

OUR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

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At the last Prize Giving of my College I felt it my duty to make certain observations on the state of our society in so far as it affects the education of our youth. As you know, it is usual for a parent to be satisfied, when once he has got his son to attend a school; it is usual for a teacher to be satisfied as long as the parent or the Head Master makes no fuss about his classwork; it is usual for the Head Master to be satisfied as long as he is able to proclaim to the world that his school has obtained so many passes at this examination and so many passes at that; and it is usual for the Government that pays the grant to be satisfied as long as the school returns are in order. All this is routine. Routine is undoubtedly essential for education. Education is surely more than mere routine. It has a purpose; it has many purposes, really. Before this country attained independence, the education provided in our schools was so designed as to enable the child to help the foreign ruler to govern this country in the latter's interest. Now that we have got political freedom, our education has to undergo a rapid reorientation, so as to fit the child for the work of his life in a free land. Such reorientation should be with a view to correcting the existing defects of our society.

The most effective method of correcting the defects of our society and of creating a healthy public opinion which is to sustain a free and stable democracy is education. My public statement pointing out along what lines the reform of our society should proceed has had a mixed reception. I have received a large number of letters from eminent ladies and gentlemen most of whom are strangers to me commending my candid and outspoken views. To them all I am most thankful. I am also thankful to several newspaper editors and numerous correspondents in the press who have had the kindness to comment on my observations. It made no difference to me whether these comments were favourable or unfavourable. They all helped to attract public attention to a matter of vital concern.

It is important to bear in mind that during a period of national enslavement, it is national culture that becomes the first casualty. "No despotism can exist anywhere unless it is able to create about itself a citadel of interest. And the English Government saw in the middle class the possibilities of a bulwark that might be raised round itself for its own protection and English education was imparted with a view to creating this bulwark."

This process of anglicization of Sri Lanka gathered strength from the prevalent educational ideal in England, namely "the training of the poor to poverty, an ... industrious poverty" to preserve the "beautiful order providentially arranged between diverse ranks and positions.

As Mr. Cyril Moore says, "Up to the Second World War the policy behind British education had changed little since the sixties of the previous

century, when they were stated ... by Robert Lower, who was an administrator and Vice-President at that time of the Education Department of H.M. Government. The lower classes ought to be educated to discharge the duties cast upon them. They should also be educated that they may appreciate and defer to a higher cultivation when they meet it, and the higher classes ought to be educated in a very different manner, in order that they may exhibit to the lower classes that higher education to which, if it were shown them, they would bow down."

Ever since the foreign ruler in Ceylon started creating out of our middle class a bulwark for his own protection, there began in this country a long era of the emasculation of our people. Living in bondage to the foreign ruler, they began to despise their own language, literature, history, religion, their own spiritual heritage and turned to England as the Mecca of all their hopes and aspirations. England triumphed and a citadel for England's protection arose in the Middle Classes of Sri Lanka.

Naturally, long before the agitation for political reform began, it is to the deterioration and neglect of national culture that our leaders turned their attention. Listen to what a leader of ours said regarding the western educated natives of the country in 1906. "They have acquired habits and manners that are not of the people, they have become alien to them, their ideals are no more the ideals of the people and their aims are no more the aims of the country. They do not realize their past greatness, but attempt to imitate the west and in this attempt they are wasting their energy, time and wealth.... Government and educational bodies ... have neglected to develop the people in the line of education which will best fit them to love their country and their people and have set too much importance on things western, they have often destroyed the ideals evolved for thousands of years, without being able to put anything in their place, and the present deplorable results may be due to these circumstances." Another leader said in 1907: "Our birds that sing in the morning in mango groves with their thousand notes, do not form any part of our intellectual life. The grass-covered fields, the paddy fields, the mango groves, the flowering... all these things.... do not create in us any intellectual quickening or emotional movement, because from our childhood onwards we have lived apart from these actualities of our life."

During those days, the infiltration of western materialism gave rise to criticism such as this: "Learning, wisdom and truth were the objects of Eastern endeavour. You find the learned man the real monarch.... And the monarchs of the sceptre and the crown, the monarchs who sat on golden and jewelled thrones, they would come down from these thrones and bow at the naked feet of the fakir and the ascetic.

For in the West, wealth has become a disease, and life is becoming vulgarized by the continual pride of gold. In America, most of all, in England also, the amount of a man's wealth has become the mark of his social consideration, and the result is that all society is become vulgarized and coarsened; for the man who has collected gold... the man who has made his

own fortune in the competition of the modern market, that man is rude, he had no culture, he is not highly educated, he has not even ordinary good manners, he is rough and crude and vulgar in his ways, he is coarse in his talk. Yet that is the type of man who is beginning to rule society. These are the money -kings of the West, they are not kings among men in wisdom, and these men are the most highly honoured in Western lands, honoured daily more and more.”

Accordingly, the public agitation for national education preceded the public agitation for political reform.

In India, too the need for the right kind of education provided a powerful stimulus for its struggle for independence. Rev.C.F.Andrews who was for many years an able champion of India’s freedom became convinced that if India would save her culture she simply must become independent and self-ruling. He declared: “Her soul is being lost under the influence of the mechanical and materialistic civilization which British rule fosters, and which it really forces on the Indian people.”

Consequently, one of the main planks of civil disobedience campaign set on foot by Mahatmaji for the attainment of political freedom was the boycott of educational institutions established or aided by the British Government in India. When this boycott movement was at its height, “an aged gentleman put a question to Mahatmaji at a big mass meeting. He asked why Gandhiji wanted the educational institutions to be boycotted when, as a matter of fact, the whole freedom movement was but an outcome of that system. He asked whether it was not a fact that such talented people as Lokamanya Tilak and Gandhiji himself were the products of that system. Mahatmaji countered the question by asking whether it was not a fact that there had been only one talented person like Lokamanya Tilak even though the system of English education had been in existence for many years. He added that if the matter were carefully considered, it would appear that Lokamanya Tilak could stand no comparison in point of talents with the great people who had appeared in our history before. Even if the great Rishis about whom we did not know much were not taken into consideration, yet could it be said that anyone in India under the British rule could be compared in point of his abilities to such giants as Gautama Buddha, Shankara, or even to Tulsidas and Kabirdas who were living only a little time before English rule began in this country? Moreover who could be sure that if Lokamanya Tilak had not had to suffer from the limitations and the burdens of a foreign medium of instruction he would not have proved a much greater man than he actually was? He, therefore, was of the opinion that whatever talents our people had exhibited after receiving English education had been acquired not on account of, but inspite of it”.

We know that these educational institutions of India which were boycotted by the Indian patriots on account of their denationalising influence have their counterparts in Ceylon, Curiously enough, the Ceylon counterparts notwithstanding their efforts to anglicise Ceylon, have been hailed by the Ceylon politician as having produced the heroes of Sri Lanka’s Freedom,

with the result that their denationalising influence goes on unabated and the gulf between them and the life of the people is growing as wide as ever. Consequently, the products of such schools having been cut off from the bulk of their fellow-countrymen generally strive hard to maintain their privileged positions by stressing the superiority of their ways of living and resisting at the same time either openly or surreptitiously all attempts to give to the people's culture its due place in the new order.

John Stuart Mill once declared that in a country governed by a despot, there is only one patriot and that is the despot himself. Who is the patriot in our high society? Obviously our high society is under the influence of the 'mechanical and materialistic civilization' introduced by the foreign ruler and as I said on a previous occasion: "whiskey-drinking, race-going, ball-room dancing, cocktail parties, gambling, adultery, animal-killing, fornication and 'concentrated modernisation' in all its forms" have become the fashion of our high society. So it must be one who conforms to or condones these fashions that can possibly become a patriot in our high society. But if a son of the soil is bold enough to point out the blighting effects of this materialistic way of life and stands up for the roots that bind him to the soil, he is at once ridiculed by the powerful forces arrayed on the side of our high society. Those who have one foot in this country and the other foot in another country naturally resent due recognition being given to our culture. Even new arrivals in our midst are emboldened by this state of things to banish all consideration of decorum and decency and publicly speak disparagingly of our culture.

It is most amazing that while the great patriots of India have been working hard to save their culture from "being lost under the influence of the mechanical and materialistic civilization which British rule fosters, and which it really forces on the people," we find in free Lanka this baneful influence enthroned in all its glory.

The truth is that our high society possesses almost the very same characteristics which the foreigner who ruled this country possessed. The average foreign official always thought of his prestige. He must maintain his prestige whatever else happened. His idea of prestige was that he must lord it over the people, treat them as inferiors, never descend to their level. "He must never allow himself to be criticized, nor must he ever welcome a suggestion from them, for does he not know better about everything than they do? He must show a strong hand in government. He must seldom if ever manifest a kind heart, lest it be taken for weakness. He must let everybody see that he will 'stand no nonsense.' In his conceit and ignorance he really thinks that this attitude of mind and this kind of conduct give him prestige. He may be known to drink whiskey and brandy in his club, and his general character may be shady.

He may be known to be biased in his judgment, and to hold the native in contempt ... he may allow his wife and daughter to ... engage in a perpetual whirl of dances that amaze and shock the people. But apparently it never enters his head that these are the things that undermine his

influence. One cannot but wish that all officials of this kind for their own good, could know what the people think about their questionable personal habits, their “meaningful” plays and dances, their.... festivities, their luxuries and extravagances, their liquor drinking, their exclusive gymkhanas and clubs, their eagerness for hunting, ... killing of animals, for the brutal fun of killing, their cynical disregard for the feelings of the people, their haughty, and arrogant spirit manifested in everything.”

Such are the characteristics of the foreigner that ruled our land. Such are also the characteristics of our high society that have now stepped into his shoes. The reason for the close resemblance is not far to seek. All through the long period of mental sloth and mental servitude under foreign domination, we have been trained to look up to the foreign master as our superior and to think that the be-all and end-all of our very existence is to imitate him “in taste, opinions, morals and intellect” - in all things except in colour. Our spirit has been broken; our power of initiative and our ability to think and act independently has been destroyed and in fear we have been content to live and have our being as spineless imitators of English ways.

The above-mentioned characteristics of the foreign ruler are the results of a materialistic civilization which has only one aim that is the exaltation of the ecstasy of the flesh. Our culture tells us that such an aim makes us more animal than human: our culture “makes money-getting, material gain and physical pleasure secondary, and puts kindness, sympathy, things of the mind, and spirit, and religion first.” Nevertheless our high society despises our culture and is ever in quest of sensual pleasure. As a result our intellectual ability runs to waste. As the Ceylon Observer of 18th April says, “The intellectuals or such as pass for them in this country live in sterile condition and nothing that they produce reflects in any way a feeling of social awareness.” Many brilliant men, with high academic achievement to their credit, having obtained cushy jobs with fat dowries, bid goodbye to their cultural activities and hunt for the pleasures of the sense. Ponder this news item that recently appeared in the local press:- “I was dumbfounded the other day that there are a few people in the University who are out to thwart research work. I overheard someone telling a friend of his how he and a few others had planned to go out for a week on a research tour when one of the big wigs stepped in and pooh poohed the idea and even went to the extent of refusing them permission to leave Colombo - and that, mark you, was during the vacation! ... It is research, not merely lectures, that makes a University.” Sir Gerald Templer, the other day, condemned the frivolity and luxury of European life in Malaya as a cause of discontent among the people and the Daily Mirror remarked, “There’s dynamite in the cocktails.”

Materialistic Civilization

Rene Guenon holds that the word civilization has no more than a century and a half of existence. It was in 1835 that it finally found its way into the dictionary of the Academy. He thinks that the word civilization spread during the XIXth century under the influence of new ideas. The scientific

discoveries, the development of industry, of commerce, of prosperity and of material welfare, had created a kind of enthusiasm and even a kind of prophetic. "In a word, civilization was Europe itself, it was a patent which the European world granted itself." The word 'materialism' was invented by Berkeley, who only used it to design belief in the reality of matter; materialism in its modern sense, that is to say the theory that nothing exists but matter originated later.

It was at this time that the mad rush for the raw materials and markets began and before long nations expanded into empires. Moon in his *Imperialism and World Politics* declares, "After all, if Frenchmen sacrificed blood and treasure to build their empire in Africa, they believed it was to fulfill their 'Mission Civilisatrice' as well as to gain raw materials and markets. Englishmen do not always weigh the 'White Man's Burden' in pounds sterling. President McKinley spoke of civilizing the Filipinos; not of exploiting them." More and more civilizing missions entered the field. And the Japanese once spoken of as yellow monkeys began to be called a civilizing power after they defeated Russia.

Benjamin Kidd writes: "The civilization of the West is yet scarcely more than glorified savagery. What has happened in it is that those who have obtained power have endeavoured ... to found all western institutions on the heredity of the individual efficient in the struggle for his own interests. Taking this inborn heredity coming straight down from the time when the universal effort was for A to kill B before B was able to kill A, those who have prevailed thereby have organised it into what is called civilization. In our international relations ... Western history is synonymous with universal suicide and as the scales fall from our eyes we see our economic systems driven by the same inherent heredity ... and rather the permanent types of this business of war in which men stand continuously facing each other". This materialistic civilization of the West has already brought about two world wars and is ostensibly setting the field for the third world war which will most probably bring humanity into utter ruin.

To avert this Armageddon, mankind has to realise that enslavement of man to matter must cease. Matter must be the servant and not the master of man. This is what Rene Guenon says on the point: If intelligence **ends** in identifying it with the most limited and inferior of all its uses, experimenting upon matter for solely practical purposes; the so-called "intellectual progress" is thus no more, to be accurate, than "material progress" itself. "Actually it never enters the heads of most Westerners of today, that intelligence is anything else; for them it no longer amounts even to reason, but to the lowest part of this reason, to its most elementary functions, to what always remains closely connected with the world of the senses which they have made the one exclusive field of activity. For those who know that there is something else and who persist in giving words their true meaning, there can be no question in our time of "intellectual progress", but on the contrary of decadence, or to be still more accurate, of intellectual ruin: and because there are some lines of development which are incompatible, it is precisely this which is the forfeit paid for "material

progress”, the only progress whose existence during the last centuries is a real fact: it may be called scientific progress if one insists, but only in an extremely limited acceptance of the word, and a progress which is very much more industrial than scientific. Material development and pure intellectuality go in opposite directions; he who sinks himself in the one becomes necessarily further removed from the other.” Rene Guenon adds: “Western science means analysis and dispersion, eastern knowledge means synthesis and concentration. What the Westerners call civilization, the others call barbarity, because it is precisely lacking in the essential, that is to say a principle of a higher order. By what right do Westerners claim to impose on everyone their own likes and dislikes?

Most astonishing of all, they genuinely imagine in their infatuation that they enjoy prestige among all other peoples; because they are dreaded as a brute force is dreaded, they believe themselves to be admired; when a man is in danger of being crushed by an avalanche, does it follow that he is smitten with respect and admiration for it? ... What the Westerners call progress is for Orientals nothing but change and instability.”

Clive Bell in his *Civilization* writes: “An Englishman of any superiority must stand on his own feet, because there is nothing about him on which he could design to learn. He must make his own way, because all public roads lead through intolerably dreary country to intellectual slums and garden suburbs. The life of a first rate Englishman or woman is one long assertion of his or her personality in the face of unsympathetic or actively hostile circumstances. An English boy born with fine sensibility ... or an absolutely first rate intelligence, finds himself from the onset at loggerheads with the world in which he is to live. ... He will be reared, probably, in an atmosphere where all thought that leads to no practical ends is despised. Thus, all his finer feelings will be constantly outraged; and he will live a truculent, shamefaced misfit, with John Bull under his nose and Punch round the corner, till, at some public school, a course of compulsory games and the Arnold tradition either breaks his spirit or makes him a rebel for life.

“... English civilization, or what passes for civilization, is so smug and hypocritical, so grossly Philistine, and at bottom so brutal, that every first rate Englishman necessarily becomes an outlaw”.

“If teachers could somehow make ordinary boys and girls grasp the quite simple fact that, though the world may seem to offer nothing better than a little money and a great deal of work, any one of them can, if he or she will have a life full of downright, delectable pleasures; if teachers could make them realise that the delight of being alone in a bed-sitting room with an alert, well-trained, and well-stocked mind and a book is greater than that of owning yachts and race-horses, and that the thrill of a great picture or a quartet by Mozart is keener (and it is an honest sensualist who says it) than that of the first sip of a glass of champagne; if the teachers could do this, the teachers, I think, would have solved the central problem of humanity.”

So we find that eminent thinkers of the West have revealed the evil effects of their materialistic civilization and the lasting benefits of our spiritual heritage. Therefore is it not high time that we cry halt to our blind imitation of English ways and revise the opinion imposed on us by colonial rule that the be-all and the end- all of our very existence is to imitate the Westerner in everything except colour?

However, after the switch-over from colonial rule to independence, it is natural for the class which constituted a bulwark for the protection of the former to continue to hold power under the new order at least during the transitional stage. This class, in order to retain its prestige, obviously makes every endeavour to get the new regime to acknowledge the superiority of these characteristics which qualified it to become a citadel of the empire builder. The press that caters to its needs, the institutions that train its members, in short all those who stand to benefit by the retention of the status quo are making a desperate effort openly and surreptitiously to impress on the new government how essential it is for its officials to possess the very same characteristics on which the foreign ruler put a premium. Therefore it has come to pass that the whole atmosphere of our public services, of our high society and our schools and the university continue to emphasise the superiority of the foreigner. This is the look of our newly won independence! Naturally the stooges of our colonial regime scorn our culture and defend their foreign characteristics on the ground that they are international, and they ask us to be tolerant towards the vulgarities of high society.

It is well to sound a note of warning to those who carry on a campaign to vilify, caricature and hold up to ridicule those few unselfish workers in our country who reflect public opinion in making an honest effort to obtain due recognition for the culture of the people. We all know how vested interests secured the services of Katherine Mayo to publish a 'best seller' to malign India and demonstrate her unfitness for self-rule. But with what results? Mr. R. Donald, sometime editor of the London Daily Chronicle has shown how the press has been commercialized on a gigantic scale and how an effect of this change has been to "place enormous power to sway public opinion in the hands of a few people". He has also shown that under the old system the proprietor "preferred less profit to compromise with principle" but under the new the culminating aim is necessarily the payment of dividends. "Dividends", said Donald, "must be earned even if principle is to suffer in the process." Let us hope that under all circumstances our press will support the democratic way of life by respecting public opinion.

Let me recall a passage of that eminent Englishman, Professor Gilbert Murray, in which he lashed the traducers like Rudyard Kipling, "If ever it were my fate to put men in prison for the books they write, I should not like it, but I should know where to begin. I should first of all lock up my old friend, Rudyard Kipling, because in several stories he has used his great powers to stir up in the minds of hundreds of thousands of Englishmen a blind and savage contempt for the Bengali and year after year they have found in our newspapers caricatures of themselves - representing them as

ridiculous cowardly, vain, untruthful, in every way absurd... held up for the amusement of the public. Now this is not fair play, and it is not decent. This incessant girding.... has an ugly look. It goes along with irritating hostility” to the cause they represent.

A recent correspondent under the pseudonym ‘World Citizen’ says that when he hears of ‘national’ culture he feels “a certain sympathy with Goering’s saying, ‘when I hear the word Culture, I reach for my revolver’”. This is dogmatic thinking and it reveals a mentality that is surely alien to world citizenship. It must be remembered that true world citizenship or internationalism is very different from “a colourless cosmopolitanism”. “For culture, like charity, begins at home, and the educationalist, no less than the statesman, must subscribe to those profound words: “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ, as it were) of public affections. It is the first in the series by which we proceed towards a love of our country and of mankind.” Brandford in Janus and Vesta rightly says, “A world citizen, whether man or woman, must be first a devoted member of the family, a good citizen in the life of the town and region, an ardent patriot, a cultured member of the Western or Eastern institutions woven into the particular civilization in which he or she is born.”

“There is no point of the unending spiral of inter-relations, vast and continually increasing, at which one can stop and say this is the one vital element, neither individual nor family, nor city, nor region, nor state, nor race, nor past nor present, nor future. To defy any element of the great circle - binding individual to family, family to state, state to humanity, the dead to the living, the living to the unborn babe - is to fall into the sin of ancient idolatry with the inevitable Nemesis thereof.”

Tolerance is certainly the high watermark of our culture. Mankind that have stood aghast at religious persecutions, the burning of scientists as heretics, the tyranny of colonialism and of slave trade, lynch law, apartheid, communal or racial fanaticisms, concentration camps and iron curtains will probably find our tolerance a pattern for all nations. A typical illustration of this national trait of ours was given by Dr. Malalasekera in a recent address. He said: “When the Catholic Portuguese persecuted the Muslims it was the Buddhist Sinhalese who protected them and later when the Protestant Dutch in turn persecuted the Catholic priests, it was the Sinhalese Buddhists kings that gave them sanctuary, allowing them complete freedom of worship and even freedom to preach in the Palace. Wahacotte is but one example of the unbounded tolerance of the Buddhists.”

Of course, we have to follow the Golden Mean. We must avoid the extreme even of tolerance, otherwise it will degenerate into lassitude or apathy.

Those who defend the vulgarities of our high society declare that our culture is neither pure nor exclusively spiritual. It is true that our culture has borrowed from other cultures just as our language has borrowed from other languages. But what it has borrowed, it has assimilated and yet it

remains distinctive. Again our culture is not exclusively spiritual. But its outstanding characteristic is spiritual, just as the outstanding characteristic of Western civilization is materialist. According to Rene Guenon, Benjamin Kidd and Aldous Huxley, whom I have quoted, western civilization has been so predominantly materialistic that “contemporary science in the hands of contemporary men and women is engaged in destroying not only things and lives, but entire patterns of civilization.” And Clive Bell observes that the best persons are regarded as outlaws of materialistic society in his country.

It is argued by the supporters of the vulgarities of our high society that notwithstanding our spiritual heritage, such vices for instance as drunkenness and sexual licence have been old habits. But it must be clearly understood that drunkenness has always been against public sentiment in this country and it is the foreign official that “set everywhere the fashion of drinking, by using, as most of them do on their own tables, and especially by furnishing it lavishly and with display.” It is significant that last Sunday C.Rajagopalachari Chief Minister of Madras referring to Prohibition said that bringing back liquor was like calling back the Britisher to rule over them again. Sex habit has now taken a new turn. Particularly since the last world war sexual licence is commended and accepted in high society, which even justifies it by giving a name, self-expression. “The woman who ‘sins’ because of economic necessity is being driven out of business by the amateur intent on indulging her cravings while preserving her conscience.” Let us hope that our society will not tolerate the new American fashion described by Lipton Sinclair in one of his novels: He writes: “This ‘petting’ was a daily necessity for her, and a girl could not get it unless she was willing to ‘go the limit’. That was the etiquette prevailing in this smart and dashing crowd; the rich high school youths would go out hunting in pairs in their fancy sports cars, and would pick up girls and drive them, and if the girls did not play the game according to their taste, they would turn them out on the road anywhere, a score of miles from a town. There was formula, short and snappy, ‘Pet or Walk!’”

It is well to remember that, “the irresponsibility in marriage that marked the hey-day of Roman luxury and the beginning of her slide down was outrageous. The wedding is recorded of a man who was taking his twenty-third wife and a woman her twenty first husband. Marriages were contracted, annulled, and contracted again as if it were a matter of exchanging furniture. The thinkers among her people warned Rome about her spiritual thinness..... but the multitude did not listen to the still small voice and the grandeur that was Rome became extinct (vide Kalki)

Now listen to what Somerset Maugham says regarding sex-life. This is the dialogue that the American hero of his book, *Razor’s Edge*, Larry, had with a friend after his close contact with our culture:

“What are your plans now?”

“I’ve got a job of work to finish here and then I shall go back to America.”

“What to do?”

“Live”.

“How?”

He answered very coolly, but with an impish twinkle in his eyes, for he knew very well how little I expected such a reply.

“With calmness, forbearance, compassion, selflessness and continence.”

“A tall order,” I said. “And why continence?”

“I know by personal experience that in nothing are the wise men of India more dead right than in their contention that chastity intensely enhances the power of the spirit.”

“I should have thought that wisdom consisted in striking a balance between the claims of the body and the claims of the spirit.”

“That is just what the Indians maintain that we in the West haven’t done. They think that we in our countless inventions, with our factories and machines and all they produce, have sought happiness in material things, but that happiness rests not in them, but in spiritual things. And they think the way we have chosen leads to destruction.”

I am inclined to think that the existing sexual licence in this country if allowed to go on unchecked will put an end to all that is good in Sri Lanka. Always remember that it was the Westerner who introduced syphilis to this country. Therefore beware of Western materialism.

Although the move to give due recognition to our national culture has been opposed by those who feel that they are without roots or their roots bind them to a world very different from that which surrounds them, it is most encouraging to find that both our former Prime Minister and our new Prime Minister have publicly supported this move. The late Mr. D S Senanayake said, “One of the precious gifts that Independence can confer on us is the freedom to develop our own cultural traditions and to make our distinctive contribution to world culture. It is a mark of the renewed vitality of the Ceylonese nation that, with the attainment of political freedom, there has arisen a genuine desire to preserve and foster our national arts..... At a time when religious and moral values are threatened by the forces of irreligion and materialism, these communicate a message which is at the centre of our ancient spiritual tradition, embodying as it does the value of sacrifice and non-attachment to worldly things.”

Our new Prime Minister said on one occasion, “The culture of the people is enshrined in the national languages - Sinhalese and Tamil. It is only in these languages our genius can be expressed.” On another occasion he said that “for four centuries three powerful foreign nations had successively held dominion over Ceylon but the people had protected and preserved their

religion.

The materialistic west had no doubt advanced far in economic and scientific progress, and had even manufactured atom bombs. Spiritually those countries remained backward. Ceylon must cherish the heritage of our culture which was dominated by religion and matters of the spirit. There was much in that direction that she could give to the world."

It is also heartening to find that the Ceylon Daily News of 21st March 1952 refers to the religion on which our culture is based as one "which has been universally esteemed for its spirit of tolerance, humanity and non-violence."

Our cultural renaissance is seriously handicapped by perhaps the greatest national calamity, brought about by foreign rule in Ceylon, the existence of hot-houses, foreign islands and ever-widening gulfs between one section of society and another. They inhabit the same land, belong to the same nation, but live in water-tight compartments.

The unwisdom of such exclusiveness in a free democracy has not been brought home to the people concerned, probably because the change-over to the new order has been too sudden for the isolationists to replace their isolation by mutual trust and fellowship.

Far from closing the gulfs that separate the people, our educational system appears to create more inequalities. An independent observer like Dr. E.R. Wyeth said last month: "As a result of educational policies over many years the educational policies for a few privileged children in Ceylon are infinitely better than those for the vast majority - and crowning all, for the few, is the vast undertaking at Peradeniya."

While there are a few who enjoy the benefits of the best schools, one may find almost complete indifference to the needs of the rest and among the latter there are frustration and apathy."

Our educational system which permits 'the benefits of the best schools' to a few and shows 'almost complete indifference to the needs of the rest' undoubtedly reflects the desire of our high society to perpetuate the social divisions for the purpose of retaining their power and prestige. Those who adhere to the belief that education unfits one for a life of labour still exert influence on our policy-makers. There is still manoeuvring and wire pulling to secure important jobs for those who possess the characteristics of the foreigner and belittle the culture of the people. And subtle devices are adopted to shut out those who respect national culture. In certain cases applications must set out the place of birth both of the candidate and of his father. Or at interviews, questions are sometimes asked to elicit the desired information.

During this month, an interesting news item on racial bias in England appeared in the Ceylon Observer "Dr. Landes, formerly of Columbia University said it had taken her months to fathom the underlying problems until she realised that there were no ... 'coloured people' in Britain. The

British, she added, did not think that way. They thought of men from Jamaica, from the Gold Coast, from Barbados.”

In the same way, designing individuals in Ceylon attach sinister importance to the village a man comes from to find out whether he belongs to the charmed circle. And thereby hangs a tale!

I think that every attempt to maintain the existing social divisions is deplorable.

According to Dr. Mc Dougall, a nation can have real progress only through self-knowledge. He says: “Each of the great nations is beginning to understand itself, and to take thought for tomorrow in the light of this self-knowledge; this increase of national self-knowledge, this enrichment of national self-consciousness, is the great new factor which alone can secure the further progress of mankind.”

We cannot imagine that national self-knowledge or national self-consciousness will come into being in ‘hot houses’ because they make endeavour to maintain their ‘splendid isolation’ from the people on all sorts of pretexts.

To them I commend what H.B. Smith says in his Nation’s Schools: “We are one nation, because we live together and share common interests. In order that we may be truly one we must be able to understand each other, we must have a common interest in the nation’s material civilization and social order, share a national culture and recognise in some sort the same ultimate ideals.

“That interest owes its compelling force to the fact that our national life, with whatever imperfections embodies ideals...., and makes their achievement possible in our own lives and in the lives of those about us.”

The ultimate ideals constitute the vital elements of our national culture we have already set out. “Each nation and each people must work out its own salvation on its own special lines, learning indeed from others, but remaining true to its own character and making its particular contribution to the welfare of the world.”

Tagore considered mutual trust and fellowship among the people to be the most pressing need. Once he said: “Our real problem in India is not political. It is social. From the earliest beginning of history India has had her own problem constantly before her - it is the race problem. Each nation must be conscious of its mission, and we in India must realise that we cut a poor figure when we are trying to be political, simply because we have not yet been finally able to accomplish what was set before us by our providence. In spite of our great difficulty, however, India has done something. She has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek for some basis of unity. This basis, has come through our saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitnaya and others.

In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. What India has been, the whole world is now..... If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity.” This is Tagore’s Prayer for India:

*What is my longing, my dream, my prayer for my country,
my beloved India?
I dream of her, I fervently pray for her,
That she may no longer be in Bondage to Strangers;
But that she may be free!
Free to follow her own High Ideals;
Free to accomplish her own important mission in the World;*

The child’s interest in his country is rooted in a faith in the ultimate ideals of his nation so that he comes to feel that he is a citizen, not only of the country as it is but also of the country as it should be.

So that, as Professor Dover Wilson says, “One of the main functions of education must always be to link up each rising generation with the national life, to enrich the minds of the coming race with those national memories which we call history and with that highest expression of the national spirit which we call literature, in short, to hand on the accumulated experience and tradition of the race to its sons and daughters. It is indeed only by so doing that the nation can be preserved, since in the words of Renan: ‘A nation is a living soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is the past, the other is the present. One is the common possession of a rich heritage of memories; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to preserve worthily the undivided inheritance which has been handed down. Citizenship is not a subject, any more than ‘character’, ‘devotion’ or ‘love of truth’. It is a spiritual principle, an atmosphere which must pervade all our teaching, inform all our educational plans”. Now that we have fostered a spiritual heritage in the midst of a materialistic and mechanical civilization - a culture that “makes money-getting, material gain and physical pleasure secondary, and puts kindness, sympathy, things of the mind and spirit and religion first - a culture that stresses tolerance, humanity and non-violence, whose dynamism has withstood the ravages of time, there can be no doubt that it has a value not only to ourselves but also to the whole of mankind.

This becomes apparent to us when we look around us and see what the modern trends are like. Then, we are forced to the conclusion that by means of our cultural traditions we can, in the words of our late Prime Minister, “make our distinctive contribution to world culture.”

What are the modern trends? Let us take Aldous Huxley as a representative thinker. In one of his latest works, he writes: “People love their egos and don’t wish to mortify them, don’t wish to see why they shouldn’t express their personalities’ and ‘have a good time’. They get their good times; but

also and inevitably they get wars and syphilis and revolution and alcoholism, tyranny and the choice between some lunatic idolatry and a sense of complete futility and despair. Unutterable miseries! Huxley thinks that the more there is of I, me, mine, the less there is of the right attitude to life." Does not our traditional attitude to life adequately respond to this view?

"Since I was born, about fifty millions of Europeans and God knows how many Asiatics have been liquidated in wars and revolutions. Why? In order that the great-great-grandchildren of those who are now being butchered or starved to death may have an absolutely wonderful time in A.D.2043. And choosing, according to taste or political opinion, from among the Wellsian, Marxian, Capitalistic or Fascist blueprints we solemnly proceed to visualize the sort of wonderful time those lucky beggars are going to have. Just as our Victorian great-great-grandfathers visualized the sort of wonderful time **we** were going to have in the middle years of the twentieth century."

"True religion concerns itself with givenness of the time-less ..."

"What have been the consequences of our recent shift of attention from Past to Future? An intellectual progress from the Garden of Eden to Utopia; a moral and political advance from compulsory orthodoxy and the divine right of kings to conscription for everybody, the infallibility of the local boss and the apotheosis of the state. Before or behind, time can never be worshipped with impunity."

"And it is only by deliberately paying our attention and our primary allegiance to eternity that we can prevent time from turning our lives into a pointless or diabolic foolery. In politics we have so firm a faith in the manifestly unknowable future that we are prepared to sacrifice millions of lives to an opium smoker's dream of Utopia or world dominion or perpetual security. But where natural resources are concerned, we sacrifice a pretty accurately predictable future to present greed. We know, for example, that if we abuse the soil it will lose its fertility; that if we massacre the forests our children will lack timber and see their uplands eroded, their valleys swept by floods. In a word we immolate the present to the future in those complex human affairs where foresight is impossible; but in the relatively simple affairs of nature, where we know quite well what is likely to happen we immolate the future to the present. Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad".

"For four and a half centuries white Europeans have been busily engaged in attacking, oppressing and exploiting the coloured peoples inhabiting the rest of the world. The Catholic Spaniards and Portuguese began it; then came Protestant Dutch and Englishmen, Catholic French, Greek Orthodox Russians, Lutheran Germans, Catholic Belgians. Trade and the Flag, exploitation and oppression have always and everywhere followed or accompanied the proselytizing Cross".

"Victims have long memories- a fact which oppressors can never understand. In their magnanimity they forget the ankle they twisted while

stamping on the other fellow's face, and are genuinely astonished when he refuses to shake the hand that flogged him and manifests no eagerness to go and get baptized.... Industrial man - a sentient reciprocating engine having a fluctuating output, coupled to an iron wheel revolving with uniform velocity. And then we wonder why this should be the golden age of revolution and mental derangement”.

“Democracy is being able to say no to the boss, and you can't say no to the boss unless you have enough property to enable you to eat when you have lost the boss's patronage.”

Huxley considers that as indispensable conditions of peace there should be the Tao a Way of compassion and the Dharma a Law of self-transcending awareness.

“Ours is the age, not of any poet or thinker or any novelist, but of the Document. Our Representative Man is the travelling newspaper correspondent, who dashes off a best seller between two assignments. ‘Facts speak for themselves’ Illusion! Facts are ventriloquists' dummies. Sitting on a wise man's knee they may be made to utter words of wisdom; elsewhere, say nothing, or talk nonsense, or indulge in sheer diabolism.”

In describing the Way of compassion Huxley writes, “Suffering may and often does produce a kind of emotional uplift and a temporary increase in courage, tolerance, patience and altruism. But if the pressure is removed, there's an immediate return to normal conditions of unregeneracy. For a short time, a blitz engenders sentiments of universal brotherliness; but as for permanent transformation and improvement - that occurs only exceptionally. Most of the people I know have come back from battle unchanged; a fair number are worse than they were; and a few - men with an adequate philosophy and a desire to act upon it are better”.

Buddhist writers distinguish between compassion and Great Compassion - “pity in the raw, as a mere visceral and emotional disturbance, and pity informed by principle, enlightened by insight into the nature of the world aware of the causes of suffering and the only remedy ... Action depends on thought, and thought, to a large extent, depends on vocabulary. Based on the jargons of economics, psychology, and sentimental ..., the vocabulary in terms of which we think nowadays about man's nature and destiny is about the worst...” Does not this opinion forestall the middle way or the Noble Eightfold Path?

If have set forth a brief summary of the modern trends of world's thought towards which we are in a position to make a distinctive contribution. The measure of our success is the measure of our ability to live up to our own culture. In our attempt to do so, we find ourselves between two dangers. First, there is the tyranny of social division which subverts mutual understanding and mutual trust so necessary for our unity and fellowship. Second, there are theories of hatred bandied about to sow dissension and discord where we should cultivate love and goodwill. Let us hope that we

shall steer clear of both these dangers. Let us rejoice that our country is called Dhammadipa and at the same time endeavour to make it worthy of the name. The formation of the World Fellowship of Buddhists is a move in the right direction.