

## **PSEUDO - NATIONALISTS!**

**By L. H. Mettananda**

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There is a definite place for insults in the colonial armoury. One of the most harmful effects of foreign domination is the change of character that comes over the ruler and the ruled alike. The foreign masters get transformed “gradually and to a considerable degree, unconsciously, but almost certainly, into tyrants, into men less refined, less truly gentlemen, less sympathetic with suffering, more tolerant of injustice and wrong, distinctly coarser and harder in their moral nature, than when they left England”, and invariably treat the people of the country as distinctly inferior, no matter how intelligent they may be, of how high character they may be.

We have heard of English officials kicking eminent personages of the subject race out of railway compartments, horse whipping servants unmercifully, roaring at respectable residents with such offensive words as “Get out! You black dog!”, and shooting when occasion arises, at unarmed natives to teach them a lesson that they would not forget. And all this with impunity, for the watchdogs of the law are on the side of White Sahibs.

It is remarkable that the foreign ruler has always endeavoured to keep up his assumed superiority, his prestige, by pouring ridicule and contempt upon the subject people, their habits, customs and institutions. To the White sahib, native manners, native music, native dress, native quarters, native religion, native history, native medicine, native language, native literature, are all crude, barbarous or primitive: and he uses the word “native” itself as a term of reproach.

That native ways must go and one hundred per cent of the population must be English-speaking and be able to read the London Times is the burden of the Imperial song. And the colonial ruler justifies his insolent attitude towards the people of the country on the grounds that he is on a mission to bear the white-man’s burden, to serve the “lesser breed without the law” and “new-caught sullen peoples half-devil and half-child.”

Who will be bold enough to challenge this “aggressive altruism” of the empire-builder? It must be said to the lasting credit of the Bengalis that they were the first to do so. They threw down the gauntlet and threatened to attain equality with the foreign masters themselves. Soon they became the target of bitter attacks by men like Rudyard Kipling and the insulting phrase “Bengali Babu” was hurled at them. “Year after year they have found in our newspapers (like Punch) caricatures of themselves representing them as ridiculous babus, cowardly, vain, untruthful, in every way absurd, talking bad and bombastic English, held up for the amusement of the public.

The wrong done to the Bengalis was resented by better English like Professor Gilbert Murray of Oxford University. Said Professor Murray: “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 many Bengalis naturally have read these stories. You cannot cherish a savage contempt for one without its being quickly reciprocated. And when both sides regard each other with the same savage contempt, it is not likely that they can dwell together in peace. And in case Mr. Kipling should feel lonely in his cell, I would send him a delightful companion, Mr. Anstey of Punch."

Be it noted that Bengal, insulted and humiliated, produced men like Tagore, the poet, C.R.Das, the statesman, Aurobindo Ghose, the saint, R.C.Dutt, the economist, Surendranath Banerje the orator, J.C. Bose, the biologist and R.C. Ray, the physicist.

As time went on the evil designs of the empire were getting thoroughly exposed. Consequently, more and more abuse was heaped on those responsible for the new turn of events. When the Indian problem reached a critical stage after the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, no less a person than the present Prime Minister of England, Winston Churchill, wrote of: "the nauseating and humiliating spectacle of this one time Inner Temple Lawyer, now a seditious fakir, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceroy's palace, there to negotiate and parley on equal terms with the representative of their King Emperor." Coming nearer home, Anagarika Dharmapala, the religious and social reformer, was lampooned as a sedition-monger and temperance workers were suspect as traitors.

At last, India became free from the shackles of empire. The freedom she won was Purna Swaraj, complete in all respects. So much so that those who loyally served the colonial ruler in opposition to the national cause "begged forgiveness for their past mistakes" and asked for "trust and friendship" of independent India.

But it is most regrettable that their counterparts in free Lanka have shown themselves to be of a different calibre. Their speeches and actions since the attainment of freedom have given the impression that they are trying hard to defend the citadels of the colonial regime against any inroads by the people of the country. They appear to treat our heritage as a mockery; our history as in ruins; our music as crude; our literature as uneducational; our medical system as obsolete; our religion as dead; our people as primitive; and our language as fit only for ayahs and cook-appus.

They appear to reproduce their imperial master's voice, and most dexterously employ the colonial technique in the new set-up. They appear to have taken full advantage of the peculiar circumstances under which our freedom came to be granted to us, in order to consolidate their gains under colonial rule. In so doing, they have been openly aided and abetted by surviving members of the ruling class, and all sorts of accomplices including even powerful foreign interests.

They fire their guns at those who want education in Ceylon progressively to conform to the principle laid down by the UNESCO Language Seminar (vide U.N. Weekly Newsletter No.22 dated 22 Sept. 1953) that on both educational grounds and in the interests of the cultural enrichment of the world, the medium of instruction in all countries and at all levels should be the mother tongue, and that it was essential that the means be found to make this possible. They call the champions of Swabhasa “pseudo-nationalists”.

Who are “genuine” nationalists? I ask.

Are “genuine” nationalists those who will not touch Swabhasa even with a barge-pole, simply because at the night-club they can order whiskey in English; at the ball-room they can speak to the partner in English; at the race-course they can punt in English; at the Office-desk they can issue instructions even to the peon in English; and lastly on reaching “home” to live in retirement they can earn high praise because of their English.

However, the crux of the problem is what is **genuine** freedom? Let Dr. Radhakrishnan answer: “Like everything else, freedom is won within and not given from without. The country we love is not a geographical area but a **spiritual possession**. Until we identify ourselves with it through our mind, heart and will, wisdom, love and service, sanity, sweetness and strength, our country is bound to be in its present intolerable situation. The forces we have to contend against are within us and must be stamped out.”