

MICROSCOPIC MINORITY CONTROLS CEYLON'S EDUCATION

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The forces that are working today against the continuation of the Swabahsa medium beyond 8th standard are certainly not a mushroom growth. It is possible to trace their origins to the very beginnings of British rule in Ceylon. Just as the Kenya Government while engaged in the campaign to oust the Kenya Africans from the more fertile and more salubrious part of the country has found it necessary also to wipe out the tradition, language and culture of the Kenya Africans which bound them to their ancestral lands and has begun to "work through the Christian missions and churches", even so the British Government in Ceylon entrusted the education of Ceylon children to the Christian church through the ecclesiastical Department which existed from the beginning of British rule until the year 1871 and thereafter continued to shower favours on the Christian Schools in a more subtle and surreptitious manner. This change of strategy was resorted to owing to the fact Buddhist and Hindu Schools began to put in their appearance for the first time under colonial rule.

These two school organisations (a) Christian (b) Buddhist-Hindu from the stand point of their objectives are diametrically opposed to each other. Organisation (a) "created a civil army and garrison every where which was more important even than the military army of occupation" - stooges of the British Government, who were loyal and became more loyal by becoming converts to Christianity. (Hansard). Organisation (b) was definitely a national organisation and it was especially concerned with the conserving of the national language and national culture, an activity that had to be carried out under the surveillance of the British raj.

How sharply these two educational bodies were once divided over the question of pursuing the study of national languages, not as a medium but as a subject of the secondary school curriculum can be seen from the illuminating evidence given by witnesses who appeared before the Education Committee of 1911 to 1912 that had been appointed to scrutinize the famous Bridges Report.

Heads of Protestant and Catholic Schools, Burghers and Europeans spoke against the study of national languages. Whereas the Heads of Buddhist and Hindu Schools as well as the prominent patriots of the day spoke in support.

CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

St. Joseph's College:

Rev. Fr L E Bouvier, O M I , Manager of Christian Schools, Colombo:- "I think that the study of the vernaculars ought not to be introduced at all into

English Schools.”

The very Rev. Fr C H Lytton:- “(The vernaculars) will not be introduced into St. Josephs’ College.”

St. Thomas’ College:

Rev. W.A. Stone, Warden:- “(Vernacular Languages) have little educational value in secondary Schools.”

St. Benedicts College:

Rev. Bro. Camillus, Director:- “I do not consider the Vernacular Languages to be of any value in the education of the classes which attend English Schools.”

Prince of Wales’ College:

Mr J G C Mendis, Principal:- “In English Schools the value of the vernacular languages is practically nil, except for the illustration of differences in idiom or the elucidation of English words and phrases.”

Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya:

The Principal:- “The introduction of the vernacular languages into the English Schools can but prevent the pupils from acquiring a proper knowledge of English. The pupils will be unable to speak English correctly, and at the same time there will be an impossibility of organising the teaching of the vernaculars.”

St. Aloysius’ College, Galle:

The very Rev. Fr. The Neut S.J. Superior: “The vernaculars are not educational.”

St. Anthony’s College, Kandy:

The very Rev. Fr D B Beekmeyer, O S B, Manager of Catholic Schools, Kandy:- “I do not think the vernacular languages should at all be introduced into English Schools, whether elementary or secondary.”

Mr. C S Schweider President, L C P A:- “The mature child in whose home English is not spoken makes most rapid progress in speaking and writing English correctly and with a correct accent when placed in a boarding school, where the children are compelled to converse in English and forbidden to converse in their own vernacular.”

Mr Francis Beven:- “I am strongly opposed to the vernaculars being substituted, either optionally or compulsorily, for the classical and modern languages of Europe in the higher parts of the curriculum of secondary schools. Their proper place is outside these schools.”

Mr G C Bliss :- Chairman of the Planters' Association of Ceylon: "As long as young Englishmen of good birth and with public school and University training are ready, as now, to come out to Ceylon and start Government or Mercantile and estate life and the salaries they now do, it must appear a very remote contingency that alteration in the education in schools would lead to Ceylonese being preferred."

Mr. Arthur Alwis:- "The teaching of their (Vernacular) languages in the secondary schools is of no educational value."

BUDDHISTS & HINDU SCHOOLS

Ananda College :

Mr D B Jayatilaka:- "An adequate knowledge of these (vernacular) languages is an absolute necessity to get along successfully in the professions -- the legal, the medical and the clerical."

Dharmaraja College, Kandy:

Mr. K.F. Billimoria, Principal:- "Vernacular languages are really important for the majority of Ceylonese."

Mahinda College Galle:

Mr. F.L. Woodward, Principal:- "My experience of boys who come to me from schools where the vernacular is not taught is that they lack something. They are not real, and seem to belong to neither one people nor the other."

Hindu College, Jaffna:

Mr. G. Shiva Rao, Principal:- "A study of the vernacular will better enable the educated classes to reach the masses and to interpret the West to the East."

Category (a) under the aegis of the colonial regime, walked towards the denationalisation of the anglicisation of their pupils and regarded the national languages as subversive of this two fold object.

Category (b) in spite of official frowns aimed at bridge-building between the children and their pupils culture. In the new set up, the two fold object of category (a) is dangerous and must be immediately given up. On the contrary, what the country needs today is more and more bridgebuildings between education and the people. Therefore the objective of category (b) is entitled to the highest regard of the entire nation.

Nevertheless, vested interests die hard. Yesterday, the die-hards of the Christian minority opposed the study of "Vernacular" languages in English schools; today they are opposing the change over to "Vernacular" languages media beyond the 8th standard. This is the way the Christian minority who now form about 9% of the population are determined to control the

education of the entire nation. Kenya Government may allow that kind of thing to wipe out the language and culture of Kenya Africans in its attempt to expel them from the better parts of their country. But in free Ceylon giving the control of education to a microscopic minority cuts at the very root of democracy.

Of course, the opposition of this minority to the switch over to national language media beyond 8th standard is organised through self-appointed bodies like the Ceylon Head Masters' Conference, The Ceylon Head Mistresses' Association and the Ceylon Educational Association. All these self-appointed bodies have high-sounding names. But the Ceylon Head Masters' Conference represents only 25 schools of which more than two-thirds are Christian Schools; the Ceylon Head Mistresses' Association too represents a similar number of girls' schools and is predominantly Christian; and lastly, the Ceylon Educational Association, a survival of colonial days; representing Christian interests almost exclusively, dead some time ago, but now mysteriously brought back to life - obviously to fight the last battle for exclusive privileges for education in Ceylon. All these three associations appear to follow as their model an exclusive body like the "Colombo Club" bearing a name that is democratic, but in reality an impregnable caste-stronghold a little England, in which "dogs and natives are not allowed."