

SINHALESE AS THE ONLY STATE LANGUAGE OF CEYLON

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Apropos the problems of independence, the Editors of the Year Book of Education 1949 observed: "The development of modern industry, the effective harnessing of science to the production of material goods, presupposes active and efficient administration and government. The latter cannot be established unless a high degree of harmony exists in the society served. Language barriers are an obstacle, nationalism a help, to the achieving of unity within the State". In India, "as the national struggle gathered force the desire for the adoption of an Indian language as the means of inter-provincial intercourse, of administration and of higher education gained in strength and volume". On the attainment of independence India adopted Hindi as the most effectual means of integration.

To achieve unity within the state, large countries such as England, France, U.S.S.R, Germany, Japan, China and the U.S.A. have employed only one state language. So have smaller countries like Sweden, Holland, Turkey, Iran and Siam. Likewise, newly-freed countries, on the attainment of independence have proclaimed only one language as their state language. India, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, Israel and Ireland have proclaimed Hindi, Burmese, Bahasa Indonesia, Tagalog, Hebrew and Irish as their respective state languages.

It is a matter of mathematical fact that the population originally speaking the state language in each of these newly-freed countries was much less in proportion than the population of Ceylon speaking the Sinhalese language. For instance--

- In India, Hindi is spoken only by 48% of the population (latest Census)
- In Burma, Burmese is spoken only by 70% of the population (UNESCO monograph on Vernacular languages, 1953)
- In Philippines, Tagalog is spoken only by 30% of the population (latest Census)
- In Indonesia, Bahasa Indonesia is spoken by only 5% of the population

In 1949, Israel's Hebrew-speaking population was only 7 lakhs, while when Ireland achieved freedom, her Irish-speaking population was only 12,460 out of a total of millions. Whereas, in Ceylon, no less than 82% of the population speak Sinhalese!

It is indeed astonishing that, after seven years of "freedom", Ceylon has not yet thought fit to do what all newly-freed countries have done for the achieving of unity within the state. In effect, instead of unity, we constantly observe the interplay of fissiparous tendencies threatening to break up our society into water-tight compartments. We cannot therefore, help remarking that we have yet to extricate ourselves from the chains that in colonial days bound us to foreign and vested interest.

While 92% of the total population of Ceylon feel themselves "to be disinherited, to be living and working outside the pale of privilege and opportunity", a microscopic

minority adopt all manner of ruses to keep such privilege and opportunity exclusively and perpetually to themselves. They raise a hue and cry that the Sinhalese language, spoken by 82% of the people and the Tamil language spoken by only 12% should both be made State languages.

Their ostensible object is to secure parity of status for the Tamil language, but their real object is something quite different. They want a minority community to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. Their sinister design is to retain English and English alone as the official language of Ceylon forever. Behind their demand are powerful vested interests, religious commercial and political, having strong overseas connections.

The question at issue therefore is whether the anaemic survivals of a bygone empire be allowed to rule the destinies of a nation, or whether 92% of the population be given equality of opportunity.

Deliberate blindness to facts inspires little confidence in anyone's argument. The plain and simple fact is that all free countries (including all newly-freed countries) have, in addition to the one state language, one or more minority languages each, as the following table makes clear:

COUNTRY	STATE LANGUAGE	OTHER LANGUAGES
Large Countries:		
Gt. Britain	English	Welsh, Gaelic
France	French	Alsation, Breton, Provincial, Catalan
U.S.S.R.	Russian	100 major languages
Germany	German	Frisian, Wind, Lithuanian
Japan	Japanese	Bungotai, Sorobun, Kambun
China	Chinese	Tibetan, Altaic, Indo-European & Austro- Asiatic languages
U.S.A.	English	Diverse mother-tongues supplanted by English.
Smaller Countries:		
Sweden	Swedish	Lapp
Holland	Dutch	Frisian
Turkey	Turkish	Persian, Arabic, Armenian
Iran	Persian	Turkish, Pushtu, Arabic, Armenian
Thailand	Thai	Malay, Chinese
(c) Newly-freed Countries:		
India	Hindi	13 major languages
Burma	Burmese	120 languages
Indonesia	Bahasa Indonesia	200 languages

Philippines	Tagalog	9 major languages
Israel	Hebrew	Diverse mother-tongues supplanted by Hebrew
Ireland	Irish	English

All these countries adhere to the first principle of democracy as laid down by Thomas Jefferson that “the *lex majoris fortis* (the will of the majority) is the fundamental law of every society of **individuals of equal rights**”. (Our emphasis).

The problem of safeguarding minority claims came into prominence at the conclusion of World War I and received the earnest consideration of the League of Nations on the basis of the principle of self-determination promulgated by President Wilson. In particular, it affected countries such as Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia and Greece; with respect to these countries the problem was raised in a most acute form. The Treaty of Versailles and the Treaties of St. German-en-Laye and Trianon provided for the protection of minorities, and the articles concerning these minorities were almost identical in all treaties,

Article 9 of the treaty with Poland states: “Poland will provide in the public educational system in towns and districts in which a considerable portion of Polish nationals of other than Polish speech are resident, adequate facilities for ensuring that in the primary schools the instruction be given to the children of such Polish nationals through the medium of their own language. This provision shall not prevent the Polish Government from making the teaching of Polish language obligatory in the said schools.... those minorities shall be assured an equitable share in... the application of the sums under the State, Municipal or other budget for educational or charitable purposes.....” (*Versailles, June 28th., 1919*)

These principles were most effectively applied among others by Czechoslovakia. By the law of April 3rd., 1919, in areas where there were, on a triennial average, at least 40 eligible children of a national minority, the Czechoslovak government established a public elementary school for them in their language, and in areas where there were at least 400 children of a national minority, a public central school in their language. All these schools were administered by the local authorities irrespective of their nationality, and in all these schools the language of the majority was compulsory.

Then there is the question of “dispersed minorities”. They arise only as a result of colonization or migration. Czechoslovak law denies these immigrants public schools in their mother tongue and compels them to send their children to the majority’s schools. According to Dr. N.A. Hans, Professor of Comparative Education, University of London, immigrants have to be compelled to educate their children in the majority’s schools for the very good reason that the majority have the right to preserve the national character of their native land. It is well known that the uncontrolled influx of new-comers converted or threatened to convert the national majorities in Vilna (the capital of Lithuania), Warsaw (Poland) and New York (U.S.A.) into minorities and the minorities into majorities. The only remedy in such cases is for the majority to compel the minority to learn its language. Were it not for the fact that the U.S.A. adopted one language as its official language and

compelled the attendance of all immigrants at English schools, there would not be an English-speaking “United States” today, but several states with different official languages. Similarly, the U.S.S.R. enforces the teaching of Russian in all schools, whatever their medium of instruction. Another case in point is Manitoba, in Canada, where immigrants of different nationalities. Ukrainians, Poles, French and Germans could at one time teach their children in their respective mother tongues. In 1916, this was stopped, and all immigrants now have to have their children taught in English.

The champions of two official languages for Ceylon attempt to side-track the real issue by quoting the precedent of such bilingual countries as Switzerland, Belgium, Canada and South Africa. Yet the most casual consideration will suffice to make it clear that the circumstances under which these countries came to have more than one official language do not apply at all to Ceylon.

Switzerland “In Switzerland, the federated cantons were quite independent in educational matters... As the linguistic frontiers coincide more or less with the borders of cantons, there is, in practice, no question of a national minority, the French cantons having French schools, the German their own, and the Canton Tessin Italian. “(Hans). As each language covers a specific territory, there is no need for bilingual schools. H.G. Wells considers the Swiss Confederation to be a temporary arrangement by people of dissimilar languages and faiths for the purpose of mutual defence. He believes that “when the Great Power tradition” which gave rise to it is certainly dead and buried, their Swiss populations may gravitate towards their natural affinities in Germany, France and Italy”.

Belgium: Being a buffer state between two great political antagonists, Belgium has become the cockpit of Europe. Its frontiers have often entered into “the bargaining and inter-play of tsars and Kings and foreign offices”. L.W. Lyde, Professor of Economic Geography, University of London has rightly said: “Belgium is an area of geographic, as well as of political transition... Its peoples and language are equally transitional. Frequent wars have had their repercussions on the linguistic frontiers. According to these frontiers, a new delimitation of provincial boundaries is needed. If and when such a delimitation occurs, there will be no necessity for bilingual schools”.

Canada: The clash between Britain and France over their American possessions came to an end with the capitulation of Quebec. The English-speaking colonies, together with French-speaking Quebec formed the Union of Canada, making English and French both official languages. But as the two nationalities are each connected with specific territory, no real need for bilingual schools exists.

South Africa: South Africa is a union brought into being at the end of the Boer War by British and Dutch colonists, for the mutual benefit of the belligerents, the common objective being the exploitation of the rich natural resources of the territory through the use of the cheap labour provided by the vast native population. By no stretch of the liberal imagination can South Africa be regarded as a democracy. It is essentially a slave-state whose existence will terminate with the emergence as a free nation of the native populace. At present, English and Afrikaans (the language of the Dutch settlers) are both official languages. However,

of the four colonies which comprise the Union, Natal is predominantly British and the Orange Free State Afrikaners. The two remaining colonies, Cape Colony and Transvaal have mixed populations and have therefore become bilingual.

It will now be apparent that the four bilingual states cited by the proponents of two official languages for Ceylon in support of their case are all transitional states whose conditions are entirely different from those obtaining here. That being the case, they can by no means serve to settle the language question which confronts our country.

Ceylon is decidedly a single natural unit. The population that speaks the majority's language is far greater in proportion than the population that speaks the state language in any of the other newly-freed countries. Prior to the British occupation of Ceylon, Sinhalese served as the island's official language for over two thousand years, and despite all attempts by the colonial overlords and their camp-followers to wipe it out, it continues to be spoken today by 82% of the population. The repository of an age long national inheritance, Sinhalese is also a living language which is fast being enriched with the thoughts and feelings of the new age. Its record and achievement cannot easily be matched.

But these considerations matter little to the darlings of the British imperial regime. The **divide et impera** policy favoured by the colonial ruler put these within the ranks of privilege and opportunity. In effect they became the first line of defence for the colonial ruler. We see the results today. The Tamil-speaking section fills 70 to 90% of offices in the Public Services. The control of education is still in the hands of a powerful minority; the only University in Ceylon is dominated by Christian missionaries. Most of its such as Science and Engineering, and many Departments such as Veterinary Science and are controlled by minority interests. At the last University Preliminary Examinations, the Sinhalese-speaking students selected for the Faculties of Science, Medicine and Engineering was 142, while the number of Tamil-speaking students selected for the same Faculties was 145.

In brief, under minority control, our educational and administrative systems have become topsy-turvy.

The privileged minority fights hard to preserve and sanctify this topsy-turvydom. "It is the nature of privilege and tyranny" says R.H.Tawney, "to be unconscious of themselves". To strengthen and consolidate their exclusive privileges is the sole object of the happy few. For this purpose, they wish to preserve English alone as the state language of Ceylon. But they dare not say so. They pose as friends of the national minority and advocate parity of status for both Sinhalese and Tamil as State languages.

In this matter of a State language, we would do well to remember the commonplace that the nation is greater than party, faction or individual, however powerful these latter may be. To achieve national harmony, we must be governed by the highest possible principles. These principles, as far as they are known today, are those embodied in the aforesaid national treaties concerning the relative claims of national majorities and minorities. The claims of the national minority must be met by the provision, in suitable areas, of schools in the language of that minority, while the claims of the national majority must be met by making their

language compulsory in the schools of the minority. To implement this principle in Ceylon, Sinhalese should be made compulsory in all schools provided for Ceylon Tamils.

Secondly, education of immigrants should be in the language of the majority. This can be implemented by making Sinhalese the educational medium for the children of immigrants. This principle finds expression in that clause of the Nehru-Kotelawela Pact which stipulates that Indian immigrants should know the language of the area.

Finally, the majority, have the right to preserve the national character of their native land. To implement this principle, Sinhalese, and Sinhalese alone, should be made the State Language of Ceylon.