in 1879.⁹³

Almost immediately Ramanathan became involved in educational matters. On 19 November, 1879, he issued his first statement on government policy. It was in fact a reiteration of the policy which had been instituted by the Morgan Commission's Report. He stressed that the government's duty was to provide broad-based education and demanded that "the future policy of the Government should be to spend largely on the promotion of vernacular education." The speech was noteworthy because it admonished the privileged English-educated class for their attitude:

⁹² S. Wickramasuriya, "Perishable Things of Life" p. 92, foot-note 15

⁹³ Ramanathan would be in and out of the Legislative Council for over fifty years, until his death in 1930.

We who speak of ourselves as rolling in wealth are the niggardliest in our expenditure on so noble a cause as education.... The wealthier classes of Ceylon, absorbed in their own pursuits, do not think of the educational wants of the poor....⁹⁴

Ramanathan was not advocating any daring changes to the *status quo*. In fact, he was repeating a view popular amongst his privileged contemporaries: vernacular-medium instruction was not only to be provided for the majority, but it should be undertaken in order to encourage traditional pursuits. He himself made the observation that, "When the Sinhalese youth comes to know a little English, his mind becomes unsettled." When the ill effects of such knowledge persisted, the youth, under its influence, felt compelled to:

[discard] the plough, the honourable and useful calling of his ancestors, [and] idles away his time or becomes a petition-drawer or clerk on a miserable pittance. This is not as it should be.⁹⁵

The implication, that education in English be restricted, was the standard view amongst its recipients who needed no reminder that knowledge of English was the pre-requisite for respectable careers. The proposal that education be extended, but that it be conducted in the vernaculars, was believed to be an acceptable solution which would satisfy all sections and communities, not least of all, the Ceylonese leadership in Colombo. This view was equally acceptable to the colonial government. In fact, mass education in the vernaculars was a topic particularly close to their heart. As a nationalist proposal, it assumed not only a degree of respectability, but of feasibility as well. The chances for its full

⁹⁴ Quoted in M. Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*. Vol. 1 Colombo:1971 p. 150 (Henceforth: M. Vythilingam, *Life of Sir P.R.*)

⁹⁵ S. Bose (ed.), *Selected Speeches of Ponnambalam Ramanathan*. Vol. I Colombo:1929 p. 14

implementation, however, looked dim. There was also never in this tradition of protest against the educational system any specific exhortation to abandon English education for the few. Quite the contrary. While attempting to inspire members of his own class to help in the spread of education, Ramanathan emphasized the need for non-missionary English schools. Neither the government nor mission bodies could be expected to bear the total cost of educational expansion. In fact, neither could afford to do so; the government was hindered by a tight budget further restricted by the failure of the coffee crop, while the missionaries were pruning their efforts at expanding education, preferring instead to consolidate their existing projects. Ramanathan did not suggest that the State be absolved of all responsibility, but he actively encouraged private enterprise in education to fulfil the unrealized ambitions of the revival movements.

In this respect, Ramanathan was unlike many of the indigenous reformers of his day. For them, speeches and the formation of organizations and associations were sufficient. They saw no need to work out the implications of their rhetoric. Ramanathan's contribution to the debate on education was more in line with that of Navalar, Dharmapala and Siddi Lebbe, in that he too founded institutions of learning. "Great as political work is," he once stated, "I am not satisfied with the results attained through labour on the platform."⁹⁶ (His "labour on the platform", however, included his contribution to the Commission on the codification of laws, which resulted in the incorporation of the Council of Legal Education.)⁹⁷ He continued:

⁹⁶ Quoted in M. Vythilingam, *Life of Sir P.R.* p. 545

⁹⁷ Ramanathan was appointed the first President of the Law Students' Union.

It is mostly of ephemeral value and does not deeply affect the real welfare of the people in their everyday life. I think purely educational work is far more important.⁹⁸

The two schools he founded - one for boys and the other for girls - were situated in Jaffna, though Colombo was his hometown. These schools contributed further to the expansion of education available to the Tamils of the Northern Province. Ramanathan College for girls, founded on 3 June, 1910, was progressive, both in concept and organization. It offered education from the kindergarten to the collegiate level, including teacher training schemes. The curriculum was diverse, encompassing "moral, intellectual and spiritual" instruction that was conducted both in English and Tamil. Ramanathan believed that such an education would help create the ideal of Hindu womanhood: women who were "thoroughly efficient at home and in society without being denationalised, but also devoted to God, loyal to the King and desirous of the welfare of the people."⁹⁹ Such values were in no way different from those propagated in mission schools. The difference consisted in the atmosphere of Hindu religiosity and the specific form of guidance offered for the realization of these ideals. The anxiety to protect the womenfolk in particular from denationalizing influences was common in many Asian societies under colonial rule. That Ramanathan's first initiative was to establish a school for girls probably reflects such anxieties.

The second school founded by Ramanathan was Parameshvara College for boys, established fifteen years after his girls' school, on 18 June, 1925.

⁹⁸ Quoted in M. Vythilingam, *Life of Sir P.R.* p. 545

⁹⁹ Quoted in M. Vythilingam, *Life of Sir P.R.* p. 550

The school was set up:

mainly for the education of Hindu boys and the training of them to lofty ideals of character, perfection in work, heartfelt devotion to God and loyalty to the King....¹⁰⁰

In setting out the aims of the school, Ramanathan once more illustrated the affinity between his educational ideals with those of mission schools. The emphasis was on strength of character combined with loyalty to God and King. As with Ramanathan College, the element of protest consisted in instruction in the Saivite faith instead of Christianity. Tamil was not to replace English in the curriculum, but only be a complement to it. Addressing the Legislative Council when he moved the ordinance to institute Parameshvara College, Ramanathan explicitly spelt out his expectations. "Any student who is admitted there [Parameshvara]," he stated, "will be given facilities to know something more of life than the perishable side of it."¹⁰¹

Ramanathan's legacy to the educational system in Ceylon, obviously went beyond sheer nationalist rhetoric. His two schools in Jaffna were testimony to his belief that a Western education could be offered within an Eastern context. His greatness lies, however, in his being one of the earliest proponents of *swabasha*, or one's own language, at the highest levels and amongst those educated in English. By providing instruction in both English and Tamil, Ramanathan was also making the point that a bilingual education at the secondary level was possible, without detriment to the child. In a speech at Ananda College in 1904,

¹⁰⁰ CO 56/19 Ordinance No. 7 of 1925 - to declare the Constitution of Parameshvara College

¹⁰¹ *Hansard* (LC), 1925 p. 183

he traced the denationalization of the Sinhalese to the "utter neglect of the use of the Sinhalese language amongst those who have learned to speak English...." "Ah me!" he continued, "If Sinhalese lips will not speak the Sinhalese language, who else is there to speak it?" He entreated his audience to be proud of their tradition and culture through their own language:

Language is the vehicle of thought. It is permissible to collect good thoughts from any nation, but if the nation to which you belong is to prosper by the thoughts you have culled, your communication of those thoughts to your nation must be in your own language. Then the language lives enriched and those who use that language are benefited by the thought introduced to it.

He urged the students of Ananda to "cultivate your language and make it a vehicle in ordinary use for good thoughts" or face the consequence of Sinhala becoming "more and more neglected and corrupted and at last die an unwept death."¹⁰² Although Ramanathan was unable to initiate a comprehensive code of education that could be adopted Island-wide, he was able to create something exceptional in Ceylon. The establishment of Parameshvara and Ramanathan Colleges by a member of the privileged English-educated class, without the moral, financial and religious support of any movement or organization, was a confident gesture which gave credibility to his rhetoric.

Ramanathan was not the only one to establish his own schools. Another Hindu school set up independently of the *Saiva Vithya Vriththi Sangam*, or Hindu Board of Education, was Manipay Hindu College in Jaffna. It was founded by C. Thiagarajah in 1910. The College, he explained, was set up to

¹⁰² Speech delivered on 3 September, 1904 at Ananda College, Colombo. Quoted in M. Vythilingam, *Life of Sir P.R.* pp. 479-480

counteract the trend towards conversion and indoctrination in Western values. The College's prime purpose was to "give Hindu boys and girls an English education with an emphasis on [their own] religion and character building." This attitude did not prevent Thiagarajah from acknowledging the role of the early missionaries in providing an education in English at a time when opportunities were scarce. He urged the population to "always be grateful"¹⁰³ to the missionaries for this invaluable service. The sentiment was not forgotten at the inaugural ceremony of the College. Mr. Kanagasabai, on behalf of the College Committee, while thanking Chief Justice Sir Joseph Hutchinson for laying the foundation stone, paid homage to the missionaries, by declaring that the establishment of Manipay Hindu College was "not intended to be hostile to missionary institutions."¹⁰⁴ These individual efforts in setting up schools were, however, rare and seemed to occur more on the Jaffna Peninsula than anywhere else.

Ponnambalam Arunachalam (1853-1924) did not follow in his elder brother's professional footsteps, but contributed equally to the tradition of protest against missionary-dominated English education. Like Ramanathan and Coomaraswamy, Arunachalam was also sent to Royal College. At school he won the Turnour Prize as had his uncle, Sir Mutu.¹⁰⁵ His academic brilliance won

¹⁰³ SLNA 25.17/12 *Manipay Hindu College Golden Jubilee Number*, Jaffna:1960 un-paged

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in *Hindu Organ*, 6 July, 1910.

¹⁰⁵ This prize for Greek, Latin and English classical knowledge was later won by Arunachalam's son, A. Mahadeva, and grandson, Balakumar Mahadeva.

him the Queen's scholarship to Cambridge University, where he excelled in mathematics and classics. As the usual choice in career for the privileged in Ceylon were law or medicine, Arunachalam opted for law. After his studies, he was persuaded to sit in open competition for the Ceylon Civil Service examination in 1875. He became the first Ceylonese to succeed and enter the Service. He remained in government service for over three decades, retiring in 1913.

His position in the Civil Service prevented him from assuming an overtly political role, but this did not affect his tone in expressing his support for the burgeoning reform movement. His responsibility in compiling the 1901 Census made him aware of the growing social problems in Ceylon.¹⁰⁶ Like his brother, he believed that bilingualism was an essential requirement for progress in Ceylon. He used his position as the Census Recorder to advocate that, "every Sinhalese or Tamil... be compelled to devote some time to the systematic study of his mother tongue, so as to be able to speak and write it correctly."¹⁰⁷ He reacted sharply to the policy of ignoring the vernacular in English medium schools. This was, he argued, "educationally vicious [and] impedes the pure development of [the] mind... The root of the evil in Ceylon is that the vernacular is neglected."¹⁰⁸

Arunachalam advocated strongly that the example of Japan should be followed in order to make Ceylon a competitive nation. He cited their

¹⁰⁶ In 1915, together with C.H.Z. Fernando, he founded the Ceylon Social Service League which undertook visits to slums, distribution of food and medical supplies as well as providing lectures on hygiene.

¹⁰⁷ *Ceylon at the Census, 1901*. p. 133

¹⁰⁸ P. Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings*. p. 291

determination to make primary education free and compulsory, "not merely in name as in Ceylon, but in fact", which had led to increasing literacy amongst all classes of people. He was also impressed particularly by the proliferation of industrial, commercial and agricultural schools as well as institutions for advanced technical training. Arunachalam pleaded with his contemporaries that these programmes be replicated in Ceylon: "What increase of wealth and strength would be ours..." if only the government would "organize effective measures to develop the great industrial resources and capacities of Ceylon to her best advantage...."¹⁰⁹

Arunachalam was more radical in his approach to political reform than other members of his class, but did not extend that same radicalism to the debate on education. He was known to hit out against those educated in English, but without offering anything more than platitudes in favour of reform. In a speech in 1921, he shocked his audience when he said:

Unfortunately many of us English-educated folk who profess to be leaders have been so demoralized by generations of rule by others, have had our spinal cord cut so that we cannot stand up erect, we have hardly the self-confidence and courage of our common people and are frightened and shocked at the idea of self-government.¹¹⁰

He remained in the eyes of some as the "perfect cultured, liberal-minded English gentleman of the nineteenth century,"¹¹¹ despite such an onslaught on his own

¹⁰⁹ P. Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings*. pp. 321-322

¹¹⁰ P. Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings*. p. 240

¹¹¹ The Labour Minister of Parliament, Colonel Josiah Wedgewood in the Foreword of P. Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings*.

class.

Ananda Coomaraswamy's concern with the educational system in Ceylon was, like that of other reformers, based on a critique of the imposition of Western ideals and values on an Eastern populace. To him, "a single generation of English education suffices to break the threads of tradition and to create a nondescript and superficial being deprived of all roots - a sort of intellectual *pariah* who does not belong to the East or the West, the past or the future."¹¹² His approach to the issue was different, however. Coomaraswamy believed in more than curriculum reform to abate the process of denationalization. His object was to revitalize interest in indigenous art, drama, tradition and culture. To encourage the process, he targeted the privileged and spurred them on to action through the Ceylon Social Reform Society founded in 1906. The purpose of the Society was to educate:

public opinion...with a view to encouraging their development on the lines of Eastern culture, and in the hope of leading them to study the best features of Western culture, rather than its superficial peculiarities.¹¹³

Coomaraswamy's participation in the reform movement was more fruitful than that of most others. Not having been brought up in Ceylon, he was, unlike his Ponnambalam cousins, neither dependent on public opinion nor on constituency politics. This allowed him a wider scope for experimentation and also provided

¹¹² A. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*. New York:1957 pp. 155-156

¹¹³ Ceylon Social Reform Society Manifesto. In Supplement to the *Ceylon National Review* No. 2 July, 1906. p. 2

him with a degree of objectivity not accessible to local activists.

Coomaraswamy was the son of Sir Mutu, the distinguished Tamil scholar and legislator, and Elizabeth Beeby, an English woman of equal verve. He was born in Colombo in 1877 but after the death of his father when he was only two, he was raised in England by his mother. Lady Coomaraswamy encouraged and facilitated her son's curiosity and interest in Ceylon and he was brought up with a deep knowledge and respect for his father's country. Coomaraswamy was educated entirely in England and it was during his time in Ceylon, in 1906, that he was awarded a doctorate from London University in Geology. He arrived in Ceylon in 1903 to undertake a mineralogical survey. He stayed for three years, his longest continuous sojourn in the Island and served as the Director of the Mineralogical Institute.

The Ceylon Social Reform Society was unique in the support it secured not only from the indigenous English-educated of the capital, but from activists in the Theosophical Movement like Dharmapala, Mary Musaeus Higgins and Annie Besant. Apart from encouraging an alternative and simpler life-style¹¹⁴ for the people, the Society was particularly concerned with education and language. It regretted that the vernaculars were taught inefficiently in schools and urged parents to lobby schools to rectify the situation. The Society also advocated the study of Pali, Sanskrit, Sinhala and Tamil literature and appealed for a combination of "a general education on the lines of Eastern culture with the elements of Western culture (particularly science) best suited to the needs

¹¹⁴ The Society promoted vegetarianism and temperance, readoption of national dress and cremation rather than burying the dead.

of the time."¹¹⁵ Under the influence of Coomaraswamy, the Society agitated for the adoption of Sinhala and Tamil as optional subjects in the London Matriculation and Cambridge Local Examinations, while also campaigning for the two languages to be made compulsory in all Government and aided schools. What was the point, Coomaraswamy asked, for Ceylon to have the largest centre of examinations for entry into London and Cambridge Universities outside England, without offering the local languages as competitors to English, Latin and Greek.¹¹⁶ It was a pitiful situation, he continued sarcastically, and could be compared to one whereby "an English student was compelled to study Chinese as his principal language...."¹¹⁷ The study of "dead" languages was a situation that prevailed in other colonies as well. C.L.R. James remembered his time at Queen's Royal College, the government's only secondary school in Trinidad, where:

...I studied Latin with Virgil, Caesar and Horace... Greek with Euripides and Thucydides. I did... French and French literature, English and English literature, English history, ancient and modern European history. I took certain examinations which were useful for getting jobs. As schools go, it was a very good school, though it would have been more suitable to Portsmouth than to Port of Spain.

"I left school... an educated person," he continued, "but I had educated myself into a member of the British middle class...."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ceylon Social Reform Society Manifesto. In Supplement to the *Ceylon National Review*. No. 2 July, 1906. p. 3

¹¹⁶ A. Coomaraswamy, "Anglicisation of the East" in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 2, July, 1906. p. 183

¹¹⁷ A. Coomaraswamy, "Anglicisation of the East" in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 2, July, 1906. p. 185

¹¹⁸ C.L.R. James, *Beyond A Boundary*. London:1963 (Reprint, 1990) pp. 37 and 41

Ananda Coomaraswamy also helped found the Ceylon University Movement. The idea of a University was first mooted by his cousin, Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy as early as 1870, without any result. On 19 January, 1906, most of the daily newspapers of Colombo carried a notice calling for a Public Meeting to consider the question of establishing a University in Ceylon.¹¹⁹ The aim of the Association was to create an institution of higher learning that co-opted the indigenous culture and tradition into its curriculum. As stated by its decree, "a University adapted to local needs and conditions."¹²⁰ A University was required, the founders stated, "to develop the education of the country."¹²¹ Coomaraswamy was pragmatic enough to realize that the emphasis on tradition and culture could very easily be relegated to the periphery, especially when dealing with other members of the privileged English-educated section of society. He feared that the omission of Eastern music, art and language from the University's curricula would result in the perpetuation of the existing system on a larger scale. In a letter to the Secretary of the Association, J.A. Gunaratna, he wrote of his worry that higher education in Ceylon:

involves the neglect of Eastern culture, music, art and languages; it is a system of education based solely on Western culture and imparted in a foreign language.

If there was to be nothing more than a perpetuation of "this sort of thing on a still

¹¹⁹ The signatories to the notice included, apart from Ananda Coomaraswamy, Ponnambalam Arunachalam, Charles Dias, the Principal of Wesley College; D.B. Jayatilaka, Principal of Ananda College; Dr. Marcus Fernando and other eminent lawyers, doctors and educationists.

¹²⁰ Report of the meeting on 19 January, 1906. Quoted in *Journal of the Ceylon University Association*. Vol. 1 No. 1, April, 1906.

¹²¹ *Journal of the Ceylon University Association*. Vol. 1 No. 1, April, 1906.

larger scale",¹²² Coomaraswamy was convinced that the Island would be better off without an institution of higher learning. He advocated adopting a system similar to that in Madras.¹²³

Coomaraswamy was supported by another member of the Committee, the Reverend A.G. Fraser, who also looked towards Madras rather than London. The Madras system, he argued, allowed for the inclusion of vernaculars as well as study of both Eastern and Western Philosophy and Science in the English medium,¹²⁴ without any detriment to the students' interests. Ponnambalam Arunachalam who was appointed Chairman of the Association also emphasized the positive role that the University could play in the development of the national languages. He hoped that the Ceylon University would "while making efficient provision for the study of English and the assimilation of western culture...take care that our youth do not grow up strangers to their mother tongue."¹²⁵

Ananda Coomaraswamy asked the same questions to Ceylonese students in England. Why had they crossed the seas to acquire an education? Medicine, law or a branch of science had some utilitarian value and he could understand that, but he was unaware of anyone coming to study "in those branches that were imaginative." He pointed out that in the nineteenth century,

¹²² Quoted in *Journal of the Ceylon University Association*, 1906 Cited in *A.C. Ancestral Home*. p. 75

¹²³ See CO 57/148 *Sessional Paper* IV of 1902. This was a favourable report on the education system in the Madras Presidency issued by the Inspector of Schools, Arthur Van Cuylenburg.

¹²⁴ A.G. Fraser, "Madras or London?" in *Ceylon National Review*. No. 1. January, 1906. p. 37

¹²⁵ *Journal of the Ceylon University Association*. Vol. 1 No. 2, October, 1906.

no Ceylonese had produced anything of importance in art or music. "But," he continued, "the things judged by posterity were not the means of making material progress but additions to the intellectual possessions of mankind." He doubted whether the students before him had any deep affection for Ceylon. He found that those that were called "educated" were strangers in their own land. "It was no credit to them," Coomaraswamy warned, "it was nothing to be proud of that the returning student was as ignorant as the young Civil Servant who went out fresh from this country [England]." He pleaded with them to assume the task and responsibility of education in Ceylon - this was "far more important than getting posts in government offices."¹²⁶ His sentiments were an echo of his father's words. Coomaraswamy was supported by the *Hindu Organ*:

[He] has used his best endeavours to promote the social, moral and physical welfare of his countrymen in a manner that those who have been bred and educated in the Island and have had greater opportunities of doing good to their countrymen should be ashamed of their indifference and apathy in these respects.¹²⁷

Coomaraswamy's contribution to the reform of the educational system, though short, was significant. He had extended the debate beyond alterations in the curriculum with the inclusion of Sinhala and Tamil, to include social and cultural reform with a greater appreciation of Oriental scholarship, literature, art, philosophy and religion. The recovery of national identity was tied to the permanence of civilization in Coomaraswamy's estimation, and simple

¹²⁶ Speech to Ceylonese students in England at the Tenth Ceylon Dinner in London, December, 1908. Quoted in S.D.R. Singam, *A.C. Ancestral Home*. p. 85

¹²⁷ *Hindu Organ*, 29 May, 1906.

knowledge of the mother-tongue was not enough. Granted that the English education on offer had a detrimental effect on society, but it was the degradation of the arts that had led to more profound consequences. What Ananda Coomaraswamy wanted in Ceylon was an amalgam of the best from the traditions of East and West, an agenda that would not be granted in the colonial education structure of Ceylon. In a farewell interview, Coomaraswamy issued his last warning:

The Ceylonese will neither respect themselves nor win the respect of others so long as their own attitudes towards the West remains one of abject imitation.¹²⁸

The Government's immediate response, after the formation of the Ceylon University Association, was the granting of two English University Scholarships instead of the one that had been offered for the past thirty-eight years. The scholarship was no longer tenable only at Oxford or Cambridge, but at London University as well. University College in Ceylon was not to be set up immediately and the crusade for its establishment became a rallying point for the English-educated and their stand on education.

In 1921, fourteen years later, University College was formally opened by Governor William Manning. The College, modelled on the lines of British universities, prepared their students for examination to London University in the arts and sciences.¹²⁹ Concession was made to the demands of the

¹²⁸ *Times of Ceylon*, 27 December, 1906.

¹²⁹ The founders expected full autonomy by 1925. *Sessional Paper X of 1925* p. 7

nationalist movement in the country. Among the languages offered for the external degree were Sinhala, Tamil, Pali and Sanskrit, but English, Latin, Greek, were also taught. The first class was composed of 155 men and women who had matriculated from London University. The role of the College in the political development was limited, but it spawned a community of young people who ensured the preservation of the status of English education even amidst constitutional and political reforms.

In this tradition of protest against the system of education, from Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy to his son Ananda, the cry had been the same: the system of education in Ceylon was divisive and denationalizing. However similar these responses appeared to be, they were not identical. They were the products of both the political developments of the period and social reform movements. The protagonists of new policies in education reflected the emerging ideologies of their times. Ramanathan followed the lead of the religious revivalists and established counter schools; while his brother, Arunachalam, followed the path of organizational agitation. It was not until Ananda Coomaraswamy, however, that education was acknowledged as a legitimate component of culture. The inclusion of tradition into the debate on education ensured that knowledge of English in itself was not the issue, that it was not to be considered a stumbling block for political reforms, but as a liability in cultural and social development. In spite of these men, and indeed because of them, the system of education did not change in any fundamental manner. There were alterations to the curriculum and increased attempts at learning one's mother-tongue, but education for the

privileged remained in English-medium schools the access to which were severely circumscribed. The number of schools that taught in Sinhala and Tamil continued to grow, but offered rudimentary knowledge and did not effect any basic change in the system. Dramatic shifts in educational policy were not forthcoming until four decades later.

**CHAPTER FOUR:
DISPARATE AGENDAS: THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE AND
RELIGION IN EDUCATION, 1927-1937**

...the masterkey is English...as a pathway leading into wider intellectual life. A man's native speech is almost like his shadow, inseparable from his personality.¹

¹ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929.

The results of the 1920 Ordinance greatly troubled at least one member of the Legislative Council. A. Canagaratnam was of the opinion that education was a crucial issue for the economic, political and social development of Ceylon. Thus far, he argued, education had not been seen in this light. For two days in February, 1926 - the 19th and 25th - Canagaratnam presented his ideas to the Legislative Council in the form of a motion for discussion. The salient points of the motion were all concerned with the language of instruction, an issue conspicuous by its absence in the Ordinance of 1920. The starting point of his motion was a condemnation the entire educational system, whereby schools were dichotomized on the basis of media of instruction. He insisted that all schools should offer instruction in English, Tamil and Sinhala, in equal proportion as they were the three languages of Ceylon. The present system was severely flawed, in his view. On the one hand, purely vernacular schools, in their present state, imparted nothing more than a rudimentary knowledge which offered little opportunity of "development as vehicles of modern thought in spite of their being cultured languages." Canagaratnam accused the government of a profound "neglect of provision for instruction in the Sinhalese and Tamil languages in Sinhalese and Tamil schools respectively." On the other hand, a neglect of the vernacular suppressed originality both in thought and action. English schools were condemned for alienating their students from the local traditions and fostering a discriminatory attitude towards their own people. In these

denunciations, he was echoing the sentiments of a previous generation of men, like the Coomaraswamy father and son, Alwis and the Ponnambalam brothers. For him the only solution was to have a single type of public school. His suggestion for rectifying the existing situation was that:

English, Sinhalese and Tamil be made language subjects in all schools, the mother tongue of the students being gradually adopted as the medium of instruction in schools of all grades....¹

His position was not entirely new, but novel in that it quite specifically championed a more comprehensive curriculum in vernacular schools. And it certainly caused a stir. He had presented his motion in a way that asked not for an enquiry into the issues raised, but for a Commission to be appointed to give effect to his recommendations. He offered further provocation by recommending that the Commission consist of "members who understand the traditions, culture and present requirements of the people."²

The Board of Education felt anxious enough about the motion in the Legislative Council to invite the author to attend a meeting of the Board to further discuss his views.³ At the meeting, A. Mahadeva, argued against the introduction of Sinhala or Tamil into English-medium schools. He based his opinion on the fact that as the business of both the Legislative Council and Government were conducted in English, there was no incentive to introduce the two languages into English schools. D.B. Jayatilake, another member of the

¹ *Hansard* (LC), 19 February, 1926. p. 327

² *Hansard* (LC), 19 February, 1926. p. 327

³ *Ceylon Daily News*, 23 February, 1926.

Board, pointed out that there were "two dangers to avoid" when discussing the subject, "on the one hand, we have to steer clear of the rock of false nationalism and on the other to [steer clear] of national indifference and lukewarmness which masquerade in the guise of cosmopolitanism."⁴ Public opinion was apparently against making the education system more egalitarian. The *Ceylon Daily News* castigated Canagaratnam's motion which they accused of being "one enormous assumption" making "short work of all the difficulties experienced by all the educationists of all time." They supported the use of vernaculars in schools, but only at the early stages of education. Canagaratnam himself was admired for "his pluck and self confidence... [but not] his nostrum."⁵ With the failure of the Board of Education to resolve the issue at committee level, the government was forced to take further action and delve deeper into the issues that had been raised.

Macrae Commission

As a result, Governor Hugh Clifford (1925-1927) was called upon to appoint a Commission of Enquiry on 17 July, 1926, with the Director of Education, L. Macrae as the Chair. The first meeting of the Commission was held over a month later, on 28 August, 1926, when it was decided, as per Canagaratnam's wishes, not only to study previous reports issued on the educational system, but documents relating to the communal and religious breakdown of students, school demographics and statistics. This, the Commission

⁴ Quoted by C.S.V. Jayaweera, "Educational Ordinance No. 1 of 1920" in *EC,CV*. p. 580

⁵ *Ceylon Daily News*, 2 February, 1926.

believed, would assist their enquiries. The specific issues to be studied included, first, the measures that needed to be adopted in order to extend the scope of education in vernacular schools; second, the practicality of making Sinhala and Tamil the media of instruction in schools all over the island; third, steps to be undertaken to improve the teaching of Oriental languages in English schools and fourth, the problem of religious instruction.

The Commission tried to recommend policies in the context of the over-all socio-economic situation and particularly, the relative position of the various communities in the educational field. Its study of previous annual administrative reports showed, to its satisfaction, that in school enrolment children from all the major communal groups were represented in proportion to their percentage in the population.⁶ They therefore, concluded that there were no serious problems of racial or communal discrimination in education. The issue of caste, however, did pose a problem, inasmuch as it affected the attendance and treatment of children in various schools, particularly on the Jaffna Peninsula. The policy of ensuring that the regulations for admission did not condone any discrimination⁷ offered no support to low-caste parents who were often discouraged from seeking admission to schools with a predominantly higher-caste clientele. Nor did the government's policy offer any safeguard against low-caste children being treated badly after they were admitted. This matter really needed urgent attention since it was discovered that low-caste pupils were subjected to

⁶ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 9 p. 7

⁷ Instituted in CO 54/949-9 *Education Ordinance* No. 1 of 1920. Part III, Section 13

humiliating treatment in seating arrangements in the classroom.⁸ The Macrae Commission, however, found it sufficient only to express its regret that such a situation existed. It justified its position by claiming that an increase in public education was the only solution for problems of caste prejudice.

In considering the problem of religious instruction in schools, the Commission acknowledged the ambivalent position of the government which allowed various denominations to look after the religious instruction of their own pupils, yet stated that they (the government) should play no direct role in this regard. Members of the Commission agreed that early religious instruction in life was of fundamental importance for the overall training of a child, but could not unanimously agree as to whether such instruction should be provided by the school system. The only solution was to agree to disagree. The Report stated:

It is unanimously agreed that the home, church, temple, or mosque are primarily responsible for religious instruction, but at this stage there is one difference of opinion whether the school should be included as an institution primarily responsible.⁹

The issue, then, remained unresolved, but the Commission agreed that this was essential in maintaining the Government's neutrality in religious matters. In other words, the preservation of such neutrality could best be maintained by the refusal to subsidize, either directly or indirectly religious instruction in school.

Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a member of the Macrae Commission, found it hard to accept the resolution on religious teaching. He insisted on

⁸ This issue came to a head a year later, in 1930. See below, page

⁹ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 17 p. 9

adding a rider before he would sign the final report. He did not agree that the Government could not subsidize religious instruction in Christian, Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim schools. He argued that:

these students belong to the four great religions of the world, and the Government which gathers taxes from all these religious communities is bound in common justice to allot to the schools of each of these communities a proportion of the expenses they incur for making their children good and true.¹⁰

This was, in his opinion, the real meaning of 'state neutrality'. Ramanathan also disagreed with the Commission's recommendations regarding the Conscience Clause by which the Commission allowed children the freedom to attend or abstain from religious worship, unless the parent specifically wished the child to receive such instruction. This differed from the Ordinance of 1920 which required the parent to set out his opposition to the teaching of religion in writing. The Conscience Clause was re-cast in, what was seen as, a positive form, whereby the parent was to give his written consent, rather than state his opposition, in the matter of religious teaching.¹¹

In relation to the prime question of language, the Macrae Commission was forced to acknowledge the complexity of the issue. Controversies emerged even before the problem could be defined. The Commission believed that the confused approach to the language issue would be perpetuated unless the *aims* of education were clearly defined. The popular assumption according to the Commission was that the language issue was only

¹⁰ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Rider 1, p. 20

¹¹ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 17 p. 9

concerned with "the teaching of the vernaculars in Ceylon schools."¹² They asserted that education was not merely a matter concerning the media through which it was conducted. It should aim at rendering the individual more efficient, raise the standard of character and promote the interests of the community as a whole in all its undertakings.¹³ That the role of language in this endeavour was central could not be disputed. The Commission offered a comparison with developments in India. For the educated Indian, "the master key is English...not merely [as] an instrument of livelihood...[but] as a pathway leading into a wider intellectual life." But this should not diminish the importance of a knowledge of the vernaculars. "The mother tongue," it quoted, "is a true vehicle of mother wit.... A man's native speech is almost like his shadow, inseparable from his personality."¹⁴ The Commission was sympathetic to the public's demand for knowledge in English and stated that it would be unwise:

to say that the instinct of the public is at fault when it regards a good training in English as the door to a wider culture, and as an important means of economic advance; but on the other hand the continued study of the vernacular by those who receive an English education should be an integral part of the educational system.¹⁵

By this one statement, they had, in fact, drawn together all the fragmented strands

¹² CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 22 p. 11

¹³ These stated aims were very similar to the general ideals that the colonial government and missionary agencies prescribed during the early days of colonialism. See K. Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education - A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. Especially chapter two, pp. 23-46

¹⁴ *Calcutta University Commission*, 1919. Vol. 1 Part 1. pp.244-245. Quoted in CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. p. 12

¹⁵ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 22 p. 13

of the language issue: knowledge of English was essential in the pursuit of cultural and economic opportunities, while knowledge of the mother-tongue was crucial for all-round development. They concluded that schools in Ceylon should, as far as possible, be bilingual, but were unsure as to "whether such bilingualism should be based upon one medium of instruction."¹⁶ Whatever the outcome of its report, the Commission was convinced that the present situation needed to be rectified. As things stood, children were taught in their own vernacular for the first four years, but because of the public's demand for English, it was being provided at a much earlier stage than was intended and was not very well taught.¹⁷ The Commission discussed whether, in the light of Ceylon's multi-lingual culture, the medium for schools should be confined to one language, namely, the vernacular. That this was to be either Sinhala or Tamil, depending on location, was not made clear, but implied. If the present system was allowed to continue unchecked, it would just accentuate:

the division of the social organization on a language basis, but it would also deny to the pupils of Ceylon a knowledge of languages other than their mother tongue which is essential for the future development of the country.¹⁸

Bilingualism had to be attempted. But the transition towards a new system would have to be undertaken gradually to avoid "the abrupt change in the medium of instruction which at present appeared to be a defect in the existing

¹⁶ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 23 p. 13

¹⁷ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 24 p. 13

¹⁸ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 29 p. 14

system."¹⁹ The Commission recommended that "instruction in the vernacular languages should be compulsory for all pupils at the earlier stage of their school career", whether the vernacular be English, Sinhala or Tamil.²⁰ Only then should a second language be introduced. The ultimate conclusion was "to provide throughout the country a system which is essentially bilingual" which would be of greater advantage to the multi-lingual character of Ceylon.²¹ While the Macrae Commission can be lauded for its foresight in attempting to create an equitable educational system within a pluralistic society, it failed in several regards. It did not come to grips with the specific issues concerned with the practicality of making English, Sinhala and Tamil co-media of instruction. It also did not address the problems that would arise with such innovation. By not offering any concrete suggestions for the implementation of the new policy, it made it impossible for the government to effect any substantial changes. There appeared to be no solution but to maintain the *status quo*. The Commission's Report was truly disappointing to all concerned, especially the original initiator of reform.

Ramanathan was equally discouraged by its conclusions. He felt that the method of inquiry had been complicated by "minor problems like caste and communal differences"²² which had detracted from a comprehensive probe into the issue of language. He had wanted a document that would encourage the

¹⁹ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 30 p. 15

²⁰ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Sections 23-30 pp. 13-15

²¹ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 37 pp. 18-19

²² CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Rider 1, page 21

use of Sinhala and Tamil at the highest levels and not simply confine their study as compulsory up to the fifth standard. To bolster his argument that the vernaculars were essential for cultural development, Ramanathan quoted extensively from the University Commission Report which stated that:

No man can be considered to have received a sound and good education until he has mastered his own tongue, and is able to speak and write it fluently and correctly.²³

To simply say that further investigation into the use of Sinhala and Tamil as media of instruction was required, was not good enough. The Commission needed to formulate a clear policy on this matter and not evade the issue. W. Duraiswamy, another member of the Macrae Commission, took a similar view. He stated that it was not at all an impractical suggestion to make Sinhala and Tamil the languages of instruction in schools. The step was essential "if it is sincerely desired to develop in all pupils 'clearness of thought, independence of judgement, and sense of individual responsibility.'"²⁴ Ramanathan concurred. He believed that, "the education that was being imparted [would] intensify the denationalization and chaos that reign in the minds of self-lovers and corporeal men."²⁵ The Commission had stated its support for a bilingual system of education, but had refused to recommend specific methods by which this could be implemented. This limitation, Ramanathan and Duraiswamy argued, had made the entire Commission Report ineffective and useless.

²³ *University Commission Report*, p. 12 Quoted CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Rider 1, page 21

²⁴ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Rider 2, p. 23

²⁵ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Rider 1, p. 21

One important issue to emerge from the Report was the idea of free education at the primary level, irrespective of the medium of instruction. The provision of free education, however, was to be tempered so as to avoid, "a sudden rush from schools which at present provided a course in Sinhalese and Tamil only to schools which provided a course in English, as such a rush might be detrimental."²⁶ George Wille, another dissenting member, was particularly concerned with the idea of free education. If it was not possible to implement this rule throughout the system, then, scholarships should be offered to "every English-speaking child up to the stage corresponding to that up to which vernacular education is free."²⁷ The idea of free education was abandoned until a decade later, when it made a volatile reappearance.

Despite the Commission's failure to suggest effective practical measures, the very fact that it recognized the need for a bilingual system at all levels, opened the way for change. Besides, the new method of enquiry ~~adopted~~ by the Commission, had two important consequences. First, by taking into account social factors, it ensured that these could not be ignored in the future. It also embodied a belated recognition that education was an intrinsic necessity for the progress of society. Secondly, the public was drawn into the process of policy formation, no matter how peripheral their contribution. They responded with great enthusiasm to the opportunity for making their positions known, either to the various Commissions which were initiated, or to the Colonial Office. Many

²⁶ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Section 35 p. 17

²⁷ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper XXVIII* of 1929. Rider 3, p. 23

of the memorialists were drawn from local, rather than the national elite and their agenda was concerned primarily with local problems. Others who expressed their opinion did so without any ambition to change the course of policy. Often, these opinions were nothing more than personal comments on the existing state of affairs. Their importance lay more in the extension of participation, than in any actual impact. These two developments proved to be of crucial importance to the Kannangara Commission ten years later.

The Macrae Commission's main recommendation, that a bilingual system was better than a unilingual one, elicited a mixed response. The conflicting points of view were best illustrated by articles in two college magazines, from the Northern and Southern Provinces respectively. S. Nadaraser, an old boy of Hartley College in Point Pedro, denounced the Government for its creation of a "most abhorrent and unnatural phenomenon", that of an "Englischer-Ceylonese."²⁸ He could not but support the Commission's recommendation for a multi-lingual system. It was shown in Switzerland, he noted, that multi-lingualism worked. He had seen that there were no "complications in the government of that country on account of the fact that there are more two than languages." Ceylon was a similar case, in spite of her languages not being so closely related to one another as in the case of Switzerland. Nadaraser recommended:

We should so modify our educational system that when the time arrives we shall be able to form a State where Sinhalese and Tamil hold positions quite analogous to those of French and German in

²⁸ CML 50/B-38 *Hartley College Miscellany*. Vol. 1, No. 3, September, 1927. p. 21

Switzerland.²⁹

K. Balasingham was not so optimistic. Writing in his old school magazine, he claimed to have once held the view that compulsory instruction in Sinhala and Tamil "would help the two races mix with each other more freely and understand each other better and that this free inter-mixture and mutual understanding would help to evolve a Ceylonese nation." Balasingham had since changed his view. He foresaw "insuperable" difficulties in the implementation of such a system, the need for which was "not clearly established either." He was of the opinion that as "English is spoken today in Ceylon by every person who has any pretension to modern knowledge,"³⁰ there would be very little incentive to study in Sinhala or Tamil, especially in districts where the other language was predominant. If English was not to be made the common language for all Ceylon, it was necessary that it should cease to be the language of law and of Government. "You cannot carry on a democratic Government in a language not understood by the people at large," Balasingham concluded. Such a scheme was a farce and could not be a permanent feature of Ceylon's administrative and legal system. Beyond its practical value, Balasingham saw English as the key to modern knowledge, which would provide a complement to Ceylonese culture. "Some defects in our national character may be corrected", he thought, "by a study of English literature and philosophy. The harmonious proportions and studied sobriety of English prose and verse cannot but tend to re-model and purify

²⁹ CML 50/B-38 *Hartley College Miscellany*. Vol. 1, No. 3, September, 1927. p. 24

³⁰ CML 50/E-13 *Richmond College Magazine*. Vol. XVI Nos.3&4 Trinity-Michaelmas, 1927. p. 12

vernacular literature."³¹ Neither Nadaraser's nor Balasingham's comments affected policy formulation nor were they meant to, but they did represent the growing tendency on the part of the public to pass judgement on governmental pronouncements and policies. This type of public participation proved to be a precursor of political developments which would be ushered in by the constitutional changes embodied in the Donoughmore Commission.

The Donoughmore Commission

In the midst of the growing debates on the issues of language, religion and education, the reformist element among the English-educated continued to entreat the Government for constitutional reform. They argued that their responsibility to the people could not be fulfilled if they lacked substantial power to enforce any changes and so demanded self-government. They found in Governor Hugh Clifford an unlikely ally. In a lengthy despatch to the Colonial Office, he traced the roots of political discontent to the inadequacies of the functioning Constitution.³² As a result, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, L.S. Amery, appointed a Royal Commission, commonly known as the Donoughmore Commission. The Colonial Secretary was asked to inform the Ceylon National Congress of the government's intention. In a letter written on his behalf, it was stated:

A radical revision of the existing Government machinery in this island is urgently demanded in the

³¹ CML 50/E-13 *Richmond College Magazine*. Vol. XVI Nos.3&4 Trinity-Michaelmas, 1927. p. 13

³² CO 537/692 Clifford to Secretary of State, L.S. Amery, 20 November, 1926.

interest of all concerned.

Therefore, a new constitution would be devised as to:

train the Ceylonese for eventual self-government which is the object that all the reforms granted up to now have conspicuously failed to achieve.³³

The Commission, formally instituted in August, 1927, arrived in Ceylon on 13 November, 1927. The Commissioners were asked to look into the workings of the existing Constitution of 1924. The Earl of Donoughmore and his three colleagues³⁴ began their task by travelling all over the Island, meeting deputations from various interest groups. The demands put forth by the groups, not surprisingly, made exaggerated claims in the hopes of securing greater concessions for their representatives. On a visit to Jaffna, for example, the Donoughmore Commissioners were appalled that the issue of caste had begun to dominate admission into local schools. They, therefore, stressed the need for the government to provide equal and adequate educational facilities as the true remedies for the uplift of all classes.³⁵ Thus, education and social reform were not ignored as they made their enquiries into the political aspirations of the people.

The Commissioners were in agreement that the main fault in the

³³ CO 54/889 Letter from W.L. Murphy (for the Colonial Secretary) to E.W. Perera, President of the Ceylon National Congress, 29 April, 1927.

³⁴ Sir Matthew Nathan, a former Governor; Sir Geoffrey Butler and Dr. Drummond Shiels, Members of Parliament

³⁵ Cmd. 3131 *Report of the Commission on the (Ceylon) Constitution*. p. 97 (Henceforth: *Donoughmore Commission*.)

existing system lay in the "divorce of power from responsibility,"³⁶ but they refused to introduce a parliamentary system on the grounds that it would encourage communal alignments.³⁷ This conclusion was based on the Commission's observation of inter-communal rivalries within the Ceylon National Congress and the growth of communal organizations. In an effort to end communal representation, the Commission recommended that nominations be replaced by territorially based elections. As the Report stated:

It is our opinion that only by its [communal representation] abolition, will it be possible for the diverse communities to develop together into a true national unity....

"Communal representation in Ceylon," it continued, "has no great antiquity to commend it, and its introduction into the Constitution with good intentions has had unfortunate results."³⁸ This did not, however, reassure the minorities, who continued to harbour fears that they would be dominated by the Sinhalese - especially Low-country - majority. This was a legitimate anxiety based on the failure of the Ceylon National Congress to accommodate the various communal groups within one cohesive unit. Ramanathan, on behalf of the Tamils, went to London in the hope of persuading influential persons to bring pressure to bear on the Commissioners. For the Muslims, T.B. Jayah spearheaded their discontent, most notably through memorials and memoranda.³⁹ But it was all to no avail.

³⁶ Cmd. 3131 *Donoughmore Commission*. p. 18

³⁷ Cmd.3131 *Donoughmore Commission*. pp. 41-42

³⁸ Cmd. 3131 *Donoughmore Commission*. pp. 99-100

³⁹ CO 54/900 T.B. Jayah, *Muslims and Proposed Constitutional Changes in Ceylon*, 27 July, 1930.

The new Constitution was to provide a system of semi-responsible government, with the conferment of ministerial responsibility on a new executive who were to be elected on a territorial basis.

Two recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission had a direct bearing on the development of educational policy. The first concerned the structural changes to be made in the organization of government. The Legislative and Executive Councils were replaced by a State Council where both executive and legislative powers were vested. The Council was divided into seven Executive Committees, each of which was responsible for a given area of governmental activity.⁴⁰ Sixty-five territorially elected members with three Officers of State - the Chief Secretary, the Attorney General and the Treasurer - were to make up the State Council. The tenure of the State Council was four years and the scheme would provide practical political experience for the indigenous population. Committee members elected a Chairman who sat on a Board of Ministers which had control over the Budget. This was the only issue on which the committees had to be collectively responsible. Thus, a particular Executive Committee could present its own proposals for change, without any guarantee of its success, a provision used to dramatic affect against unpopular or threatening legislation. This provision was to prove fateful for educational proposals within the decade.

The second relevant recommendation was universal franchise, a

⁴⁰ The seven Executive Committees were concerned with Home Affairs, Agriculture, Local Administration, Health, Public Works, Communication and Education. The entire scheme was modelled on the London County Council.

unique development in colonial policy. Earlier constitutions had made franchise contingent upon the qualifications of literacy, income and ownership of property, thereby limiting it to the relatively privileged sections of society. The Donoughmore Commission extended the vote to all men over the age of 21 and women over 30. The English-educated social groups, both within and outside the Ceylon National Congress, reacted unfavourably. They tried hard to maintain the existing conditions for franchise, citing poverty and ignorance as limitations to political awareness. A deputation of Congress office-bearers, E.W. Perera, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and R.S.S. Gunawardene, insinuated that those who earned a monthly income below fifty Rupees would only be susceptible to bribes and would, therefore, be irresponsible in the exercise of their vote.⁴¹ More relevant, however, was the Congressmen's realistic fear that should the vote be given to the Indian labour community, the Sinhalese population, particularly the Kandyans, would be denied representation in the State Council. The deputation also voiced their concern over the lack of an educational criterion. The remedy they proposed was to, "organise evening or night classes throughout the country with a view to ensuring that all adults, both male and female, should achieve literacy as early as possible." This was only because, the Congress stated, "an uneducated man was a dangerous institution."⁴² The only person within the Congress to unequivocally support universal franchise was the labour leader, A.E. Goonesinha. As a result of this impasse, he withdrew his support from the

⁴¹ HCNC. pp. 829-830

⁴² Draft Report of the Eleventh Annual Session of the Ceylon National Congress. 21 December, 1929. DCNC. Vol. II p. 953

Congress in 1927.

The minorities were themselves not immune to the fear of mass participation in politics. Publicly, it was claimed that the time was not ripe for such experimentation. More discretely, universal franchise was condemned as a guarantee of Low-country Sinhalese domination. Even more cautiously, the minority leaders expressed their apprehension of having to depend on an 'ignorant, poor and unreliable' electorate to maintain their position. Ponnambalam Ramanathan strongly urged that universal education should precede universal franchise; a belief which caused him to ask, "Why should we not leave the illiterate and uninstructed inhabitants alone, and [maintain] the present qualifications...?"⁴³ The argument put forth by the Donoughmore Commission that only through practical experience of the vote would political acumen emerge,⁴⁴ was vehemently denounced:

Let the suffrage be given to everybody, be he fool, mischievous, or undetected rogue, and it will be all right in the end, because if he is given the vote there is a chance of his becoming better! That contradicts all the conclusions of educationalists who insist on the masses being educated.⁴⁵

E.R. Tambimuttu was equally convinced that, "an illiterate mass is the greatest danger to any social progress in the country, especially if it is left in the hands of unscrupulous persons." While "ignorant men are bad enough," he continued,

⁴³ *Hansard* (LC), 1 November, 1928. p. 1671

⁴⁴ Cmd. 3131 *Donoughmore Commission*. p. 84

⁴⁵ *Hansard* (LC), 1 November, 1928. p. 1671

"ignorant women are worse."⁴⁶ The Donoughmore Commission was unmoved. Their response to, what appeared to be the outburst of a spoilt section of the populace, unwilling to share privilege, was equally caustic. In their opinion, they stated, "...the development of responsible government requires... an increasing opportunity to the rank and file of the people to influence the government and the franchise cannot be fairly or wisely confined to the educated classes."⁴⁷

On 12 December, 1929, the Legislative Council voted by the slim margin of two (19 to 17) to accept the Donoughmore recommendations. The dissenters objected to its acceptance on so narrow a majority. Of the nineteen that were in favour, there was one Tamil and thirteen Sinhalese members. Amongst the opponents, there was representation from all the communal groups in Ceylon: two Sinhalese, eight Ceylon Tamils, two Indian Tamils, three Muslims and two Burghers. The two Sinhalese members who voted against the recommendations, did not do so because of the franchise clause, but because they believed the Donoughmore Report did not go far enough in granting self-government. The dissenters expected a traditional parliament rather than a system of Executive Committees. E.W. Perera, the President of the Ceylon National Congress was one of the unconvinced. After the acceptance of the recommendations, he broke with the Congress and formed the rival All Ceylon Liberal League. By and large, however, the Congress was grateful for whatever was on offer. The Congressmen may not have fully appreciated the novelty of the Donoughmore Commissioners'

⁴⁶ *Hansard* (LC), 1 November, 1928. p. 1671

⁴⁷ Cmd. 3131 *Donoughmore Commission*. p. 87

Report, but they were not willing to jeopardize the concessions that had been granted by agitating for anything further at this point. As Gunawardene and Bandaranaike wrote:

Ceylon is one of the few British possessions in which the demand for political reform has never passed from constitutional agitations to hostile demonstration. Our appeal has always been to reason and justice.⁴⁸

The Ceylon National Congress, predictably, dominated the first elections to the State Council which took place on 4 May, 1931 - the first time by universal franchise. This was in spite of the fact that those who were elected, stood for election as individuals and not as members of an organized party. On 10 July, 1931, the State Council met to elect the seven Executive Committee Chairmen who would be Ministers under the new Constitution. Apart from the Minister of Communications and Works, a Muslim, H.M. Macan Markar, and an Indian Tamil, P. Sundaram, Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, all the other Ministers were Sinhalese, Congress stalwarts. C.W.W. Kannangara, one of two Sinhalese members who had voted against the Donoughmore recommendations, was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee for Education. He was the President of the Ceylon National Congress at the time. There were two particularly sensitive issues that came to the fore after the formation of the State Council, which, while not having a direct bearing on the educational developments of the time, certainly affected the way in which society reacted to the fast pace of changes in social and political life. The first was the

⁴⁸ HCNC. p. 814

increased political expectations of the working class,⁴⁹ and the second, the genesis of communal politics.⁵⁰

Disparate Opportunities

Until the 1920s, discussions on the problems of Ceylon's educational system had focussed on language and religion - concerns which had become quite central in Ceylonese society. After the Donoughmore Constitution was implemented, communal⁵¹ and caste tensions were on the rise - as illustrated by the growth of communal parties⁵² - and it came as no surprise when their effects were felt in the educational sphere. Inter-caste rivalry was concentrated primarily, though not exclusively, in the Northern Province, where the Hindu caste system (albeit a modified version of the Indian one) prevailed.

⁴⁹ The first hurdle that the new State Council members had to face was that of a weak economy. The Great Depression had resulted, not only in severe retrenchment, but also a widening gap between wages and the cost of living. Along with the constant influx of rural people into the cities, the legislators had their hands full. The activities of the Young Lanka League and the Marxists to channel discontent into politically astute trades unions did not unduly worry the members of the State Council as neither had an elected representative.

⁵⁰ The Jaffna Youth League, inspired by the visits to Jaffna by Sarojini Naidu and Nehru in April and May respectively, spearheaded a Tamil boycott of the elections. The League had argued that the Donoughmore Commission had not gone far enough in granting self-rule. As a result, all but four Northern seats, were filled by men who had either been active in political reform or those already in the Legislative Council. The Tamil boycott exacerbated communal feelings. The Sinhalese argued that Ramanathan's visit to Whitehall precluded any goodwill they might have had for the people of Jaffna. Any Tamil initiatives, therefore, did not warrant any Sinhalese support. In an appalling statement of prejudice, H.A.P. Sandarasagara declared, "I'll make Jaffna an Ulster and I'll be its Lord Carson." Quoted in *Ceylon Daily News*, 17 May, 1931. See also J. Russell, *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931-1947*. Dehiwala, Sri Lanka:1982

⁵¹ "Communal politics" with its exclusive and aggressive emphasis on the interests of a language group or a religious community, while not absent in the past, acquired a new importance and urgency in the context of the constitutional changes, affecting profoundly the public attitudes to educational questions.

⁵² In 1933 after Tamil leaders had denounced their earlier boycott of elections as a grievous error, elections were held on the Jaffna Peninsula. This was actively supported by the Colonial Office which had become concerned about the Sinhalese domination in the State Council. See CO 54/916 H.R. Cowell's minute of 10 May, 1933.

It was manifested through prejudicial treatment meted out to low-caste children in government and assisted schools. Blatant discrimination was manifested in three ways: first, *Pariah* children were barred from entering a number of schools;⁵³ second, *Vellala* and non-*Vellala* children were forbidden to dine together;⁵⁴ and, most importantly, non-*Vellala* children were made to sit on the floor while in class.

The matter of discrimination in the seating arrangements came before the Board of Education for the first time at a meeting in February, 1928. At that time, the Board concluded that no child should be discriminated against on the basis of race, creed, nationality or caste while in school. If it was found that such practices were prevalent, the school in question would have to forfeit its expected aid. As such sanctions referred only to grants, the policy could only be enforced in government or assisted Anglo-vernacular and vernacular schools. This regulation was passed in November, 1928, but confirmed by the Executive Council only on 12 July, 1929 and extended to English medium schools on 16 August, 1929. It was, therefore, not included in the Macrae Commission Report.

When the regulation came into operation attempts were made by Managers to co-operate with the Department in securing equal treatment to all pupils. It was principally directed at schools in the Jaffna Peninsula. The General Manager of the Hindu Board of Education, S. Rajaratnam, and a member of the

⁵³ *Morning Star*, 8 January, 1930.

⁵⁴ *Morning Star*, 14 March, 1930.

Board of Education, sent a circular to all his Head Teachers, but it became obvious that unless all Managers co-operated it was useless to try to enforce the rule. As caste rivalries and prejudices were very strong, it became clear that equal treatment of pupils would only mean provision of seats for children of the low castes and not that these children should be seated with those of higher castes.⁵⁵ By March, 1930, very little progress had been made, but a circular requesting Managers of schools to furnish a certificate that no differential treatment was being meted out to pupils in their schools caused some agitation in Jaffna. At first one hundred and seventy four Managers refused to furnish such a certificate, but with the withdrawal of grants, only five Managers representing eight schools, expressed their discontent by not issuing the relevant certificate. These schools hoped that the situation would change once the general public accepted the new law.

The public resorted to memorials to make their discontent known. In July 1930, a group from Jaffna sent one such memorial to the Colonial Office complaining about the hardships they had suffered as a result of the Hindu social system, particularly *Vellala* dominance over the rest of the community. The extension of franchise under the Donoughmore Constitution, "had exasperated the high caste people and led them to treat the depressed classes with greater severity."⁵⁶ In educational terms, this exasperation had exhibited itself in unequal seating arrangements for non-*Vellala* children, thereby contravening

⁵⁵ CO 54/903-5 Enclosure 1 to Despatch Number 763. Report from Acting Director of Education, L.McD. Robison to Colonial Secretary. 5 September, 1930.

⁵⁶ CO 54/903-5 Memorandum of the Jaffna Depressed Tamils' Service League to Secretary of State, Lord Passfield, 2 July, 1930. Enclosure of Despatch 674.

government policy.⁵⁷ The offending schools were openly defiant of the sanctions against non-enforcement of the provision for equal seating arrangements. Either the non-*Vellala* pupil was forced to sit on the floor, or was compelled to leave the school if he did not obey. Those schools which did allow low caste children to assume their rightful places, were often targets of vandalism.⁵⁸ Among these were fifteen mission schools which had been burnt down. In many instances, the children themselves were not spared. They were either subject to false allegations or had to bear the wrath of school managers when high caste children withdrew in protest. The memorialists were of the opinion that the Government was trying its best to enforce the equality rule, but were not encouraged by the degree of collaboration between "its own officers and the majority of the high caste people."⁵⁹ Even the threatened withdrawal of grants did not deter some schools which refused to enforce the equal seating policy. The memorialists begged the Colonial Office to look into the matters directly.

The Ceylon Government was livid that the League from Jaffna had not made any representation to the government in Colombo, but had gone over their head to the Colonial Office. A government official, B.H. Bourdillon, wrote to the Secretary of State on behalf of Governor H.J. Stanley (1927-1931), suggesting that the memorial be ignored. The memorialists were advised to try and elect

⁵⁷ *Administrative Report* (DE), 1930.

⁵⁸ *Morning Star*, 30 May, 1930 and 6 June, 1930.

⁵⁹ CO 54/903-5 Memorandum of the Jaffna Depressed Tamils' Service League to Secretary of State, Lord Passfield, 2 July, 1930. Enclosure of Despatch 674.

their own representatives in the State Council to look after their interests.⁶⁰ The Government could, or would, do nothing. Lord Passfield accepted Bourdillon's advice. He informed the memorialists that he could only suggest that the grant of adult franchise would lead to a progressive amelioration of their condition.⁶¹

As the Jaffna Depressed Tamils' Service League made representations to the Government against unequal treatment, village leaders from Jaffna answered back with their own lengthy memorial to Whitehall. This petition, illogical and angry in tone, claimed that the Government was using its legislative clout to wilfully "disturb the equilibrium of our customs..."⁶² The enforcement of the equal seating arrangement had seriously disrupted life in the Peninsula. Feuds between caste groups had broken out, there was a general defiance of law and order, and increased hostility towards managers of schools, teachers and even Legislative Councillors. The Government had ridden roughshod over the wishes of the people, who would have been "willing to accept changes if they [were] effected with due care, attention and proper consultation." The people had protested, the leaders of the country had protested, the Hindus and even Tamil Christians had protested against the introduction of the rule, but to no avail. The government should not, the memorialists argued, "interfere with our customs and religion unless and until we desire changes or agree to changes." This interference was not appreciated, especially if any changes - "cyclonic and

⁶⁰ CO 54/903-5 B.H. Bourdillon to Lord Passfield, 22 August, 1930. Despatch 674

⁶¹ CO 54/903-5 Lord Passfield to Governor H.J. Stanley, 23 September, 1930.

⁶² CO 54/903-5 Memorial from the Leaders of the Villages in Jaffna to Lord Passfield, 20 June, 1930, Section 1. Enclosure of Despatch Number 763 (Henceforth: Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930)

communistic" as they were - were deemed to be destructive "to our society or established order which gave us peace for centuries."⁶³ The memorialists invoked history to emphasize their view that it was foreigners who had made the caste system oppressive: "we have suffered much by the alien rule by their proving deliberately indifferent or ignorant to our customs and social Welfare." The British in particular were guilty of standing aloof from the customs of the Jaffna people and were more content to supplant tradition with an alien English system. Such apathy and indifference did nothing but contribute to "oppression and chaos in our society".⁶⁴ The same air of indifference was now being made manifest in the enforcement of equal seating, "without ascertaining the wishes and feeling of the people, the leaders of the country, the managers of Schools or recognised societies."⁶⁵ In order to enforce the new regulations, the Government resorted to dramatic tactics. The Director of Education, along with various School Inspectors, paid surprise visits to schools to ensure that the equal seating regulation was being applied. During these visits they forcibly "interseated and equalseated" the students, to the "annoyance and humiliation" of school managers.⁶⁶ The memorialists were angered that there had not been any prior notification of the change and they were given no time to make their own arrangements if they were "not in sympathy with the change." They were only informed that the rule had been established. This change was not asked for by

⁶³ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930. Section 2

⁶⁴ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930. Section 3

⁶⁵ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930. Section 2

⁶⁶ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 2

any community or school, but by individuals of "rationalistic and communistic tendencies."⁶⁷ In fact:

the lower classes do not wish to go beyond the caste system and have not asked for reform or showed inclination in sit in equality.⁶⁸

Under the caste system, the memorial explained, "equal-seating is unknown in private houses, temples or other public places".⁶⁹ Equal seating was not considered a boon by any class in Hindu society. It stated that, "no *Vellala* likes to have equal seat with a *Brahman* or others with the *Vellala*. All like to follow the caste system which offends nobody and it is their religion."⁷⁰ Therefore the government's decision to enforce it in state aided schools, was bewildering.

The Board of Education was perceived to be the ultimate culprit. It had only two Tamil members and the others, mostly Sinhalese and Christians, were accused of ignorance regarding caste distinctions in the North. The present unhappiness of the country has been "the result of hasty legislation, by the rule of the majority"⁷¹ without consulting or securing the consent of the people previously or without any appeal from any section of the people for such a violent change. The Director of Education and the Board of Education were accused of having discovered an existing rule in the Code of assisted Schools under which the equal seating arrangement should be insisted upon. Its

⁶⁷ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 2

⁶⁸ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 6

⁶⁹ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 7

⁷⁰ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 5

⁷¹ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 2

enforcement was really a method of dividing Hindu Society into several camps or "into anarchy which will afford a field to the Missionaries to build schools to the lower classes of Hindus and thus carry on their missions."⁷² Equal seating, the Colonial Office was informed, does not bring about economical advantage or improvement but "is a mere satisfaction to the foreign eye."⁷³

The memorialists asked for a commission to enquire into merits and demerits of the caste system. They suggested that to improve the lot of the lower classes, more technical education should be provided, "instead of mere reading the vernacular language... and colonising them in new parts so that, when they are economically improved, they must necessarily improve in their sanitary habits and personal cleanliness when there will be less protest and people will be willing then to relax caste rules."⁷⁴ For added emphasis, the memorialists quoted the Premier, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, in reply to a protest made by a Black American regarding the refusal of English hotels to admit him. MacDonald was alleged to have stated that he could not interfere with the customs of the country. The village leaders hoped that the British Government "will not violate our customs in this country."⁷⁵

The memorial from village leaders, was really an attempt to re-establish an orthodox Hindu order in Jaffna, but couched in the language of an appeal for caste peace, rather than for active discrimination. The memorialists

⁷² CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 5

⁷³ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 7

⁷⁴ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 7

⁷⁵ CO 54/903-5 Jaffna Memorial, 20 June, 1930, Section 6

were from the ranks of the traditional elites who were caught in a bind. On the one hand they firmly believed in the provision of education to the majority of the people, yet, on the other, they were unwilling to relinquish their customary status and privilege in the process. They fought the battle on two grounds; first, by asking for more technical schools to be set up by the government, they tried to ensure that the Tamils would secure a certain degree of knowledge coupled with vocational skills. And secondly, by targeting the Christian-dominated Board of Education, they maintained a link with reformers of the past. They had an unexpected ally in Ponnambalam Ramanathan who supported the *Vellala* cause.⁷⁶ As a member of the Board of Education which had devised the policy, he believed that the clause was just. But as a member of the *Vellala* community himself, he fiercely advocated that enforcement should be strictly according to the letter of the law which need not necessarily offend caste prejudice. That is, that low caste children should not be made to sit on the floor, but be provided with separate benches so as not to seat them amongst the high caste pupils.

The Department of Education reacted strongly against the criticism of the village leaders. Their memorial, it was claimed, painted an exaggerated picture of conditions in Jaffna. The Department acknowledged that several schools had been burnt down, but the measures adopted by Government, such as making the villagers pay for the school, "succeeded in preventing any further outbreak of rioting and the people are gradually coming to realise that forceful

⁷⁶ *Morning Star*, 14 March, 1930.

methods will not delay the enforcement of equal seating."⁷⁷ The Department was particularly sensitive to the accusation that the clause was borne of a whim of the government officials. It stated that several renowned Tamils, including Ramanathan and Canagaratnam, were present at a meeting of the Board of Education and members of the Macrae Commission, where the issue had been discussed. Both men had supported the position that caste distinction should not be negatively manifested in schools. Another member of the Macrae Commission, Duraiswamy, although not present at the particular meeting, had signed the Report which contained a paragraph on communal differences.⁷⁸ Therefore, it could be assumed safely that he was in agreement with his two colleagues from Jaffna.⁷⁹

The Department of Education did, however, suggest that the appointment of a commission might be in order. It was recommended that the commission be composed of Tamil leaders from the Peninsula as well as social reformers from England to report generally on the caste system "and how the enforcement of equal seating would violate the religious and social principles underlying it."⁸⁰ Robison concluded his letter in biting tones:

I cannot say how far the signatories to this petition are entitled to represent public opinion in Jaffna nor how far any of them understand what the Memorandum contains except that they do not wish

⁷⁷ CO 54/903-5 Enclosure 1 to Despatch Number 763. Report from Acting Director of Education, L.McD. Robison to Colonial Secretary. 5 September, 1930.

⁷⁸ CO 57/227 *Sessional Paper* XXVIII of 1929. Section 9 p. 7

⁷⁹ CO 54/903-5 Acting Director of Education, L.McD. Robison to Colonial Secretary. 5 September, 1930.

⁸⁰ CO 54/903-5 Acting Director of Education, L.McD. Robison to Colonial Secretary. 5 September, 1930.

to forego any of their privileges of bullying those of lower caste. This I think is the main point of the Memorandum.⁸¹

Caste conflicts were not confined to the lower classes in Jaffna. In 1936, the State Council was accused of pandering to caste prejudices in the elections which had affected their sense of duty to the public. No less a person than the Governor, Edward Stubbs (1933-1937), expressed his concern that constituencies judged candidates, not on merit, but on race, religion or caste. He warned the candidates that their over-emphasis on sectional differences would prove a serious menace to the future of Ceylon.⁸² The Governor was supported in his view by a lengthy memorial sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and signed by over 17,500 people, who believed that:

The only anti-dote to the evil of the observance of caste is a healthy scheme of education, which the people cannot expect from the State Council most of whose members are worshippers at the shrine of that wicked distinction.⁸³

The members of the State Council, who had been more than willing to take upon themselves the responsible task of guiding the destinies of the country had resorted, both in and out of the Council, to machinations and party politics for their own benefit. The Donoughmore Constitution had envisaged intelligent mass participation in the political process. Instead, the electorate, especially in the hinterlands, had been duped "by designing politicians who have masqueraded

⁸¹ CO 54/903-5 Acting Director of Education, L.McD. Robison to Colonial Secretary. 5 September, 1930.

⁸² *Hansard* (SC), 20 March, 1936.

⁸³ CO 54/939-11 Letter on behalf of Memorialists, from I.E. Goonewardene to W. Ormsby-Gore, 6 March, 1937.

before them as their friends and advocates only whilst seek election." Support was obtained by "wild and chimerical promises" which thus far had not been kept.⁸⁴

The Minister for Education in particular was singled out for attack. He was accused of being "hardly a guide or friend of the people on the path of salvation from the thralldom of ignorance in which the masses of the country are now grovelling." Five years after his election, Kannangara was faulted for not having promulgated any comprehensive scheme "for the moral, social and educational [upliftment] more especially of the rural inhabitants of the Island."⁸⁵ He had been petitioned in 1936 to create a net-work of educational centres with the primary object of raising the moral, material and intellectual level of the masses. The memorialists wanted centres of mass education to be set up all over the country to cater for both adults and children. It was proposed that each centre should provide an elementary vernacular education in both day and night schools; an industrial school; an agricultural school and a library. The schools would provide the opportunity to achieve a standard of literacy "that will successfully enable [the population] to understand the problems of the day." To have a night school would allow adults the benefit of acquiring some education after the day's toil. Improved methods of agriculture and industry would be beneficial not only to the community, but to the country at large. These were some of the methods suggested that would reduce unemployment. As for a

⁸⁴ CO 54/939-11 Memorial signed by over 17,500 Ceylonese to the Secretary of State, 17 November, 1936. pp. 3-4

⁸⁵ CO 54/939-11 Letter on behalf of Memorialists, from I.E. Goonewardene to W. Ormsby-Gore, 6 March, 1937.

library and reading room, village folk "will have the advantage of reading wholesome literature" which would be of much cultural value in broadening horizons. The newspaper would make the wider population conversant with the events and the topics of the day, not only of the country but also in all parts of the world.⁸⁶

The system of education which was in vogue in the Island did not appear to be sound. It produced young men whose sole aim in life was to be clerks or peons in mercantile and public services. The memorialists were concerned that they had abandoned "the work of their fathers to drive a quill in an office for a paltry pay."⁸⁷ Four decades earlier, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy had made a similar observation. It was not, he had argued, entirely the fault of the student, but the consequence of the educational system. Were the "natives entirely to blame," he asked, "if they care only to become Government clerks, proctors and advocates?" The education hitherto available," he continued, "has been of such a kind as to fit them for this species of work and no other."⁸⁸ The obsession with white collar employment within the colonial administration persisted. To ensure that a child pass an English Final Examination, parents from rural areas put at risk their whole future by raising loans on mortgages of their

⁸⁶ CO 54/939-11 Memorial signed by over 17,500 Ceylonese to the Secretary of State, 17 November, 1936. pp. 3-4

⁸⁷ CO 54/939-11 Memorial signed by over 17,500 Ceylonese to the Secretary of State, 17 November, 1936. p. 2

⁸⁸ Quoted in *Ceylon Review*, Vol. 3 No. 2 October, 1894. Cited by S.D.R. Singam, *The Life and Writings of Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy*. p. 91

ancestral property to pay for the cost of their education, often in towns where most of the English colleges and schools were to be found. To remedy this, a network of schools providing elementary education with industrial and agricultural subjects introduced in the curriculum, was required. This would mean, the memorialists believed, that the "sons of the peasantry, while gaining an elementary education they can pursue with greater efficiency the noble calling of their ancestors."⁸⁹ It was only through education for the masses that political, material and economic progress could be achieved. The memorialists concluded:

We beg to submit the extreme importance of introducing to this country a scheme for Mass Education moddled [sic] on that which is that would [sic] suit the special requirements and conditions of the Island.⁹⁰

Neither the Governor⁹¹ nor the Secretary of State were impressed by the memorial. In a confidential reply to Stubbs, Ormsby-Gore wrote that the memorial "is [the] sort of... memorial which four of my men of nimble wits could produce regarding the state of affairs in any colony." He continued, "This memorial is clearly the work of impractical visionaries who imagine that long established conditions can be changed over-night by a 'stroke of the pen'."⁹²

⁸⁹ CO 54/939-11 Memorial signed by over 17,500 Ceylonese to the Secretary of State, 17 November, 1936. p. 2

⁹⁰ CO 54/939-11 Memorial signed by over 17,500 Ceylonese to the Secretary of State, 17 November, 1936. p. 3

⁹¹ CO 54/939-11 Governor to Secretary of State, 17 November, 1936.

⁹² CO 54/939-11 Secretary of State to Governor Stubbs, 7 January, 1937.

The Minister of Education

The memorial did, however, affect the Minister of Education, C.W.W. Kannangara. His background made him particularly sensitive to the criticism levelled against him. Christopher W.W. Kannangara was born in 1884 in Ambalangoda in the Southern Province. He began his education at Wesleyan High School in 1890. His father had been dismissed from the Government Clerical Service in 1897 for financial mismanagement. As a result of this misfortune, his only hope of carrying on his education was by means of a scholarship. In 1898, he won the Foundation Scholarship at Richmond College, Galle which took care of his board, lodging and tuition fees. While at Richmond, Kannangara distinguished himself and in 1902 he passed the Cambridge Senior Examination with distinction in Mathematics. His early career was as a teacher of Mathematics, first at Richmond, then at Prince of Wales College in Moratuwa, followed by a stint at Wesley College, Colombo. In 1910 he gave up teaching after passing his Proctors' Examination and returned to Galle to practice law. During his stay at Galle between 1911 and 1917, Kannangara underwent a conversion. As the President of the Sinhalese Young Men's Association, Galle Branch, he became interested in Buddhism and renounced his Christian upbringing. He also realized that his lack of knowledge of Sinhala would hinder his political aspirations. He was first elected through a by-election to the Legislative Council on 18 June, 1923. Kannangara was a member of the Board of Education and as such, a member of the Macrae Commission of Enquiry.

Kannangara, as a member of the Macrae Commission, had supported the proposal for a bilingual education, but also advocated vernacular

education up to the highest level. In 1926, his position was that, "English is a good thing for the nondescript who have no language or race of their own, but is not a good thing for those Tamils or Sinhalese or others who have a pride in their race."⁹³ He did not, however, actively pursue proposals for the abolition of English from the educational system. He was equally proud of his stand on mass education. He was an ardent supporter of a unified system of schools, with no division between denominational and government institutions. He saw the persistence of a linguistically divided system of schools as a hindrance to universal literacy and equality of opportunities. The remarks of the memorial that he 'was no friend' to the masses hurt. In 1932, soon after his election as Minister of Education, he made a note of the flaws in the education system. In stating his position to the Council, he stated:

In our Island practically half the children are without education and universal suffrage has been granted under the new Constitution. In these conditions, if we decide to deny to the people even an elementary knowledge, I think it will be a most fatal step indeed.⁹⁴

Reform would only be possible if "a sound system of national education"⁹⁵ was enforced. His failure lay in not backing up his statements with concrete action, a fault he was to remedy with the Educational Ordinance of 1939.

⁹³ *Hansard* (LC), 25 February, 1926 p. 387

⁹⁴ *Hansard* (SC), 11 October, 1932. p. 2633

⁹⁵ *Hansard* (SC), 9 August, 1938. p. 1972

Conclusion

For the first time in the years between 1920 and 1938, education was considered by the decision-makers on terms that went beyond the needs of the rulers. With the extension of franchise and the increasing volume of public memorials, the political leadership too had to adjust their perception on education. Unlike earlier times, they now had their constituencies to answer to, and this accountability, while not drastically altering policy implementation, certainly affected policy formulations. This was certainly apparent as communal loyalties became paramount. In spite of these dramatic changes in society and politics and the increased clamour against the system of education, there was still no attempt to rid the country of premier schools that charged high fees and taught in English. The social groups with access to English education remained united on this issue regardless of their communal affiliation. Their activism in demanding a University was one illustration of their anxiety to preserve and extend the entrenched privileges of English secondary education.

**CHAPTER FIVE:
TOWARDS AN EGALITARIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION,
1938-1948**

How can we imagine that it is healthy to continue a system which rigidly separates the English-educated person from the Sinhalese or Tamil-educated person as if they were inhabitants of different worlds?¹

¹ *Ceylon Daily News*, 24 February, 1941.

One result of the Donoughmore Constitution was an increase in the political sophistication of the Ceylonese leadership. Extension of the franchise had also induced a greater awareness of the masses, and with it, a measure of pragmatism in political initiatives. The agitation for the expansion of social welfare policies became the basic agenda through which the Ceylonese elite could demonstrate, not only their political maturity, but more importantly, their empathy with less privileged elements in the electorate. They convinced themselves that any such programmes they undertook, would present a contrast to the colonial government's preoccupation with containing expenditure which, they could contend, had restricted social progress. Their handling of educational developments during this period, however, illustrated both their willingness to advocate progressive legislation, as well as their inherent conservatism when their privileges appeared to be endangered. By the time of the Second State Council, (1936-1947)¹ they were firmly entrenched in positions of political and social leadership. The important issues that came up for discussion in the Council and in newspapers in the late 1930s were not unlike the issues that had dominated the educational scene till then; but questions of funding and more crucially, religion and language, were to become more politicized than ever before. This was largely

¹ As a consequence of the Second World War, the term of the Second State Council was extended from 1940-1947. The only dramatic result in the elections to the Second State Council was the defeat of the former President of the Ceylon National Congress, E.W. Perera.

a result of the legislators' ostensible effort to construct an egalitarian society.

Educational Ordinance Number 31 of 1939

Empowering the Executive Committee

With the transfer of responsibility to the Executive Committee for Education from the Board of Education, the functions of the 1920 Ordinance had to be re-assessed. The newly established Committee, however, had an inauspicious start. Its first task was to undertake a "comprehensive review of the existing legislation relating to education"² and the preparation of a Draft Bill was part of this exercise. This was done by the Director of Education and sent to the Legal Draftsman's Department in July, 1932. For six years the Bill journeyed between the offices of the Legal Draftsman and the Director of Education. J.M. Fonseka, the Legal Draftsman, blamed the delay on more urgent matters occupying his office, while the Board of Education, with its Christian majority, was loath to accept what was perceived to be the demise of denominational education. Similarly, they were also reluctant to facilitate the erosion of their own responsibilities. The entire situation could be described as farcical but for the overtones of jealousy and pettiness. Ostensibly, the battle was for the preservation of legislative rights and efficient functioning against the threat of incompetence.³ The Bill was retrieved from the Legal Draftsman's Department and on 24 November, 1937, handed over to an ex-judge of the Supreme Court and

² *Administration Report (DE)*, 1931. p. 10

³ When Kannangara asked for an explanation as to the delay, he received an excuse from Fonseka that ran into about "a hundred sheets of foolscap," leaving him, Kannangara, none the wiser. *Hansard (SC)*, 9 August, 1938. p. 1972

now private lawyer, M.T. Akbar, who completed the entire drafting process eighteen days later.

What ultimately emerged did not warrant this inordinate delay, for it was not a revolutionary document. The Bill, in seven parts, was first tabled in the State Council on 9 August, 1938. Its presentation for discussion, however, occurred on the 26th day of October that same year and only then, after several deferments. The Minister for Education, C.W.W. Kannangara, in his introduction, pointed out that the Bill consolidated most of the provisions in the existing Ordinance, No. 1 of 1920, but effected certain changes. The most crucial of these alterations consisted in curtailing the powers and responsibilities of the numerous agencies and the development of a centralized education system. In an attempt to modify its independent status, the Board of Education had its administrative and executive functions curtailed, and its role was reduced to that of a central advisory body. Kannangara justified this position by appealing to the vanity of the State Council. He argued that the Council in general, and the Executive Committee in particular, should bear the responsibility for education. It was "only proper"⁴ to shift responsibility away from the Board of Education. In reality, it was not responsibility that was being transferred, but control. The Board was given the peripheral task of setting up Local Advisory Committees, which were to advise the Director of Education "upon the local requirements and problems of the various parts of the island."⁵ These committees were to replace

⁴ *Hansard* (SC), 9 August, 1938. p. 1970

⁵ CO 54/969-9 Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939. Sections 9-12

the district committees, which Kannangara accused of being "very stubborn and so independent that they do not want to recognize the fact that they obtain authority from this House."⁶ The advisory committees, therefore, were not given the same authority; they could not make by-laws, nor were they allocated funds to establish or maintain schools.

The Department of Education was established as the central educational authority, under the aegis of the Executive Committee for Education. The Department seemingly had the power to "enforce and execute" the provisions of the Ordinance, but it was qualified by the Executive Committee's final authority to rescind or revise any order.⁷ Part three of the Bill was in the nature of a compromise formula. Urban and Rural educational authorities were to be established to replace Local Advisory Committees and would "be called upon to prepare local education schemes and to bear the whole or a specified part of the cost of supplying the educational needs of their areas, power being given to them to levy an additional rate or to borrow money for the purpose."⁸ This was welcomed by members of the State Council who were anxious about the onus of financial responsibility placed on the government for educational development. The inclusion of this section into the Bill was curious, in that it was never proclaimed, and remained a dead piece of legislation - a fact that would come back to haunt the government.⁹ In spite of these convoluted enactments, the

⁶ *Hansard (SC)*, 9 August, 1938. p. 1974

⁷ CO 54/969-9 Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939. Section 3

⁸ CO 54/969-9 Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939. Sections 14-17 and 22

⁹ See below, pages 237ff

Executive Committee had managed to legally empower themselves to dominate the educational scene.

The Communal Confrontation

The fourth part of the Bill raised the most contentious of issues: religion in schools. This section expressly set out conditions for the provision of religious instruction in government schools. Anticipating discord, Kannangara made the following statement even before the Bill had been debated. He offered the Council his assurance that, "this Ordinance is not designed to give effect to any policy aimed against denominational schools."¹⁰ The new law, however, made it very clear that no applicant to an assisted school could be refused admission on the basis of "religion, nationality, race, caste, social status or language of the parent."¹¹ Children were further exempted from attending school on days designated religious holidays by the denominational body to which their parents belonged. The point of friction, however, arose in the discussion regarding the timing and overall provision of religious instruction.

The Bill stated that such instruction, which in reality meant Biblical studies, could only be offered before, or after, school hours and then too, only with the express authorization of the Director of Education and if the classes had been previously publicized. The first part of the clause was not novel. It had been discussed in the State Council the previous March. A member of the

¹⁰ *Hansard* (SC), 27 October, 1938. p. 3617

¹¹ CO 54/969-9 Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939. Section 28

Executive Committee for Education and member from Dumbara, A. Ratnayake, had proposed a similar motion calling for religious instruction to be offered "immediately before or after school sessions."¹² Those who agitated against the motion offered mutually contradictory arguments. They first argued that if religious instruction was to be offered, then it should cover all the religions practiced on the island and this would only burden the system. The second argument centred around the premise, that, by offering religious instruction in government schools - most especially Buddhist and Hindu studies - the state would compromise its position on religious neutrality. This was, for all intents and purposes, a false argument, for the state had never maintained a neutral stand on the issue of religious education, its position being made clear by its continued subsidies for denominational schools. Legislators could not resolve the issue of extending religious instruction beyond Christian beliefs and the motion was passed by a majority of seventeen votes to six.

When these issues came up for debate in the State Council as part of the Education Bill, there was vigorous agitation to have the discussion deferred. It suddenly occurred to the Councillors that this clause might actually be detrimental to denominational, specifically Christian, schools. In calling for a delay in the debate, supporters of these educational institutions hoped that any relaxation of governmental patronage would be avoided. As the member for Trincomalee-Batticaloa, E.R. Tambimuttu, acknowledged that, "this postponement

¹² *Hansard (SC)*, 10 March, 1938. p. 929

is really to defeat the Bill."¹³ Of the thirteen members who voted for stalling the debate, most either represented predominantly Roman Catholic constituencies, or had strong Christian connections themselves. The member from Colombo South, A.P. de Zoysa, claimed that he voted for the delay because he felt that the Bill did not go far enough, while E.W. Abeygunasekera (Nuwara Eliya) and H.A. Gunasekera (Balagoda) refrained from commenting on their dissension. The thirty-three Councillors who were in favour of holding the debate had a majority of non-Christian members and representatives of non-Christian constituencies. They included twenty-three Buddhist, six Hindu and two Muslim members. There were also two Christians who wanted the debate to proceed - the member from Anuradhapura, H.R. Freeman, and the nominated member, G.A.H. Wille, himself a member of the Executive Committee for Education. Wille was described by another Executive Committee member, Razik Fareed, as the "most vociferous critic in the Committee"¹⁴ on most issues.

What was the sticking point that made this clause, and thereby the Bill, so contentious? In general terms, Christian organizations, especially the Roman Catholics, were of the firm belief that the Bill was an organized attack on Christianity as established in the Island. This Bill was seen to be part of a plan to reduce the influence of missionary-denominational schools. For the first time, the education debate included the wider theme of a possible Buddhist-Christian confrontation and as such, it provoked a more vociferous, even militant, reaction

¹³ *Hansard (SC)*, 27 October, 1938. p. 3613

¹⁴ R. Fareed, "The Executive Committee for Education from Inside" in *EC, CV* p. 600. Fareed was a member of the Executive Committee for Education from 1942-1947.

than any previous social welfare policy. One member argued that the passage of the Bill would result in "religious persecution and a clash of interests which may bring about civil commotion and unrest in the country."¹⁵ Another critic believed that "chaos" would ensue, hindering "the freedom of parents and teachers."¹⁶ To propagate their point of view, the Christians organized public meetings and campaigns to alert the public to, what they called, the "dangers" inherent in the Education Bill. The first protest meeting was convened by Reverend A.S. Beaty, President of the Ceylon Education Association, and held at Colombo Town Hall. It was attended by a wide range of educationists. The opponents believed that the primary objective of the Clause was to:

remove from the Board of Education the power of drafting the Code which was the foundation of the educational system of this country and vest in a body of politicians described as the Executive Committee of Education.¹⁷

Father F.T.M. Long joined the fray by stating that the Clause was:

based... on utterly fallacious reasoning, dangerous political theories and reckless sense of irresponsibility, [as such] it must be ruthlessly recast by competent hands.¹⁸

The meeting engendered so much passion that it was described by one newspaper as a "mass meeting against the Nazification of Ceylon's education system."¹⁹

¹⁵ Sri Pathmanthan (Mannar-Mullaittivu) *Hansard* (SC), 27 October, 1938. p. 3616

¹⁶ Father Kaitun Pullae of Wennappuwa Catholic Boys' School as quoted in the *Times of Ceylon*, 13 October, 1938.

¹⁷ Quoted in *Ceylon Daily News*, 1 October, 1938.

¹⁸ Quoted in *Ceylon Daily News*, 1 October, 1938.

¹⁹ *Times of Ceylon*, 11 October, 1938.

Another protest meeting was held at Plaza Theatre in Colombo on 12 October, 1938, co-ordinated by the Rector of St. Peter's College, Father Nicholas Perera. Dr. E.A. Cooray, in his address to the crowds, challenged Kannangara to be "candid" and admit to the people that he "wants to put an end to denominational schools." Cooray threatened to take the Bill to the Governor if it passed through the State Council. He exhorted the audience to "even cross the seas,"²⁰ if necessary. Such vitriolic attacks dominated other protest meetings as well, especially those held by Catholic teachers of Chilaw district and the Ratnapura Catholic Association.

One result of this Christian furore around the country in protest against the Bill, was the awakening of hitherto dormant religious intolerance. The various Buddhist and Hindu interest groups who had, until this point, considered the Bill as nothing extraordinary, began their own agitation. Directed against the missionary agencies, the Hindus and Buddhists argued that non-Christian educational institutes had not been granted comparable benefits nor been entitled to state patronage. As a result, these institutions, it was argued, had suffered. In an attempt to attract the most support for their cause, each special interest group deluged members of the State Council with information and pamphlets in support of their argument for or against the maintenance of denominational schools. N.M. Perera, the LSSP member from Ruwanwella, in his confrontation with Roman Catholic agitators discovered that "not one of them had read the Bill." Instead,

²⁰ Quoted in *Times of Ceylon*, 13 October, 1938.

"they had been issued instructions to carry on an agitation against the Bill"²¹ in a fashion typical of mob frenzy. The Colonial Office was forced to take heed of the situation in order to avoid a potentially dangerous religious confrontation. In an internal memorandum, H.R. Cowell gave his assessment of the problem: "Education is obviously going to provide a very thorny question of political controversy in Ceylon." But he had faith in the Governor, and was confident that the latter would interfere "if he had reason to believe that, under the cloak of educational policy, some religious or racial minority was being subjected to differential treatment."²²

The entire controversy brought to a head two issues that had dominated the educational scene; first, the formidable influence wielded by the missionary societies with the unequivocal approval of the colonial government; and second, the denominations' reluctance to give up their privilege, prestige, but more importantly, power. Significantly, the debate highlighted a deep seated regard for the mission schools in sections of Ceylonese society not confined to Christians alone. The nominated Muslim member, T.B. Jayah, reminded the Council of a basic fact. Denominational schools, he stated, had not come into existence solely because the various denominations were:

anxious to add to the number of schools for purposes of their own, but because the Government in the past had not provided adequate facilities in the matter of education.²³

²¹ *Hansard (SC)*, 9 November, 1938. p. 3761

²² CO 54/960 Internal Memorandum, 1 November, 1938.

²³ *Hansard (SC)*, 29 June, 1939. p. 2152

Jayah, himself a former teacher,²⁴ warned against penalizing denominational schools for the failure of the government in carrying out its duty. Apart from the Government-administered Royal College, denominational bodies - whether Christian or not - had the monopoly of secondary, and therefore English, education. For the missionary agencies, the agitation against the Bill was not based on appeals to rationality. This was understandable, because they believed that the issue at stake was self-preservation. Specifically, the Christian denominations objected to permission being granted to government school teachers to offer instruction in religious studies. The fear was that classes in Buddhist and Hindu doctrine would be introduced in government schools. The government would then be caught in the position of providing financial assistance for religious instruction in schools that had been deemed "secular". This would, at best supersede, and at worst erode, the place of prominence Christian instruction had as a subject in assisted schools. The missionaries were also against the conscience clause which was to be enforced by the Ordinance. The clause was believed to be a serious impediment to conversion. The anxiety about the conscience clause was significant. Almost a decade earlier, the Macrae Commission had also attempted to introduce the conscience clause indirectly, urging that permission be sought from parents before religious teaching could be offered. The proposal had provoked no protests at the time. In the new, political atmosphere, a very similar proposal was perceived to be a threat.

²⁴ Jayah had had wide experience of teaching in schools of various denominations. He had taught in the Christian Prince of Wales College in Moratuwa and the Buddhist school, Ananda College. He had also been the Principal of the Muslim administered Zahira College.

Mission bodies were also opposed to the new clause which would allow children to refuse to attend schools controlled by denominational interests other than their own. This clause was a major departure from Ordinance 1 of 1920 which had required children to attend school in the proximity of their residence, irrespective of denomination. Now with the permission of the Director of Education, children could be exempted from this particular provision of the statute. The Christians were fearful that this would result in diminishing attendance in their schools which were in predominantly non-Christian areas. G.A.H. Wille, in opposition, was angered by the double standard of the supporters of the Bill. He denounced the Leader of the House, D.B. Jayatilaka, a Buddhist, for encouraging Buddhist parents to send their children to Buddhist schools, yet when Christian denominations "frankly say that in their schools they want teachers of their own persuasion, then there is this intolerant howl raised."²⁵ The cause for greatest anxiety, however, was the transfer of authority in education from the Board to the Executive Committee. The Board had been composed of a large majority of Christians or sympathizers of missionary bodies. On the other hand, the Executive Committee was made up of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim members,²⁶ who might well wish to ensure the demise of the denominational of schools.

When it came to the ratification of part four of the Education Bill,

²⁵ *Hansard (SC)*, 29 June, 1939. p. 2186

²⁶ Elected on 18 March, 1936 to form a new committee were C.W.W. Kannangara from Matugama as Chairman; H.W. Amarasuriya of Galle; S. Natesan of Kankasanturai; A. Ratnayake of Dumbara; A.P. de Zoysa of Colombo South; D.D. Gunasekera from Bandarawela and the two nominated members, T.B. Jayah and G.A.H. Wille.

the following provisions were included by way of compromise. First, religious studies could not form any part of the formal curriculum and no child would be forced to attend any religious class without specific consent from the parents. Secondly, the teacher providing religious instruction had to be of the same denomination as the child. The missionaries were not satisfied. They were convinced that this new provision reduced their prerogative to convert the general populace. These fairly mild enactments were given teeth by the provision that if the conditions were not met, the Director of Education had the authority to withhold or refuse to pay a grant to the offending school.²⁷

Plantation Schools and Other Provisions

Parts six and seven were far less contentious, but they did have a bearing on the existing system of education. The former modified the provisions of Ordinance 1 of 1920 relating to plantation schools. Schools in estates where there were more than twenty-five children between the ages of six and ten, were to be subject to inspections like other grant-aid-schools. With the permission of the Director of Education, two or more estates could combine to provide estate children with education. One of the changes wrought by the Bill of 1938, concerned the issue of language. Unlike the Ordinances of 1907 and 1920, which required the provision of *vernacular* education, the new Ordinance omitted the stipulation regarding instruction in the indigenous languages and merely hinted that a certain amount of English instruction might be available in vernacular

²⁷ CO 54/969-9 Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939. Sections 29-30

estate schools. This was entirely cosmetic and nothing was done to expand the curriculum beyond what was already on offer: instruction in the three R's. The second change provided the Director of Education with the legal power to force parents to send their children to school, on pain of a one rupee fine.²⁸ Part seven covered miscellaneous provisions of the repealed Ordinance 1 of 1920. These included the rule that at least two months notice was required for the establishment of a school. The Government was free to decide which particular school was eligible for grants. Children who played truant, would be flogged or sent to certified industrial schools. The Government also had the power to acquire land for the building of schools.²⁹

Code of Education

It was, however, another part of the Bill that explains the impassioned opposition to this legislative act of 1938. The Minister of Education, C.W.W. Kannangara, had always been more than a little suspicious of the real reasons behind the missionaries' vehement response. He himself had been subjected to a ferocious personal attack when he attempted to move the Education Bill. E.W. Cooray had charged the Minister of "striking at the root of democracy" and of "trying to grapple power for himself." In this accusation, Dr. Cooray was supported by a Buddhist, Peter de Silva, who believed that this Bill was initiated by the Minister with an "eye on the next elections."³⁰ Stanley Obeyesekere, K.C.,

²⁸ CO 54/969-9 Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939. Sections 31-35

²⁹ CO 54/969-9 Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939. Section 33

³⁰ Quoted in *Times of Ceylon*, 13 October, 1938.

accused Kannangara of being a "toy dictator."³¹ On examining the arguments and complaints against him, Kannangara concluded that the real objection of, not just mission societies, but all dissenters was to the fifth part of the Bill. This part empowered the Executive Committee to set out regulations for the conduct and maintenance of schools. This was also known as the Code of Education, and licensed the Committee to regulate, among other matters, the syllabus, finances and appointment and training of teachers.³² Kannangara accused his adversaries of petitioning Governor Andrew Caldecott (1937-1944) for a reduction in governmental expenditure, especially on education. Bowing to what appeared to be pressure from the Governor to reduce spending, the Executive Committee advocated curtailing the number of schools in any one area. It was this particular issue that had so troubled the denominational bodies. They saw this action, which was directed against vernacular and Anglo-vernacular schools, as a threat to their own schools. Kannangara was able to exploit the mutually contradictory arguments put forth by supporters of the denominational system. By pointing out the selfishness of these special interest groups, he was able to mobilize opinion in support of the Bill. Even those who had initially voted for postponing the debate, came round to the position of the Executive Committee. It became difficult to justify opposition to a Bill that catered to the needs of the majority.

³¹ Quoted in *Ceylon Daily News*, 1 October, 1938.

³² CO 54/969-9 Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939. Section 13

The Consequences of the Ordinance

The controversy over the educational Ordinance 31 of 1939, highlighted the conflict between sectional interests on the one hand, and what was perceived to be the public good on the other. In attempting to make the requirements concerning religion in education more broad-minded, the members of the Executive Committee had to take on the fury of the missionary organizations and their supporters. The most frequent complaint was best summed-up by Dr. Milanius de Almeida, who stated:

It is a well-known fact that Christian Missionaries were the pioneers of education in Ceylon. They received large subsidies from abroad and devoted themselves unselfishly and without hope of material reward to educate our people. Today the vested interests of these Christian Missionaries are a national heritage, which the new Bill is attempting to destroy.³³

The authors of the Bill were, however, determined to create an educational system that would both augment the quantum of religious instruction in schools and diversify it. If this meant a lessening of missionary influences, so be it. They used the Buddhist and Hindu counter-agitation as an excuse invoking the need to concede to public demands. The Ministers were aware that their decision would antagonize some members in the Council, who would then have to be placated with minor modifications of the original Bill. Kannangara hoped that the Bill would, "fall into line with the provisions of the Donoughmore Constitution"³⁴ and offer a chance for the Ceylonese political leadership to

³³ Quoted in *Times of Ceylon*, 13 October, 1938.

³⁴ *Hansard* (SC), 10 November, 1938. p. 3782

formulate policy independently of the colonial government. But the benefit of the Education Bill was seen differently by N.M. Perera. He pointed out that the one positive development to emerge from the confrontation, was the arousal of:

an apathetic Buddhist public to a full recognition of its rights, and if a challenge is issued for a struggle between missionary education and Buddhist education, I have not the slightest doubt in my mind as to what the eventual result will be - and much I think to the regret of the missionary bodies.³⁵

On 1 September, 1939, a year after its introduction into the State Council, the Bill came into force as Ordinance Number 31 of 1939.

The Educational Reforms of 1939 induced a reassessment of the entire language issue. With substantial devolution of power in 1931, vested interest groups, especially denominational bodies, saw in policy measures the road to political and social power. Yet, the outcome was not any basic re-ordering of educational policies, implying a rejection of the dichotomous structure with its chasm between mass and elite education. Instead, entrenched privileges were defended, the nationalist and ideological rhetoric notwithstanding.

In 1939 there were 410 fee-levying schools with 98,898 pupils but 4,701 schools that charged no fees and catered to 675,281 students.³⁶ On paper the numbers were impressive, for they implied not only a high rate of literacy but considerable educational achievement as well. Yet, this was deceptive. There *was*

³⁵ *Hansard (SC)*, 10 November, 1938. p. 3760

³⁶ *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 77

a steady increase in the literacy rates over the years,³⁷ but, to repeat, the education being offered free of charge was extremely limited: an education through the Sinhala and Tamil medium with little prospect for upward mobility or security of livelihood, while an English education remained a *sine quo non* for better jobs and social status. Further, available only on payment, a sound knowledge of English remained beyond the grasp of the majority. This was not a new situation. Restrictions on access to English education had been introduced by the Morgan Report in 1869 and not just by charging a tuition fee. Limited access was further ensured by keeping the number of schools offering English deliberately low, and by concentrating them around urban areas. Seven decades later, by 1943, the position had become firmly entrenched. There was one chink in this armour meant to defend privilege. The number of schools offering education in the indigenous languages had increased, and thanks to the fact that they charged no fees, so too had the number of students availing themselves of such an education.³⁸ Their aspirations for upward mobility was a potent threat to the privileges of a small minority.

By the end of the 1930s, the increasing cost of education to the government once more emerged as a contentious issue.³⁹ The Leader of the

³⁷ In 1921 39.9 per cent of the population over the age of five were literate as compared to 26.4 percent in 1901. By 1946, the percentage had increased to 57.8. See the *Census Reports* of 1921 and 1946.

³⁸ In 1900 there were 1654 vernacular schools, both government and grant-in-aid.

³⁹ The percentage of government grants to schools run by the various religious organizations in 1939:

Christian	75.3
Buddhist	18.2
Hindu	4.9
Muslim	1.6

This was over and above the cost of the management of its own schools.

Administrative Report (DE), 1939 p. 59. In real terms, the government spent 19.5 million rupees (or 15.9

State Council, D.B. Jayatilaka, was anxious that the problem be resolved quickly and funding for education be kept stationary, as a means towards balancing the budget. He impressed upon the Council the necessity for a speedy and thorough examination of levels of expenditure on education. Jayatilaka, with the backing of the Board of Ministers, further advised that an independent authority be called in to undertake the review, as the only possible method for avoiding undue conflict of interest amongst the members of the Executive Committee for Education.⁴⁰ The latter was less than pleased by Jayatilaka's lack of confidence in them, but agreed to the suggestions. They advised that the independent examiners include at least two persons well acquainted with the education system in Ceylon, rather than just financial experts. They agreed with the Leader of the House that if a Commission was to be appointed, this should be done immediately.⁴¹ It was stressed that the Commission would be concerned primarily with financial issues. With the memory of the rather acrimonious and protracted debates on the Education Bill of 1938 still fresh in the minds of the Councillors, the establishment of a Commission to enquire once again into the existing system of education was seen as superfluous, time consuming and an additional waste of money and, therefore, unnecessary. The politicians concerned with education offered to go back to their Committee and advise the Council on

per cent of its total budget) on education in 1939-1940; a total up from 7.8 million rupees (7.1 per cent of the budget) in 1925-1926. *Economic and Social Development of Ceylon, 1926-1954*. Colombo: 1955. p. 15 Cited in J.E. Jayasuriya, *Educational Policies and Progress*. p. 518

⁴⁰ *Hansard* (SC), 23 May, 1939. p. 1723

⁴¹ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 5

suitable candidates.⁴²

The Educational Report of 1943

Introduction

Over a year later, on 4 April, 1940, the Executive Committee returned to the Council but, instead of recommending names of outsiders who would assist in the enquiry into governmental expenditure, they advocated that the Committee was the sole body qualified to undertake the examination. To soothe likely opposition, they offered a compromise: that the Committee would work in conjunction with the technical assistance of local experts on education. This was not the best solution by any means, but with no other option in the offing and time running short for a budget proposal, the Council reluctantly agreed. Membership of the Special Committee was by no means stable. The rate of turnover was high and over a course of three years, members of the Committee included - at one time or another - the Director of Education, L. Robison, Principals H.S. Perera of the Training College and E.L. Bradby of Royal College; P. de S. Kularatne, the retired head of Ananda College and the ex-Principal of Trinity College, the Reverend R.W. Stopford. Reverend R.S. de Saram, the Warden of St. Thomas' College and Father M.J. LeGoc, the retired Rector of St. Joseph's College, were also members of the Special Committee. Ivor Jennings, Principal of University College, joined the Committee at the beginning of June in 1941. Of the seventeen members who signed the Committee's Report on 9

⁴² *Hansard (SC)*, 9 February, 1939. p. 443

September, 1943, only eleven were original members. On the whole, twenty-three Councillors and educationists had served on the Special Committee.

Until this point, the issue of language had been debated within the confines of educational policies. Even the revival movements of the nineteenth century that had spearheaded the spread of the Sinhala and Tamil languages, had concentrated on the promotion and establishment of schools aimed at rivalling the prestigious English-language government and mission schools. The emphasis had not always been on awarding the indigenous languages status equal to that of the official language. But there had been those who were concerned that the quality and quantity of education in Sinhala and Tamil should be enhanced. The agenda of both the Ceylon Reform Society and the University Association included these objectives. Over time, this issue had been dealt with, but with no apparent change in the system.⁴³ The priority of education had very often to compete with other political developments, but this was to change after the introduction of the Donoughmore Constitution.⁴⁴

⁴³ For a fuller discussion see Chapter Three.

⁴⁴ The new Constitution had ushered in universal franchise which accentuated the ethnic rivalry among those sharing such power as had been devolved by the colonial rulers. The rivalry was informed by the apprehension that power in the hands of one ethnic group would be used exclusively for the promotion of its own interests. When the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission were made public, those who had been united for so long by ties of shared power and prestige both in public life and within the structure of government - the English educated elite, who were drawn from a wide spectrum of ethnic groups - began to turn back to their respective communities for political support. In the absence of any history of mobilization along lines of ideology or shared interest, the only way to be assured of support lay in appeals to the common link of language and religion. For more details, see Chapter Four.

Identifying the Issues

The Committee started their proceedings by issuing a list of twenty-one questions and held sittings in Colombo, Kandy, Galle, Jaffna and Batticaloa to gather opinions and evidence on costs and finance. Collation of the material resulted in the drafting of a Report in 1943 which, in spite of all the initial objections, ended up being "a comprehensive review of the educational system and policy" after all. This was justified by Kannangara in the Preface to the Report. He wrote that although it was unfortunate that over the years committee after committee and commission after commission had investigated and reported on particular aspects of the educational problem, "at no stage was a comprehensive review of the entire educational system made." The worst consequence of the proliferation of reports was that no attempt was made "to found a national system of education..."⁴⁵ The notion of a "national system" of education was a product of the growing national consciousness and associated movements in society at large. This need was generated by the burgeoning consciousness, and had to be recognized in the educational system, the Minister of Education pointed out. Kannangara projected a circular argument. Education was, he stated:

the key to any national reawakening and the only way of escape from the vicious circle - no education, no national reawakening, no national reawakening, no national system of education - was for the national leaders to have agitated for a national system.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 17

⁴⁶ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 7

Anticipating possible criticism against the leaders of the past, who had not deemed it necessary to co-opt a nationalist ideology into the educational system, he emphasized their "preoccupation with other questions" more relevant at a time when the early leaders had to meet "the needs of colonial administration."⁴⁷ This was shrewd. For to lay the blame on any particular individual or group of individuals, would be to lay blame upon themselves. Kannangara was well aware that the issues being raised in 1943, could have quite as easily been tackled in 1939 or even as early as 1920. Not only had the indigenous leadership comparable influence in the earlier commissions of enquiry, but the political climate at the time was no less "nationalistic." One possible reason for the leaderships' change of tactics, was simply that the public as electors now had political clout and were demanding favours in exchange for support. As J.R. Jayawardene observed:

It is the universal franchise that has brought the English educated and the masses together, it is the impulse created by the use of universal franchise, by the ideas realized by the grant of universal franchise which enable the people to choose their own rulers, which will ultimately make Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages of this country, and I would suggest that we anticipate the event.⁴⁸

Not unlike previous reports, this too was exceedingly lengthy, consisting of twenty-one chapters. The reason for such prolixity was that in the course of the financial investigation, a number of defects in the educational system were identified. Of these, four were considered to be crucial and in need of

⁴⁷ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 7

⁴⁸ *Hansard (SC)*, 24 May 1944. p. 746

immediate attention. The identification of the four "defects" in the educational system was not so much ironic, as cynical, not least because these "defects" had combined to form the pivot around which the colonial system of education had revolved ever since 1833. The four 'deadly sins' were identified as the language problem, inadequate content, the high cost, and the problem of attendance. The last two defects were not minor, but they had less political impact than the first and the second.

Tackling the Issues

The content of education was seen to suffer from a number of shortcomings, the most significant being the literary bias of the curriculum without consideration of, or reference to, the practical aspects of Ceylonese life. This criticism was levied against both English and vernacular medium schools. However, the advocacy of change in the schools' curricula in favour of a more practical system of education was essentially directed towards Sinhala and Tamil schools. The limitations of employment opportunities for vernacular educated youth was not unknown to the formulators of policy. In 1905, through the Wace Commission, an effort was made to introduce agricultural training into the curriculum.⁴⁹ It was, however, four years later that a scheme for granting aid to schools which started gardens was proposed.⁵⁰ The 1911 Code for Assisted Schools carried out the recommendations and by the following year there were

⁴⁹ *Sessional Paper XXVIII of 1905*

⁵⁰ *Sessional Paper XVII of 1909. Committee of 1909 - Agricultural Training for Ceylon.*

329 school gardens in both government and aided schools.⁵¹ The Department of Public Instruction even went so far as to prepare and issue text books on agricultural training. By 1927, the number of school gardens had increased, but the numbers remained unimpressive in proportion to the number of schools: 748 gardens in government schools and ninety-nine school gardens in aided institutions while the total number of vernacular schools in Ceylon was over three thousand.⁵² As the Administration Report commented, the plan of the Department of Education was to re-orient the entire curriculum:

to bring the work done in harmony with the lives of the people - especially the agricultural community.⁵³

Industrial education was introduced in vernacular schools only after 1916, but it produced little by way of result.

The failure of these attempts at making the content of education more practical was not unexpected. The proposal of changes were always implemented in a half-hearted way, with little encouragement or enthusiasm from officials and instructors alike. The Reverend R.W. Stopford, a former Principal of Trinity College, was aware of the limitations of the curriculum, which he argued was too academic and not an adequate preparation for life. Yet, he also argued against a purely vocational education, which he believed to be the "negation of all education."⁵⁴ What was needed was a middle ground that would encourage

⁵¹ *Administration Report* (DPI), 1912-1913 p. 14

⁵² *Administration Report* (DE), 1927 p. 44

⁵³ *Administration Report* (DE), 1927 p. 5

⁵⁴ Reported in the *Ceylon Daily News*, 24 February, 1941.

both manual and administrative labour; a system in which a sound education would no longer be a prerogative of the privileged and be truly open to all. The entire system had to change. As Stopford said:

[How] can we imagine that it is healthy to continue a system which rigidly separates the English-educated person from the Sinhalese or Tamil-educated person as if they were inhabitants of different worlds.⁵⁵

But specific recommendations were never forthcoming.

English schools were, by and large, exempted from such demands because their focus and emphasis were different. The curricula of English medium schools was dominated by preparation for the London and Cambridge public examinations and the products of those schools were very often sent abroad for further study, a fact that prompted Ananda Coomaraswamy to comment:

Ceylon is the largest Cambridge local centre outside England, sending up 700 candidates. The Government also holds a special "University Scholarship Examination" in English and Latin and Greek, and English and Mathematics and Natural Science in alternate years, the successful scholars proceeding to an English University.⁵⁶

To alter a system that offered them social, political and economic rewards, was not in the interests of the indigenous elite and they, therefore, did nothing to encourage an overhaul of English medium schools. Therefore, practical education, geared to indigenous needs and of no value for the relevant examinations, did not

⁵⁵ Reported in the *Ceylon Daily News*, 24 February, 1941.

⁵⁶ A. Coomaraswamy, "Anglicisation of the East" in *The Ceylon National Review*. No. 2. July, 1906. p. 183

have a place in this stream.⁵⁷ Even the Department of Education was aware of this fundamental flaw in the system, yet unwilling to alter it; minor reforms could not hence be expected to work. The inability to force structural changes meant that even a Governor's comments carried no weight. McCallum's observation that there was a literary bias in education which made it "too mediaeval, hidebound and illiteral [sic]"⁵⁸ seemed more a criticism of the department of the English educated, than a call for radical change.

On the issue of language in education, the fundamental difference between the Report of 1943 and all the previous reports, lay in the former's tone. On the one hand, the Report seemed forthright in its acknowledgment that the system was inadequate; yet there was also a dimension of astonishment that such a system - dichotomized on the basis of language, whereby the majority of pupils were educated in the vernacular and the few were educated in English - was even in existence. This system, the Report acknowledged, had resulted in "dividing the population into two more or less watertight social compartments" where knowledge of English had become "a badge of social superiority".⁵⁹ After serious reflection, it concluded that only through a knowledge of Sinhala and Tamil, could an effective contribution be made to the world of indigenous literature and art, and this as yet, "had not been developed."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Administration Report (DE)*, 1930 p. 8

⁵⁸ Memo to the Board of Education, "System of Education in Ceylon, 1909". Eastern pamphlets No, 104. Cited by S. Jayasuriya, "Attempts at Curricular Reform" in *EC,CV*. p. 559

⁵⁹ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 138

⁶⁰ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 138

Another "defect" that was identified and linked to the one described above, concerned opportunities, or lack thereof, open to the students from the two streams. English education, the Report stated somewhat belatedly, was available only to those of some economic means. The unfair advantages to be gleaned by the already well-off made a mockery of the vernacular stream of education. English, the Report commented, was the key to advancement, in higher education, in government employment, in business. Sinhala and Tamil were perceived to be more "natural" languages of instruction, and there was no reason why "English should be retained as a medium of instruction at any stage in the educational process."⁶¹ To rectify these two situations, the consequences of which were not just an inequitable system of education, but a sharp bifurcation in society as well, the Report proposed a revolutionary solution: the gradual phasing out of English altogether. A new ideal was introduced to induce a fundamental shift in educational policies: "the mother tongue at all stages of education," with provision being made for the Burghers to retain their mother-tongue, English, as their language of education. To aid in this endeavour, the Report recommended that "education should be free from the Kindergarten to the University."⁶² Before the issue of free education could be debated, language as a political problem acquired a new and threatening significance.

⁶¹ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 47

⁶² CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 47

The Politics of Language

One immediate consequence of the educational ordinances of 1939 and 1943, was the overflow of the language issue into the political cooking pot. *Swabasha* education still had no status at the university level.⁶³ Special interest groups, including most especially politicians in predominantly less anglicized areas, realized the political mileage to be gained from demanding the abolition of English as a means of instruction and concomitantly, as the language of government. Jayawardene was the first to exploit the issue. He decried the dualistic nature of education as having resulted in the creation of two different "nations". This he denounced as "one of the worst features of British rule introduced into this country."⁶⁴ Jayawardene had the backing of the Ceylon National Congress, which had, in 1939 recommended that English be replaced by one of the national languages. It stated:

This is very necessary for political independence [and] connotes the abandonment of English as the official language and adoption of a national language. We suggest the adoption of Sinhalese, the language of the majority of the people as the official language. Tamil can be used in the Tamil speaking districts.⁶⁵

Three years later, the Ceylon National Congress Office received an anonymous letter from someone claiming to be a "well-wisher". This did not prevent the author from venting his frustrations. The letter accused the Congress for having failed in "almost all the fundamental requirements of a National Movement."

⁶³ CO 56/22 No. XX of 1942 - Ordinance for provision to establish a University

⁶⁴ *Hansard (SC)*, 24 May, 1944. p. 748

⁶⁵ Report of the Ceylon National Congress Policy Congress, 1939. Quoted in *DCNC*. Vol. III p. 1801

Particular admonishment was reserved for the handling of the language issue. The Congress, the letter stated, "has done nothing... against the disgusting habit of our so called leaders speaking to each other in English whenever they meet." "Are we a race without a culture or a literature," the letter continued, "that we should be such slaves of a foreign language? How many of our leaders can talk fluently in their mother-tongue? It is time that they learnt to make Sinhalese the medium of conversation and cease to be national anachronisms."⁶⁶ It was no doubt this sort of public pressure which forced the leadership into taking a stand on the language issue.

The most ardent support for the pro-vernacular policy came from the Southern Province, that is the Sinhalese who advocated the exclusive adoption of Sinhala, rather than both the indigenous languages. There were two important points that the supporters of an exclusive use of Sinhalese as the medium of instruction had not considered. First, English had become something more than just the official language in Ceylon; it had assumed an importance on the world stage as well, particularly in matters of commerce. To dispense with English altogether was seen by its supporters as tantamount to sealing Ceylon off from the rest of the world. As G.G. Ponnambalam stated:

English is a world language, accepted by other linguistic communities outside Ceylon, and its use as lingua franca between the different linguistic communities makes it virtually indispensable.⁶⁷

The second important point concerned the interests of the Tamils

⁶⁶ Anonymous Letter dated August, 1942. Quoted in *DCNC*. Vol. IV pp. 3152-3153

⁶⁷ *Hansard* (SC), 24 May 1944. p. 766

and the importance of Tamil as a language. It was the mother-tongue of at least 20 percent of the population, and to replace it with Sinhala alone would reduce the Tamils to the status of second class citizens. English was really the only means of mobility outside Jaffna available to the Tamils. It came as no surprise, therefore, that supporters of the Tamil cause began to voice their concern at its threatened exclusion from education as well as administration. By articulating their concern, the Ceylon Tamil political leaders, as the historian Russell observes, "became associated, in the eyes of even the most liberal of the Sinhalese nationalists, as the guardians of the entrenched privileges of the English educated class, even when their motives may have been to protect the rights of the Tamil community as a whole."⁶⁸ The Burghers, whose mother-tongue was officially acknowledged as English, were equally perturbed by the discussions. They supported the Tamils who were willing to accept an arrangement according equal status to the vernaculars, but wanted English to remain as a balancing factor between the two communities, neutral as it was in relation to all the ethnic groups.

The crux of the problem was soon recognized: if the vernaculars were to replace English as the medium of instruction throughout the education system, the bifurcation of society between the English educated and the rest would be removed only at the cost of creating a potentially more explosive division between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The segregation which would ensue from using the mother tongues as media in education would perpetuate

⁶⁸ J. Russell, "Language, Education and Nationalism - The Language Debate of 1944" in *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*. Vol. VIII No. 2, June-December, 1978. p. 45

this division. This point was, however, missed by many concerned who accepted, uncritically, the position taken by W. Dahayanayake at the debate on reforms of education. Metaphorically referring to the fate of Caliban at the hands of Prospero, he stated:

What is it that English education has done to us? It has impeded the natural development of each individual in this country. Knock out English from the pedestal which it occupies to-day and place thereon our Sinhalese and Tamil languages and we shall be a free race.⁶⁹

The only alternative to retaining English as the link-language was effective Sinhala-Tamil bilingualism or the enforcement of Sinhala on the Tamil community thereby creating a monolingual state. However, there were few at this time who considered the second alternative a viable option. As early as 1937, the idea of bilingualism was mooted by the Tamils when the Tamil member for Batticaloa moved a resolution that "teaching of Sinhalese in Tamil schools and Tamil in Sinhalese schools be made compulsory."⁷⁰ The Tamils, obviously approved the idea of a bilingual as opposed to a monolingual state. The newspaper, *Hindu Organ*, remarked in an editorial in 1937:

We can hardly disguise our joy at the passage of this motion. There is not that atmosphere of complete trust and confidence between the Sinhalese and Tamils that there should be. We put it to the Tamils that the Sinhalese may not feel the need for Tamil, but for us a good working knowledge of Sinhalese is of the utmost importance.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *Hansard* (SC), 21 November, 1944 p. 2615

⁷⁰ *Hansard* (SC), 5 June, 1937.

⁷¹ *Hindu Organ*, 10 June, 1937.

This enthusiasm did not end in mere words. Between 1938 and 1940 the Hindu Board of Education adopted the policy of making Sinhalese a compulsory subject in all the schools under its jurisdiction. But their example did not inspire as much zeal outside the Northern Province, especially amongst the Sinhalese politicians. The Sinhala majority's xenophobic anxieties concerning a minority, especially its language and culture was stated by Jayawardene:

The great fear I had was that Sinhalese, being a language spoken by only three million people in the world would suffer or may be lost entirely in time to come, if Tamil also is placed on an equal footing with it in this country. The influence of Tamil literature, a literature used in India by over 40 million, the influences of Tamil films and Tamil culture in this country I thought might be detrimental to the future of the Sinhalese languages.⁷²

Initially, the call for the replacement of English with the vernaculars amongst those within the English-educated sections of society was ambiguous. Their problem was one of identity. Some saw the introduction of the vernaculars as a means of distancing themselves from the colonial rulers, while projecting to themselves and the masses that they shared a nationalist outlook, best articulated in Sinhala or Tamil. J.R. Jayawardene stated that:

...language is one of the most important characteristics of nationality. Without language, a nation stands a chance of being absorbed or losing its identity. With language it has a chance of living for centuries.⁷³

There were others, like A. Ratnayake, a member of the State Council, who saw the

⁷² *Hansard (SC)*, 24 May, 1944. p. 748

⁷³ *Hansard (SC)*, 24 May, 1944. p. 748

discontinuance of English as status-suicide. As he remarked:

Our vested interest is English and through a knowledge of English, we are exploiting the masses and we are most reluctant to surrender our privileges.⁷⁴

However, it was those who saw the language question in the larger context of nationalist politics that prevailed. Their problem was to find the way to a national consensus and avoid the threatened rift between the two communities. The nationalist purpose in emphasizing the vernacular languages was stated succinctly once again by Jayawardene:

This country is always in danger of being governed by a small [group] who go through these English schools, whereas the vast majority who go through Sinhalese and Tamil schools must always be in the position of hewers of wood and drawers of water.⁷⁵

However, it was the apathy of the vernacular speaking voters to general political issues beyond their immediate concerns that had alarmed those at the helm.⁷⁶ There was little hope of mobilizing them for any effort to win the ultimate prize, independence, if this state of affairs could not be changed. It became imperative, therefore, to be seen to adopt and develop the vernaculars as the languages of education and government. In this way it was hoped that the masses would be mobilized in support of a demand for independence.

By 1943, only seven per cent of the population was literate in English. On the basis of this Census Report, the State Council proposed a motion

⁷⁴ *Hansard (SC)*, 24 May, 1944. p. 750

⁷⁵ *Hansard (SC)*, 24 May, 1944. p. 747

⁷⁶ For a general discussion on this theme, see K.M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic States - Sri Lanka, 1880-1980*. London:1982 pp. 55-57

to make Sinhala the official language in Ceylon. The details of the motion, issued on 22 June, 1943, which did not come up for discussion until the following May, included the following:

That with the object of making Sinhalese the official language of Ceylon within a reasonable number of years this Council is of the opinion:

- a) That Sinhalese should be made the medium of instruction in all schools.
- b) That Sinhalese should be made a compulsory subject in all examinations.
- c) That legislation should be introduced to permit the business of the State Council to be conducted in Sinhalese.
- d) That a Commission should be appointed to choose for translation and to translate important books of other languages into Sinhalese.
- e) That a Commission should be appointed to report on steps that need to be taken to effect the transition from English to Sinhalese.⁷⁷

Jayawardene, the mover, requested that an amendment to his resolution be made immediately with "Tamil" added after "Sinhalese" wherever it occurred.⁷⁸ The amendment could not be accepted at the time due to procedural reasons, a fact that worried the Tamil members of the Council. J. Tyagaraja, Member from Mannar-Mullaitivu, expressed his concern:

I fail to see how national unity or national cohesion can be brought about by suppressing one of the languages spoken by two million people in this country. Sinhalese clearly desire to make Sinhalese

⁷⁷ *Hansard (SC)*, 24 May, 1944. p. 745

⁷⁸ *Hansard (SC)*, 24 May, 1944. p. 746

the only official language.⁷⁹

Ponnambalam, member from Point Pedro, voiced a similar objection:

But I cannot be blind to the fact that the motion as it stands invites the House to accept the language of a section of the people as the official language and the medium of instruction and the medium of normal official intercourse. It is merely one of the first steps that one would take to advance the theory of one race, one religion, one language.⁸⁰

It is doubtful that the motion was meant to deliberately alienate the Tamil community from the political process at this early stage. Bandaranaike, in an attempt to appease the Tamil members,⁸¹ offered the following conciliatory comments:

I do not see that there will be any harm at all in recognizing the Tamil language also as an official language. It is necessary to bring that amity, that confidence which we are all striving to achieve. I have no personal objection to both languages being considered as official languages, nor do I see any particular harm or danger or real difficulty arising from it... I feel it would be ungenerous on our part as Sinhalese not to give due recognition to the Tamil language.⁸²

V. Nalliah, the member from Trincomalee, was the only Tamil to support the original motion albeit with a rider:

If those who do not know Sinhalese or Tamil have decided to remain in Ceylon, it is high time they learnt one of the languages. I do not see why, we as

⁷⁹ Quoted in the *Ceylon Daily News*, 25 January, 1939.

⁸⁰ *Hansard* (SC), 24 May, 1944. p. 764

⁸¹ This proved to be ironic in that just over a decade later, in 1956, while as Prime Minister of independent Ceylon, he promulgated a series of "Sinhala-only" legislations.

⁸² *Hansard* (SC), 25 May, 1944. p. 811

Tamils, should stand in the way of Sinhalese becoming the official language of the Sinhalese areas and Tamil becoming the official languages in Tamil areas.⁸³

The amendment was passed by twenty-nine votes to nine.⁸⁴ One of those who voted against the amendment, Dudley Senanayake, another future Prime Minister, argued that national unity could only be forged on the anvil of a single language.⁸⁵ As he stated, "It is very essential that there should be one official language. And, I ask, what could that language be other than Sinhalese?"⁸⁶ The debate in the State Council in general supported the phasing out of English as the language of higher education and administration. The State Council was divided into three groups on the language issue. First there were those who were in favour of retaining English, among them the Europeans and Burghers as well as some Tamils such as G.G. Ponnambalam, who believed that English could survive as the *lingua franca*. The second group consisted of Sinhalese councillors who supported a Sinhala-only policy. And the third group were the supporters of bilingualism, mainly Tamils and members of the Muslim community.

Implementation of the policy, however, was a very different matter. The State Council was not insensitive to the realities of these problems, but their words were not effectively translated into action, largely because of the power of vested interests dedicated to the perpetuation of the *status quo* with all the

⁸³ *Hansard* (SC), 24 May, 1944. p. 759

⁸⁴ *Hansard* (SC), 25 May, 1944. p. 816

⁸⁵ Cited in J.E. Jayasuriya, *Educational Policies and Progress*. p. 483

⁸⁶ *Hansard* (SC), 24 May, 1944. p. 769

advantages that went with it. A Malay member, T.B. Jayah, proposed an amendment to delete every motion except the last which suggested the setting up of a commission to look into the transitional phase of language change. The motion was defeated by twenty-five votes to twelve. Twenty-three members who voted against the motion were Sinhalese.⁸⁷ The amended resolution included the recommendation that a commission be appointed, specifically to report on the necessary steps required to effect a change from English to Sinhalese and Tamil. Carried by twenty-seven votes to two, this was a concession that was to be rescinded within a decade.

The Free Education Scheme

The idea of a free-education scheme, with a total emphasis on instruction in the indigenous languages was not unique to the Education Report of 1943. In 1934, the Northern Province Teachers' Association had made the same call for "free and compulsory education with teaching in the vernaculars in all subjects except for English." The President of the Association had stated:

The best results in education can only be achieved by using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. The education of this country must be built behind some national aims. It must create a nation of young Ceylonese, proud of their country and the masses must be given the blessing of education.

The role of the educator, he further argued, "must be to create a nation of young Ceylonese, proud of their country and the masses must be given the blessing of

⁸⁷ *Hansard* (SC), 25 May, 1944. p. 816

education."⁸⁸ Not surprisingly, this recommendation did not get the attention it deserved, and therefore, the response was not half as vociferous as the publication of the twenty-fourth Sessional Paper of 1943.

The debates in the State Council that followed were exceptional for a number of reasons. The most outstanding feature was the new role played by the indigenous political leadership. The nationalist rhetoric had never before been so eloquent or passionate. Projecting themselves as spokespersons for the less privileged, the political elite sounded convincing. Disparaging their own backgrounds, infused as they were with Western values and mores, they denounced English as a medium of instruction and the privileges that accompanied a knowledge of that language. The leaders projected themselves as one with the people, empathizing with the trials and tribulations they had allegedly suffered at the hand of the British. Yet, what the debates actually highlighted was the emerging ideological division amongst the privileged and the incongruity between public debates and public action. What induced this outpouring of nationalist sentiment was the proposal that education should be made available to all free of charge.

On the face of it, the scheme to introduce free education from the Kindergarten to University levels appeared to be revolutionary. The idea, however, was less novel than it at first appeared because education in Sinhala and Tamil was already available free of charge. Rather, the scheme was seen to create a non-discriminatory educational system, to provide equal opportunities for the

⁸⁸ Quoted in *Ceylon Daily News*, 30 January, 1934.

rich and poor alike, resulting in an egalitarian society. It was meant to introduce a sense of "social efficiency" which would prevent unemployment, raise the standard of living, increase production and promote co-operative enterprise.⁸⁹ Education was meant to take the lead, and was to be built around the public assumption that all children were of "equal educability", thereby reducing the reliance on financial worth and social status of the child or parent. In other words, the appeal of the free-education scheme lay in its supposed ability to act as a panacea for society's ills. And in this context, those of privileged status could do nothing but appear to support the scheme.

Kannangara introduced the recommendations in the Report by reiterating the bifurcation of society resulting from a linguistically divided and economically discriminatory educational system. He stated that:

The affluent, the rich, the influential, those who can afford to pay, attend one kind of school imparting the higher education which is given in a foreign tongue.

They have to pay for such an education, Kannangara argued, because the benefits accrued from it, more than compensated for the initial investment.⁹⁰

Controversy surrounded the scheme from its inception. Although the Minister of Education, C.W.W. Kannangara, is credited with steering the scheme through the State Council, the proposal was first mooted by another member of the Executive Committee for Education, A. Ratnayake - who himself

⁸⁹ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943. p. 77

⁹⁰ *Hansard* (SC), 30 May, 1944. p. 847

was greatly influenced by Gandhi's Basic Education Scheme.⁹¹ In fact, Kannangara had earlier expressed his doubts about the viability of such a system. In 1931, responding to an Education Department proposal to offer free education to Burgher children, he stated that the scheme had not been enforced because of financial considerations.⁹² P. de S. Kularatne, the retired Principal of Ananda College and Member from Balapitiya, recollected how the idea was put to the Minister. The day before the signing of the Report, Ratnayake, Natesan - another member of the Committee and Principal of Parameswara College - and Kularatne met to discuss the contents. In the course of the discussion, the idea of inserting a rider creating a free-education scheme was suggested. When the motion was put to the rest of the Committee, the reception was not entirely positive. Kannangara was one of those who objected, accusing Ratnayake of "dragging a red-herring across the trail".⁹³ The Minister's main objection was the time constraint - the delay that a re-drafting would involve. Ratnayake, who served on the Executive Committee for Education from 1931 until 1947 and acted as Minister for Education in December, 1943, claimed that the Committee members were, after not a great deal of persuasion, able to overrule the Minister and "practically dictated policy to him."⁹⁴

⁹¹ See especially M.K. Gandhi's two books: *Basic Education*. Ahmedabad, India: 1951 and *Towards a New Education*. Ahmedabad, India:1953.

⁹² *Hansard* (SC), 8 October, 1931. p. 511

⁹³ P. de S. Kularatne, "A. Ratnayake, the Father of Free Education in Ceylon," in *Tribute to An Asian Statesman's Vision and Foresight - The Record of Forty Years of Parliamentary Service and Activity*. Colombo:1971 p. 157

⁹⁴ A. Ratnayake, "The Executive Committee for Education in Action" in *EC,CV* p. 596

After detailed discussions amongst the members, a vote was taken and the Report re-drafted to include the new clause. The vote for a free-education scheme, but more especially the way it was introduced at the last moment, did not excite much enthusiasm. Reverend R.S. de Saram and Dr. Ivor Jennings both threatened to resign from the Committee. Jennings refused to sign the final draft. He was appalled by the procedure, by which "this pearl of great price was dropped like a red-brick onto the heads of the Members of the Special Committee"⁹⁵ at the penultimate meeting, "when the report was ready for signature..."⁹⁶ Jennings was primarily concerned that the haste with which the rider had been accepted meant that the free-education scheme had not been considered from all relevant angles. It was on this basis that Jennings refused to sign the Report.⁹⁷ The possibility that the scheme, if implemented, might have negative repercussions on admission procedures and diminish the exclusive status of University College, was not mentioned. Thus, there was dissension about the scheme, even prior to the Report coming before the State Council for debate.

The negative response to the free-education scheme was based on two issues. First, there was great doubt that the state could afford to subsidize a free-education scheme without compensation from those availing themselves of the educational system. Under the scheme, the government would be held responsible for the payment of teachers' salaries as well as providing a Maintenance and Equipment Grant based on each unit of average attendance.

⁹⁵ Quoted by F.R. Jayasuriya, "A Pearl of Great Price' - An Evaluation" in *EC,CV*. p. 635

⁹⁶ Quoted by S.H.M. Sumathipala, *Education in Ceylon*. p. 272

⁹⁷ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XXIV* of 1943 p. 149

School books, stationary and a midday meal were also to be provided under the scheme. It was estimated that the immediate cost would be well above the 2.5 million rupee mark.⁹⁸ The Financial Secretary, H.J. Huxham, opposed the proposals on the grounds that they would lead to "expenditure on a scale which this Government cannot possibly afford."⁹⁹ Governor Moore, in a personal letter to the Secretary of State, G.H. Hall, cited post-war thrift as the reason why he agreed with Huxham. Moore confessed that the government would be unable to meet the financial costs of maintaining such a scheme for more than a few years. There was, however, no constitutional basis for rejecting the scheme. In a confidential response on behalf of Hall, Under Secretary of State Sidebotham, sympathized with Moore, but was equally powerless to modify the proposal. Hall was particularly disappointed that parents who could afford to pay, would not have to.¹⁰⁰ This clause bothered Jennings as well. He saw the remission of fees as "a further subsidy to the middle classes." He continued:

From the educationalists' point of view the ideal is to provide free-education and maintenance for all: but if there are only limited funds they should first be used to subsidize those who need subsidies, not those who do not.¹⁰¹

Members of the Civil Service also shared the apprehension of the Governor and

⁹⁸ CO 54/988-13 Financial Secretary Huxham's projections to the Colonial Office. Enclosure in correspondence of Governor Moore, 15 October, 1945.

This did not include the conservative estimates of Rupees 300,000 as equipment grants and Rs. 259,000 as being the calculated loss of revenue through the remission of fees in government schools.

⁹⁹ *Hansard* (SC), 30 May, 1944. p. 841

¹⁰⁰ CO 54/988-13 Secretary of State to Governor H. Moore, 15 December, 1945.

¹⁰¹ I. Jennings, *The Economy of Ceylon*. Oxford:1948 pp. 180-181

Financial Secretary. One of them, J.A. Mulhall, stated, "I thought at the time that it was throwing a heavy financial burden on the country and that it had been pushed for political reasons rather than on its merit."¹⁰² D.S. Senanayake tried to ease the minds of those who were not convinced about the government's ability to finance the scheme. "I want to assure all those present here that there is no room for doubting the country's ability to pay, and our willingness to provide the money."¹⁰³ When Hexman was replaced as Financial Secretary by Oliver Goonetilleke, those in favour of the scheme believed that they had a supporter in charge of the purse. Goonetilleke promised to provide all the practical help necessary.

The second reason for opposition to the Report was the genuine apprehension that standards in the various types of schools - aided, government and private - would fall to the lowest common level in an effort to maintain parity. The exorbitant fees that were charged for attending an English language school and the handsome subsidies received from the government had been able to provide the best in terms of equipment and books, but most of all, teaching staff. With the proposed alterations to the system of grants-in-aid, these predominantly mission schools would lose their edge. This was of particular concern to the school managers, some of whom had been members of the Special Committee, as well as various politicians, most of them products of mission schools. The heads of three leading schools in the country, Bradbury of Royal

¹⁰² RH Mss.Ind. Ocn.s. 174 ROHP: Interview with J.A. Mulhall, 14 January, 1966.

¹⁰³ *Hansard* (SC), 30 May, 1944. pp. 839-840

College, de Saram of St. Thomas' College and Jennings of University College, all argued this point. Those opposed to the scheme took advantage of missionary sensitivities and re-formulated their approach. Instead of focusing on the possible limitations of the scheme, they denounced it as an unwarranted, all out attack on denominational schools which could exacerbate minority fears. Kannangara had inadvertently provided them with the ammunition they sought.

After a deferment of a month, the debate commenced on 30 May, 1944. In a lengthy introduction to the Report, Kannangara traced the history of education from the advent of the British until 1931. The entire system, he announced, had been dominated by systematic discrimination against Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim schools by the government and mission bodies. There was no denying the attraction of mission schools, but the Christian bias had been detrimental to society. As a consequence, the role of the denominational schools had to be re-assessed. The improvements suggested by the Executive Committee, Kannangara claimed, "are only the embellishments on the casket that contains the pearl of great price..."¹⁰⁴ He acknowledged the fact that the recommendations were so extensive that their implementation could take well up to "15, 20 or 30 years." In conclusion, the Minister reached the pinnacle of his eloquence:

Sir, it was the boast of the great Augustus that he found Rome of brick and left it of marble. How much nobler will be the state [sic] of the State Council boast when we shall be able to say that we found education dear and left it cheap, that we found it a sealed book and left it an open letter, that we found it the patrimony of the rich and left it the

¹⁰⁴ *Hansard (SC)*, 2 June, 1944. p. 946

inheritance of the poor.¹⁰⁵

The speech was greeted with a tremendous ovation, but the majority of members in the Council were in no hurry to see the realization of such high ideals. They realized what it would entail: a levelling of the education system that would drastically affect their own positions and status, for education in mission schools had been one of the main routes towards the formation and consolidation of a privileged class. With astute arguments and points of order, the debate was further adjourned until 11 July. This disturbed R.E. Jayatilaka who believed that by postponing discussion, the "Old School Tie Brigade" were planning to sabotage the educational report. "It has been said," Jayatilaka claimed, "that powerful influences are trying to torpedo these Education proposals."¹⁰⁶ The mover of the original postponement motion, D.S. Senanayake - the self-appointed spokesman for Buddhist causes after the Temperance Movement *and* a product of Royal College - defended himself by claiming that the report was too important not to devote the entire proceedings of the Council to its discussion.¹⁰⁷ Senanayake was also leader of the State Council and as such was concerned about the financial implications of the reforms. More importantly, he was also in the midst of negotiations with Whitehall regarding constitutional reforms which, he felt, would be jeopardized by the strong anti-denominational stand of Kannangara's report. Twenty-nine members of the State Council participated in the debates and together moved a total of fifty-one amendments.

¹⁰⁵ *Hansard* (SC), 2 June, 1944. p. 946

¹⁰⁶ *Hansard* (SC), 16 June, 1944. p. 1077

¹⁰⁷ *Hansard* (SC), 16 June, 1944. pp. 1078-1079

The Member from Maradana, S.W.R.D Bandaranaike, hailed "the violence of the criticism" that the Report evoked, as indicative of its importance. He urged Kannangara to be "flattered that his Special Committee has produced a document of such importance and interest that it has aroused so much discussion in this country."¹⁰⁸ The Colonial Office also had its reservations; not so much about the scheme in itself, but about the motives of the Minister of Education. In an internal memorandum, Trafford-Smith expressed his trepidation on the basis of the Soulbury Commission Report:

Their [the Commissioners] impression was... that he [Kannangara] is intensely sincere, but somewhat narrow-minded and militant in his desire to remove European Christian influences as far as possible from the educational system and substitute Sinhalese-Buddhist influences.

Trafford-Smith did not mean to imply that Kannangara was "strongly anti-Tamil or anti-Hindu". In fact the reverse:

All his educational measures have been island-wide and without distinction of race [or] caste. It was merely the anti-Christian tone that was cause for concern.¹⁰⁹

Those who took part in the debates were not overtly hostile to the concept of a free-education scheme. They could not afford to be. At a time of growing nationalism, to reject the scheme would be political suicide. Among the objections raised, the most frequent was that the scheme did not go far enough. G.G. Ponnambalam, the Member from Point Pedro, was the only opponent to

¹⁰⁸ *Hansard* (SC), 13 July, 1944. pp. 1221

¹⁰⁹ CO 54/988-13 Internal Memorandum, 8 November, 1945.

come out publicly and denounce the scheme. "I venture to submit quite summarily that the recommendation is nothing more or less than the abolition of tuition fees." This Ponnambalam argued, could not, "by any stretch of the imagination be called free education..." Through his attack, Ponnambalam tried to exorcise the erroneous notion that was making the rounds. It was assumed that any child could attend any school and thereby could simply gain entrance to the exclusive schools in Ceylon. This was not the case; mission schools would still be entitled to enforce their own entrance requirements. As Ponnambalam elaborated:

It would be a good cry that we were giving or proposing to give free education, and anybody who hesitated or questioned such a move or, shall I say such a manoeuvre, was a reactionary and a diehard. But in point of fact the claim of free education sought to be given to the people of this country is one of the most gigantic hoaxes which it is sought to perpetrate on an uneducated electorate...¹¹⁰

On 6 June, 1945, the Report, with numerous additions was passed. One of these stated that henceforth, only the State would be allowed to establish new schools. Free education was ostensibly introduced on 1 October, 1945, but this did not put an end to the efforts of those seeking its demise.¹¹¹ Two years later, on 23 January, 1947, the Report came before the State Council once again, this time as a Bill for ratification.¹¹² Before the debates could begin, opponents tried to get the reading of the Bill postponed. It was an old tactic; stalling to

¹¹⁰ *Hansard* (SC), 13 July, 1944. p. 1206

¹¹¹ *Hansard* (SC), 6 June, 1945. pp. 4154-4173

¹¹² As Ordinance XXVI of 1947

divert attention and interest in contentious legislation. With the aid of the Speaker, Waitialingam Duraiswamy, the first reading was passed almost surreptitiously. This caused an uproar. Reverend R.S. de Saram of St. Thomas' College, was livid. In his capacity as a member of the Special Committee, de Saram had objected to the inclusion of the scheme in the original document, fearing an end to mission-run schools. He commented:

In a minute or two with no speech, no explanation, no information to the country at large, this important Bill which will, if passed, affect the lives of millions was introduced and passed at its first reading.¹¹³

He was supported, by among others, a group from Trincomalee who sent an urgent telegram to London expressing their unanimous protest, not just against the discriminatory policies of the education system, but also against the "undue haste and unconstitutional manner in moving [the Bill at its] first reading...."¹¹⁴

The second reading of the Bill, on 20 February, 1947, did not get by as smoothly as the first. A.F. Molamure (Balangoda) moved that the Bill be postponed, first after the day's recess and then, due to the limits of time, until 6 March, 1947. His motion was, not unexpectedly, passed.

Mission schools, both Protestant and Catholic, all over the country used the two week period between debates to vent their anger at the Bill. The educationists organized public meetings and took advantage of school occasions to make their opinions known. They were often joined in silent support by

¹¹³ Quoted in *Ceylon Daily News*, 1 February, 1947. An article by J.L. Fernando in the same paper on 25 January, 1945, also questioned the speed with which the Bill was passed.

¹¹⁴ CO 54/995-5 Telegram from the President of the Mahajana Sangamaya (Convention of Sodalities of the Trincomalee Diocese) to the Foreign Office. Not dated.

politicians, who had felt inhibited in the Council to oppose the free-education scheme, but who still remained unwilling to voice their disapproval publicly. Taking the side of the mission bodies was an echo from the recent past. The rancour of the 1938 debates was to be repeated, down to the personal attacks directed against the Minister of Education. He was particularly berated for his "unrelenting, mischievous propaganda"¹¹⁵ against Christian schools. Kannangara, a mission school product himself, had become the most hated man in Ceylon. K.V. Subramania Ayer, an Indian educationist, accused Kannangara of being tyrannical and oppressive on a Soviet or Nazi scale. In his scathing attack, Ayer continued:

The godless Buddhism in him, and the totalitarian philosophy of the Sinhala Maha Sabha to which he acts as a convenient pillar, have forced him to start a campaign against Christian schools and society.¹¹⁶

Kannangara was accused of exploiting his alleged past in order to mobilize support for his policy. He had not, it was asserted, been granted a scholarship on the basis of need, as he was wont to emphasize. Rather he had been the recipient of a merit award, an award that had taken Kannangara to Richmond College, Galle. At Richmond, the Minister was not the target of derision because of his alleged lack of wealth, instead he had been highly regarded precisely because of the prestige associated with the award.¹¹⁷ The validity of these

¹¹⁵ SLNA 25.17/11 *Jaffna College Miscellany. Jubilee Number*. December, 1947 p. 31

¹¹⁶ V.K. Subramania Ayer, "Christian Education in Ceylon" in *The Searchlight*. Vol. 19 No. 28. September 7, 1940. p. 1

¹¹⁷ From an article signed "A Contemporary" and entitled, "The Minister for Education - A Leaf from the Past" in *The Searchlight*. Vol. 26 No. 11. April 22, 1947. pp. 6-7

allegations was not especially relevant, but the attack on Kannangara's alleged inimical attitude to denominational schools was mainly a ploy to bolster up the opposition to the free-education scheme. The scheme had offered denominational schools the option of remaining within the system and abolishing fees, or opting out and maintaining their unaided, fee-levying status. The schools had been given three years to decide and inform the Board of Education by 1945 (later extended to 1948). This choice placed the schools in an unenviable position. If they chose to remain outside the system, the accusation that they were "enemies of Free Education and, by implication, of the poor...."¹¹⁸ would be validated. If they joined the scheme, the schools feared that their standards would drop. Schools like Jaffna College, however, found that they could not maintain the high standards for which they were known, if they were not in receipt of tuition fees. The equipment grant being offered to the school was, simply, not sufficient. The College had even considered making part of their school "free" while retaining the rest outside the new system.¹¹⁹ In the end only fifteen schools elected to remain outside the system.

The dilemmas faced by Jaffna College were not unique, nor was their attitude towards the free-education scheme. The Catholic institution, St. Joseph's College in Colombo, was also unable to accept the "meager" equipment grant offered by the government as compensation for remaining in the system.¹²⁰ The *Ceylon Daily News* championed the cause of Catholic schools.

¹¹⁸ SLNA 25.17/10 *The Double Blue - Wesley College, Colombo. Diamond Jubilee Number.* 1949. p. 78

¹¹⁹ SLNA 25.17/11 *Jaffna College Miscellany. Jubilee Number.* December, 1947. p. 31

¹²⁰ SLNA 25.17/16 *Blue and White - St. Joseph's College, Colombo. Diamond Jubilee Number.* 1956. p. 4

In an editorial it wrote that the Catholics had not only cast their educational net wider than most of the other denominations, but had also provided free education for many years. The paper believed, therefore, that the Catholics had "especial cause for complaint if the State's Free Education Scheme has the effect, as many have good reason to fear, of retarding rather than assisting education in their schools."¹²¹

Hostility towards the new educational system increased over time. In a speech at St. Joseph's College Annual Prize Distribution, Archbishop T.B. Cooray, claimed that the State Council had "outlived normal life by many years and which... in its decrepit old age wants to impose on us an Ordinance on which depends the future of the youth of this country..." The scheme, he went on to claim, was "extremely impudent" and of "tremendous danger" to "our children."¹²² Going beyond the rhetoric, the Principal of Wesley College, Reverend James Cartman, publicly analyzed the real pressures behind the implementation of the scheme. He told his students at their Prize Giving ceremony in 1948, that the Report had been published at a time when political and national fervour was widespread. Therefore, to even question a document that, on the surface, appeared to be egalitarian was "regarded as almost a crime against the people of the country."¹²³ He did not doubt the benefits to be derived from free-education, or more attention being paid to Sinhala and Tamil,

¹²¹ Quoted in SLNA 25.17/16 *Blue and White - St. Joseph's College, Colombo. Diamond Jubilee Number. 1956.* p. 36

¹²² Quoted in *Ceylon Daily News*, 8 February, 1947.

¹²³ SLNA 25.17/10 *The Double Blue - Wesley College, Colombo. Diamond Jubilee Number. 1949.* p. 77

but he too could not give the scheme his unqualified support. Instead, he too relied on an old excuse: he deplored the haste with which the recommendations had been conceived. The issues, he argued, "might at other less politically tense moments have been considered more soberly, and I believe, more profitably for the country as a whole."¹²⁴

On 7 March, 1947 the Council met again to ratify the educational proposals. The opposition outside had inevitably spilled into the Chamber. A petition signed by over 87,000 Catholics was presented in the State Council by I.X. Pereira, a nominated Member. It stated that the opening of any new government schools was:

irreconcilable with the liberty of the subject and the freedom of conscience guaranteed by the State to members of all communities.¹²⁵

Together with the numerous public meetings and attacks at prize distribution ceremonies, this petition was to Kannangara just another deliberate attempt to intimidate and coerce him into withdrawing the Bill. In an emotional speech to the Council, Kannangara felt compelled to defend himself, "What have I done against the Christians? ... I have no such evil intentions..." he declared, to oversee the demise of the denominational school. The idea behind the proposals was that, "...after 131 years of suffering we wanted to give a just and equal opportunity to those whose fathers had no large bank balances, provided that they were able to profit by the education..."¹²⁶

¹²⁴ SLNA 25.17/10 *The Double Blue - Wesley College, Colombo. Diamond Jubilee Number. 1949. p. 77*

¹²⁵ *Hansard (SC), 7 February, 1947. col. 1117*

¹²⁶ *Hansard (SC), 6 March, 1947. col. 1127*

Once the kid-gloves were removed, the debates were marked by overwhelming rancour. Again there was no direct mention of the free-education scheme, but the vehement protests from the denominational bodies produced the result wished for. Ratnayake was the only Member to defend the Bill. Even Kularatna, who along with Ratnayake and Natesan, had been an original proponent of the scheme, was uncertain as to the direction the proposals would take. He believed that a six month postponement of the reading would enable the Members to fully assess its implications. "It is not because I oppose free education," Kularatna insisted, nor was he afraid of the "threatening letters" he had received. His opposition, as he explained, was because:

I feel a great disappointment with this... Bill. I feel that the Minister should if possible, bring a comprehensive Ordinance before this House and if it is not possible for him to do so, we will have to wait for the Parliament to do that.¹²⁷

So, without really saying *why* he could not sign the Bill, Kularatna made excuses like the other Members. He had, however, previously acknowledged a grievance against mission schools. He stated,

Sir, I do not want to be ungrateful to the school that produced me. It is my experience all these good people [missionaries] did proselytize, did attempt to proselytize and do proselytize the Buddhist children.¹²⁸

This was a position that G.C.S. Corea could not accept. The days of outright conversion were over. He urged members to look around the Chamber. "We

¹²⁷ *Hansard* (SC), 6 March, 1947. cols. 1144-1145

¹²⁸ *Hansard* (SC), 15 November, 1944. p. 2481

have had in this House," he argued, "a very large number of Members who attained prominence in various spheres and who are Buddhists educated in Christian institutions."¹²⁹ So that excuse was no longer relevant. Nonetheless, denominational pressures were having their effect, though this too was denied. The Member from Negombo, H. de Z. Siriwardene fervently played down his connections with denominational bodies:

Some people seem to think that I am opposing this Bill because I represent a Catholic constituency, and that in opposing the Bill I am actuated by self-interest.¹³⁰

It was, instead, the impracticality of the Bill that made it impossible to sign and he gave his total support to a deferment of the reading. Ratnayaka was incensed. In a vehement speech he stated that he had "not yet come across a single person in this country who is opposed to free education." There was, however, always a qualification.

But Sir, they put in a 'but'. Some say, 'but it is very expensive...'. The Hon. Member for Balapitiya [Kularatna] says that this Bill is very good, *but* we should have a comprehensive Bill.

There was a real 'but', Ratnayaka argued and this was it:

An Hon. member told me, 'I am in favour of free education. But the elections are coming on. There are about 5,000 Catholics in my electorate, and those Catholics are so organized, so politically conscious and they exercise such a powerful influence on my electorate that I am compelled to vote [against the Bill]'.¹³¹

¹²⁹ *Hansard* (SC), 24 May, 1944. p. 745

¹³⁰ *Hansard* (SC), 7 March, 1947. col. 1185

¹³¹ *Hansard* (SC), 7 March, 1947. col. 1171

The vested interests of the denominational schools had to be broken and this was the purpose of the Bill, Ratnayaka continued:

The Public school system has shut out thousands and thousands of brilliant young men, brilliant men who might have been poets or great scientists or great statesmen or eminent doctors. It was a conspiracy; it was a plot; it was a diabolical plot; and the plotters in various garbs and guises, are resisting the attempts of the Minister to break this conspiracy.¹³²

The speech did not move many members of the House. G.R. de Silva of Colombo North focussed on the expense of implementation by defining the scheme as a "Communist scheme" and an ill-plotted one at that. He accused the authors of not having the "slightest idea of Communism...." If they had, they would realize that the state would "have to bear all this expenditure."¹³³ J.G. Rajakulendran (Bandarawela) described the Bill as an untidy, badly conceived piece of legislation, "on a subject so vital to the life and progress of the nation."¹³⁴ G.G. Ponnambalam agreed because he thought that support for the Bill would "amount to a complete betrayal of the democratic trust reposed in us as representatives of the people."¹³⁵

The debates ended in stalemate. On 7 March, 1947, the Council voted to adjourn proceedings until 13 May. The Catholics were buoyant; the Bill had not received the support of D.S. Senanayake, the acclaimed leader of Ceylon on the verge of independence. In the recess, however, Catholic activism to stop

¹³² *Hansard* (SC), 7 March, 1947. cols. 1178-1179

¹³³ *Hansard* (SC), 7 March, 1947. cols. 1191-1192

¹³⁴ *Hansard* (SC), 7 March, 1947. col. 1201

¹³⁵ *Hansard* (SC), 7 March, 1947. col. 1243

the Bill was superseded by Buddhist and Hindu efforts to ensure its passage. The arena of debate had shifted. Preserving elite privileges by containing the spread of an English education was no longer the issue. The debate came to reflect essentially sectarian concerns. Less than a week after the end of the State Council session, the All Ceylon Buddhist Students Union campaigned for the Bill's success. As a result the 'Central Free Education Defence Committee' was inaugurated, with E.W. Adikaram at the helm. The Tamils in Batticaloa, under the organization of the Ramakrishna Mission, organized support for the Bill amongst the Hindus. Adikaram dismissed the two main objections to the Bill. The first, that there were certain provisions which could not be accepted was simply "a trick" and, secondly, that the country could not afford free-education was "a myth". These were attempts, Adikaram maintained, at "subterfuge to [have] the Bill postponed or defeated."¹³⁶ He anticipated that with the election of Senanayake as Prime Minister, Kannangara would be excluded from the Cabinet¹³⁷ and the Bill would die an ignominious death. The vilification that had, until this point, been directed against C.W.W. Kannangara the Minister of Education, was now turned towards the Minister of Agriculture and Land, D.S. Senanayake. He was seen as an obsequious supporter of the missionaries, in spite of his public image as a leader of the Buddhist community. He was accused of connivance at the propaganda launched by the Archbishop of Colombo and the Warden of St. Thomas' College, and of wanting to see the Bill defeated.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ *Ceylon Daily News*, 28 March, 1947.

¹³⁷ *Ceylon Daily News*, 30 April, 1947.

¹³⁸ *Ceylon Daily News*, 5 May, 1947.

Imitating the strategy of the Catholics, the Buddhists held public meetings and organized signature drives in support of the Bill. When the debates resumed on 15 May, 1947, 500,000 signatures were laid before the State Council in support of the Bill. The mood in the House changed. Suddenly, staunch opponents of the Bill claimed that they had been misunderstood. They insisted that they had never really been in support of denominational privileges in education, nor were they ever opposed to free education as such. As one Catholic lobbyist stated, rather wearily, "We were against only certain clauses... Pass the Bill...."¹³⁹ The reason for this *volte face* was nothing more than the shifting boundaries of political pragmatism. The Buddhists had not been considered a political threat, and, in spite of the revival movement in the 1880s and the Sinhala Maha Sabha, were not perceived to be a viable pressure group. The Catholic lobby had learnt their tactics from Bonjean a generation earlier and they had always been the better organized. Defence of their interests, particularly in education, was seen as the right political manoeuvre. The success of Buddhists' strategy in mobilizing support for the Bill forced a re-assessment of their potential power. With such a demonstration of political clout, political partnerships had to be reconsidered. After all, constituencies had a higher proportion of Buddhists than Christians.

In the midst of these debates there were serious negotiations regarding the transfer of power and constitutional reform. The British

¹³⁹ D.J. Anthony quoted in the *Ceylon Daily News*. 15 May, 1947.

government had made a commitment in 1943 that at the end of the second world war, they would carry out a "re-examination of the reform of the Ceylon Constitution...directed towards the grant to Ceylon of full responsible Government under the Crown in all matters of internal civil administration."¹⁴⁰ Even before the end of the war in 1944, a Royal Commission under the Chairmanship of Lord Soulbury was appointed to make proposals on the subject of constitutional reforms. The resultant Constitution not only recommended the provision for increasing representation for the minorities, but also agreed to the limitation of Parliamentary authority which prohibited:

the enactment of any law which would impose disabilities or restriction, or confer advantages or privileges, on members of any community or religion to which members of other communities or religions were not subject.¹⁴¹

This limitation could be overcome by a constitutional amendment, but it seemed that as the constitution provided for a parliamentary form of government, based on the British model, a scheme of representation would certainly produce a Sinhalese majority.

The shift in the debates was smooth, essentially because of procedure which disallowed several opponents, including Senanayake, from speaking again. This prevented the most vociferous opponents from commandeering the debates. The rhetoric of nationalist fervour reached a high decibel. "Denominational schools must be destroyed," cried W. Dahanayake, the

¹⁴⁰ CO 57/272 *Sessional Paper XVII* of 1943.

¹⁴¹ Ceylon (Constitution and Independence) Orders in Council, 1946 and 1947, Article 29, Section 2 (b) and (c). Cited in R.N. Kearney, *Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon*. Durham, N.C.:1967 p. 38

member from Bibile. He continued:

What I say is that a school like St. Thomas' College should be handed over to the state.... Today its portals are open to the sons of Ministers, but tomorrow we want those portals to be opened to the sons of the workers of Ratmalana.¹⁴²

On the question of allowing denominational schools to exist as well as the issue of language, Dahanayake had not been an unequivocal supporter of Kannangara. Three years earlier he had advocated a change in the medium of instruction. He was on record as having criticized English education as having "impeded the natural development of each individual in this country." He went on to state that, "it is through the medium of English that the Britisher tries to keep us slaves for ever."¹⁴³ V. Nalliah was another member able to shift gear with little effort. He had stated earlier that denominational schools had to be re-assessed. There was no point, he had argued, "to be fighting political dyarchy while maintaining a dual system of education."¹⁴⁴ Now, he recognized the "scheming brains beneath the shaven skulls"¹⁴⁵ of the Buddhist clergy who forced, not just another look at the education Bill, but a radical shift in political orientation. He noted that:

the Bill will go down in history, not because of any great intrinsic merit in it, but because of the manner in which it will go through - owed to the fact of the

¹⁴² *Hansard (SC)*, 15 May, 1947. col. 1630

¹⁴³ *Hansard (SC)*, 21 November, 1944. p. 2615

¹⁴⁴ *Hansard (SC)*, 14 July, 1944. p. 1259

¹⁴⁵ *Hansard (SC)*, 15 May, 1947. col. 1664

politically conscious section of the Buddhist clergy.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

So what Kannangara had envisaged - a national re-awakening to aid a national system of education - had occurred, at least verbally in the political arena. This was a turning point in the political development of Ceylon. Before the year was out, political debates of similar vehemence occurred demanding replacement of English as the official language first, by Sinhala and then by Tamil. The political leadership too was changing. Though as heterogenous as ever, they tended to act in concert when the issue was constitutional reform. When it came to other matters, however, there were often very sharp differences, but not sharp enough to cause severe rifts amongst the Councillors. The debates on the Free-education scheme highlighted perfectly this pattern of policy development.

The political leadership were caught up in a conflict not of their own making. They were not always united when it came to formulation or enacting legislation, yet they were reluctant to do anything concrete which would affect the *status quo*. Essentially, the system remained unaltered, both in education and politics. English remained the language which conferred status and made status mobility possible. But the realities of democratic representation in a plural society forced changes in strategy and political style. The politics of free schools represented one brand of populism for which the elite leadership had, at least, very little enthusiasm in fact. The organizational strength of the Catholic

¹⁴⁶ *Hansard* (SC), 15 May 1947. col. 1665

missionary bodies deepened their lack of enthusiasm. When the Buddhists who were the majority in the electorate showed that they too could play the same game, there was a marked change in Ceylon politics and the politicians began to sing a different tune.

CONCLUSION

In 1946, two years before independence, the literacy rate of the Ceylonese population over the age of five was 57.8%, one of the highest in any colonial territory.¹ This thesis has attempted to explain, *inter alia*, how this unique end result can be traced not solely to governmental and missionary endeavours, but largely to the concerted response of the indigenous English-educated leadership to a series of political and cultural challenges.

Under colonial rule, particularly British rather than Portuguese or Dutch rule, Ceylon had been transformed from a traditional, feudal society to one that was administratively and judicially more bureaucratic. A primary requirement of British colonialism was a purely functional one: a small group of local people educated through the medium of the official language to serve as low-level functionaries within the new apparatus. As the administrative needs of the colonial rulers increased, so too did the opportunities for those educated in English. Access to various occupations was now available to them. These included public and leadership roles, as Legislative Councillors and Civil Servants, the professions of medicine, law and even some space as entrepreneurs. The social status associated with these occupations, the fact that they could not be achieved without knowledge of English and the narrowness of the group, are three reasons for them being referred to in this thesis as either the privileged

¹ This figure indicates literacy in English, Sinhala and Tamil in a population of 5,795,000. Cited in Unesco, *Progress of Literacy in Various Countries*. Paris:1953 p. 65

section of society or *elite* for want of a better word.

The English-educated elite, in its composition, cut across all the ethnic, religious and linguistic divisions in pluralistic Ceylon. They were politically conservative and initially their ideology was just a reflection of the perceived needs of the colonial rulers. They had been educated primarily in mission schools and had, over time, developed a Westernized ethos that manifested itself in overt and covert forms as in dress, speech, habit, manner, attitude and intellectual concerns. They were fully aware of their status in society, ensconced as it was in privilege, and tended to act in a manner that would not harm their own interests.

But Ceylonese society was not simply a two-tier hierarchy composed of those who were educated in English and those who were not. While knowledge of the English language was the *sine qua non* for upward social, economic and political mobility, the vast majority of the population was educated through the media of Sinhala or Tamil. Amongst those educated in the vernacular were two distinct segments. The first consisted of those who pursued a traditional form of education and became ayurvedic doctors, monks, priests, teachers or notaries. Within a local context these occupations conferred relatively privileged status, but the influence of this 'intermediate level elite' did not extend beyond the localities where they functioned. The members of this sub-group were neither Westernized, nor had they attended missionary institutions. They tended to be parochial in their outlook and deeply attached to a traditional ethos infused with Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim values. They were also not perceived to be in direct competition for jobs or status with the English-educated elite whose spheres

of activity and influence were national in scope. However, unlike this urban leadership, the vernacular-educated intermediate groups had more direct access to the rural population and urban poor by virtue of their shared participation in indigenous cultures. The influence that they wielded on the under-privileged sections of the population was concomitantly greater than that of the English-educated.

Below these two strata of relative privilege was the rest of Ceylonese society - who have been termed, at various points in this thesis, as the *masses* as no other adequately inclusive term would fit this category. Educational opportunities were not available to them all, but those who had been able to acquire some education, had done so primarily in government or missionary administered institutions. These schools offered at best rudimentary education: nothing beyond instruction in the 3Rs. Opportunities for upward mobility were virtually absent as a result and the lower strata of Ceylonese society tended to follow the occupations of their forefathers as labourers and agriculturalists. They could not, therefore, even begin to aspire towards any position of privilege. What emerges, then, is a society wherein the indigenous population is hierarchically divided into distinct strata with hardly any possibility of movement from one to the other. There were also horizontal divisions on the basis of religion and language, but the relevant categories were not mutually exclusive. The elite at the beginning of one period was certainly not divided along ethnic lines. Their mutual competition was along lines of personal or group rivalries. The growing power of the revivalist movements endowed the ethnic divisions with new and often sinister significance. The English-educated social groups were inevitably

drawn into this process of formation of new identities.

As a social group, the latter were constantly evolving, ideologically and politically, and hence their awareness of the needs and aspirations of the rest of society also evolved. In real terms as distinct from political rhetoric, however, the response of the leadership appeared to be self-conscious efforts at protecting their own privileges especially in relation to educational matters. They protested against the strategies of the government and missionaries on the one hand, and, on the other, maintained their deep attachment to an education in English which had provided them with the means to acquire and preserve their status and also shaped their views of the world. The English-educated elite were not unaware, however, that the very system which had nurtured them had serious limitations that threatened their aspirations to emerge as political and social leaders of the masses. The premier schools they had attended instilled in them an ethos that alienated them from the rest of society culturally, but more important, linguistically. They realized that their general lack of knowledge of Sinhala and Tamil was detrimental to their social and political standing in Ceylon in the eyes of both the government and the larger population. Their protest against educational policies did, therefore, stem from motives of self-interest, but was swayed by genuine nationalistic concerns as well.

The impetus that prompted a reassessment of their role and ideology was a burgeoning assertion of cultural, particularly religious and linguist nationalism spearheaded by the vernacular-educated elite. The religious revivals, while specifically targeting the missionary-dominated education system and its promotion of Western, Christian values, also criticized the products of these

institutions - the English-educated elite - for their alienation from the traditions and culture of the country. The privileged leadership believed that in order to counter their deepening sense of denationalization, the existing system of education needed to be altered. What they advocated was a system whereby instruction in Sinhala and Tamil could be provided in English-medium schools. Their new strategy of protest emphasized the fact that these schools made no effort to teach subjects connected with local history, culture or religion. Recognition of these serious limitations did not, however, induce any attempt at the wholesale abolition of the existing system of education. Even when the issue of missionary domination emerged as potentially explosive, the elite protest was tempered by their deeply held belief that these English-medium institutions of learning were centres of excellence and as such should not be tampered with. Yet, at the same time, they also encouraged the extension of Sinhala and Tamil based education to the general population on a scale not readily available in other colonies.

That the privileged responded to the increasingly strong strain of nationalism in the way that they did can be attributed to two factors. First, to broaden their appeal to the masses, they had to be able to communicate with them and as such had to master not only the local languages, but indigenous traditions as well. Secondly, to preempt the competitive advantage of the vernacular-educated intermediate stratum, it was necessary to offer concrete gains to the majority of the population. The national leadership hence strongly advocated the increase in the number of vernacular schools and the extension of the curriculum beyond the 3Rs.

As a consequence of these pressures, both the government and the missionary agencies that administered educational institutions were forced to alter their own policies. The elite used the levers available to them - primarily the debating chambers of the Legislative Council - and began, as individuals or under the aegis of community-centred organizations, to establish schools that promoted their new thinking. They were no longer content to leave educational developments entirely in the hands of either the government or the missionary agencies. The new strategies they adopted had a visible effect: the monopoly of the Christian missions was broken and Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim denominational schools were established.

In spite of this overtly nationalist stand on the part of the English-educated, their position was replete with contradictions, of which three emerge distinctly. First, the elite did not seek the demise of English-medium schools: mission schools were not forced to close down, nor did their enrolment figures suffer any reduction. Members of the privileged leadership, including those who actively agitated for a basic revision of the curriculum, continued to send their children to the prestigious mission schools, especially St. Thomas' College, Colombo and Trinity College, Kandy. The government-run Royal College also continued to be well patronized by the same social group. The realization that the education on offer at these types of schools was the key to the achievement and perpetuation of privileged status at the national level, ensured its survival. Secondly, the English-educated did not seek the expansion of English-medium schools, for they were not anxious to extend to others the possibilities of access to privilege and power. Thirdly, the leadership did not encourage instruction in

English in Sinhala or Tamil schools precisely because they wanted to restrict the number of people with an English education.

Political developments had their repercussions on the system of education and the responses of the privileged as well. With the introduction of universal franchise, the national leadership had to consider the perceived needs and aspirations of the general populace, dependent as they now were on their constituencies. The ideology of the vernacular-educated elite, preaching ethnic and linguistic loyalties to the masses also became an important feature in the further evolution of the indigenous leadership. The leaders' first task was to urge the creation of an education system on more egalitarian lines. They strongly advocated that more education, and of a higher quality, be provided for the masses. This development pales in comparison to the leadership's most dramatic initiative: the provision of a free-education from the Kindergarten to University levels in all three language streams. The fact that this was essentially a populist programme which offered the prospect of electoral success and that it indirectly encouraged the politics of communalism and language, did not diminish the enthusiasm of the nationalist leadership. The conflicts that arose - between individual members of the privileged class, between the elite and the government, and between the elite and denominational bodies - as a consequence of this novel policy were inevitable. But that it succeeded to some degree was due to the leadership's genuine commitment to nationalist reform beyond the rhetoric. In spite of these actions and the expansion of Sinhala and Tamil-media education, the premier position afforded to English language schools remained and so too did the privileges associated with such schools.

Two points emerge from this study: the first is the fact that the English-educated leaders of Ceylonese society were responsive - albeit not without a certain preoccupation with self-interest - to the aspirations of the rest of society and second, that their stance in relation to the movement for nationalist reforms, forced the government and missionary agencies to re-assess their own policies. From the time of the Morgan Commission Report of 1869 when English education was made accessible only to a small minority to the end of the period covered in this thesis, the elite's interest in maintaining the restrictions that had underpinned their privileges was in no way diminished and in practice the expansion of educational opportunities in English was never more than moderate.

APPENDIX ONE

GROWTH OF LITERACY¹ RATE OF POPULATION FIVE YEARS OF AGE AND OVER, 1881-1946²

Census Year	Total %	% Males	% Females
1881	17.4	29.8	3.1
1891	21.7	36.1	5.3
1901	26.4	42.0	8.5
1911	31.0	47.2	12.5
1921	39.9	56.3	21.2
1931	47.9	62.0	30.2
1946	57.8	70.1	43.8

¹ Literacy in either/or English, Sinhala and Tamil

² Ceylon Department of Census and Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Ceylon, 1967-1968*. Colombo:1970 p. 35

APPENDIX TWO

GROWTH OF LITERACY RATE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF POPULATION FIVE YEARS OF AGE AND OVER, 1901-1946¹

Census Year	Total %	% Males	% Females
1901	2.6	3.7	1.4
1911	2.7	3.8	1.5
1921	3.7	5.2	2.1
1946	6.3	8.4	4.0

As compared to India:

GROWTH OF LITERACY RATE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF POPULATION TEN YEARS OF AGE AND OVER, 1901-1931²

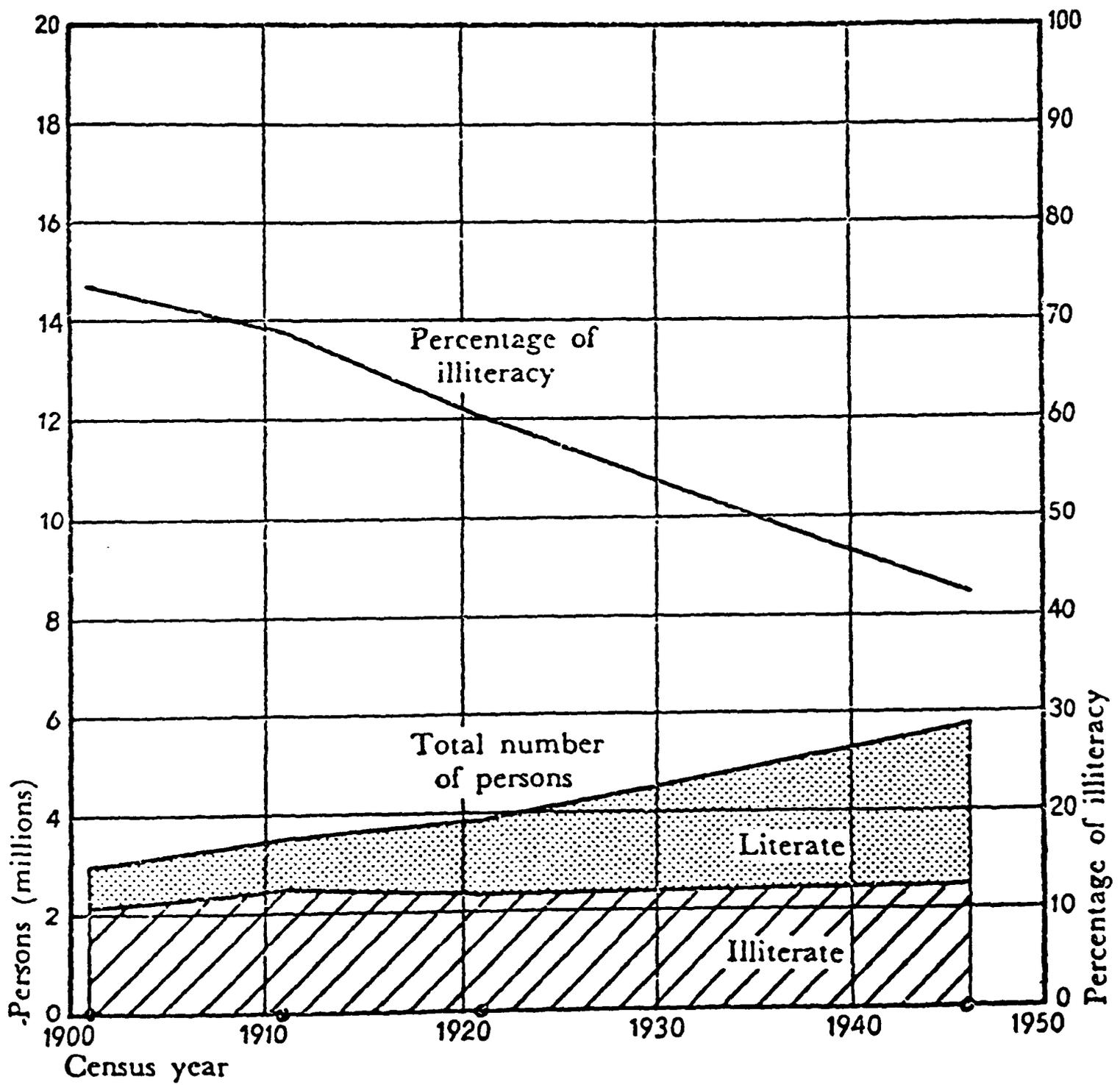
Census Year	Total %	% Males	% Females
1901	0.5	0.9	0.1
1911	0.7	1.3	0.1
1921	1.1	1.9	0.2
1931	1.4	2.4	0.3

¹ Unesco, *Progress of Literacy in Various Countries*. Paris:1953 p. 68

² Unesco, *Progress of Literacy in Various Countries*. p. 112

APPENDIX THREE

NUMBER OF LITERATES AND ILLITERATES AND PERCENTAGE OF ILLITERACY IN CEYLON (POPULATION FIVE YEARS AND OLDER)¹



¹ Unesco, *Progress of Literacy in Various Countries*. p. 233

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