

WHY DO WE NEED ENGLISH? - MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES COMMISSION

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There are three possible aims:

- (1) Renationalisation
- (2) To Impart English culture;
- (3) To impart knowledge in the field of exact science, technology and fact.

The first aim is to make our population 100 per cent English speaking. No language, however important it is, can replace the mother-tongue. It is established beyond any reasonable doubt that the mother-tongue is more than a language; it is the foundation of personality. Therefore renationalisation is out of the question.

The second aim envisages the possibility of culture filtering through upper levels of society into lower levels. That is not the way the culture of a people develops. Culture is not a hothouse growth: it grows naturally out of the common soil of the human spirit: it is popular in origin. In Ceylon, English is learnt out of its context, away from English scenery, English life and English people and under such conditions it cannot impart English culture. At best, it creates a new caste that chooses to live in isolation from the life of the people and their surroundings. This is an impediment to the growth of a free democracy in Ceylon.

I hold that we need English to achieve the third aim, namely, to acquire knowledge in the field of exact science, technology and fact and for no other purpose, for the simple reason that swabhasa is not adequately informative nor is it able to keep pace with English in recording the advancement of knowledge.

I consider that under normal conditions the appropriate stage to introduce English is what is now called the Senior Preparatory. A four-year course in English will suffice to enable students to read English books to gather modern knowledge.

We must carefully discriminate between the language-abilities in English that our students want and those that they do not want. They want the ability to read English books and understand them, and the ability to listen to English speech and understand it. These two types of abilities are far easier than the remaining two, namely, the abilities of writing and speaking English. The latter two abilities are required mainly by diplomats. As diplomats should receive ad hoc training, schools need not bother about them.

THE MEDIUM OF EDUCATION

What should be the medium of education? It is not the importance of the language that should determine it, but something else. The evils of using English as the medium have been thus described: "Instead of laying stress upon thinking and reasoning, we emphasized memorizing: in place of knowledge of things and realities, we acquired a sort of mastery over words. It affected originality of thought and development of literature in the mother-tongue. We have impoverished ourselves without being able to enrich the language which we so assiduously studied". (University Education Commission Report, 1949)

Therefore, swabhasa, so intimately related to the child's life and surroundings, should be the medium of his education.

GENERAL EDUCATION

There are people who, while admitting the absurdity of the first two aims mentioned above, nevertheless attempt to justify the early introduction of English on the ground that English is a part of general education, or that it is an international language.

If general education is regarded as an objective of higher education to "open windows in many directions, so that most of the varied experiences of (a person's) life, and most elements of his environment shall have meaning and interest to him," it is precisely the same as the third aim for which we propose to teach English from Senior Preparatory onwards.

INTERNATIONALISM

There is too much loose thinking in this country about 'internationalism'. It must be remembered that true internationalism is very different from a colourless cosmopolitanism. "To love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle of public affections. It is the first in the series by which we proceed towards a love of our country and of mankind."

Therefore the first essential for general education or internationalism is swabhasa. And only after the student has gained mastery of the varied language habits connected with swabhasa does he become fit to begin a second language. W.M. Ryburn's research has conclusively proved that strength in the mother-tongue means strength in English with a positive correlation of 95.

THE CHANGEOVER

The Minister of Education's directive for the progressive changeover of the medium of secondary education from English to swabhasa with effect from 1953 is an implementation of the policy that came into being in 1945. Official instructions were issued in 1945 to effect the change-over to

swabhasa in English primary classes or schools, and Rule 6A of the School Teachers' Pension Rules, published in Gazette No.9809 of December 12 1947, provided for teachers with ten years' recorded service who are unable to give instruction in either Sinhalese or Tamil to retire with compensation for loss of career.

We are prepared for this changeover of medium in 6th standard next year. We have the necessary teachers and the necessary textbooks. We have no misgivings whatsoever. We welcome the changeover, as we are convinced that at long last a definite step is taken to put square pegs into square holes and round pegs into round holes.

We get over the difficulty of finding suitable teachers by appointing, whenever a vacancy arises, one who is good both in his particular subject and in swabhasa.

TEXTBOOKS

It is true that at present there is an inadequacy of suitable textbooks in science. The greatest urge for the production of such books is the demand for them. Now the demand is created and the necessary books will come. For science or most other school subjects, the best textbooks are those written by teachers with working experience and not translations made by people who are not familiar with the subject matter.

As regards general science in 6th standard we can do without a text-book for the present. I intend to entrust that work to a teacher who is good in swabhasa as well as in general science. The lessons he gives the classes will eventually be incorporated into a textbook. The technical terms will not cause us any anxiety. In cases where swabhasa terms have been long in use, we shall certainly use them. In other cases, we shall continue to use the English terms as they are international. It is an irretrievable blunder to coin new swabhasa equivalents for all the scientific terms in the English Language. The University Education Commission, 1949, is definitely of the opinion that English scientific terms should be retained in the national language. What is important is for the teacher to talk to his pupils in swabhasa and for the pupils to talk to the teacher in swabhasa.

RACIAL SEGREGATION

It is untrue to say that the adoption of swabhasa medium will lead to the separation of races. English was never intended to be a bond to unify the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The most effective method of bringing about social unity is by giving every Sinhalese child a working knowledge of Tamil and every Tamil child a working knowledge of Sinhalese. It should be an integral part of our educational policy. By following this method you forge a bond that will create mutual respect and mutual understanding between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

A three-year course is quite ample to give a working knowledge of each other's language, which is from 6th standard to 8th standard. At Ananda

College we give a working knowledge of Tamil to all Sinhalese students in 6th, 7th and 8th standards. This has been welcomed by parents and pupils alike.

It is said that in certain big schools in Colombo, where there are parallel classes for Sinhalese and Tamil pupils, there is racial segregation. E.G. Malherbe, in his monumental study of bilingualism in South Africa (English and Afrikaans), has met this objection. He endorses the basic principle that education should be imparted through the mother-tongue of the pupils.

He compares unilingual schools with parallel medium schools. Unilingual schools are either English unilingual-schools where English children learn through English or Afrikaans-unilingual-schools where Afrikaans children learn through Afrikaans. In parallel medium schools English and Afrikaans children learn separately in the same premises, English children through English medium and Afrikaans children through Afrikaans medium.

Professor Malherbe supports parallel medium schools and states that they offer several social and educational advantages over the separate schools. "These advantages are held to arise from the fact that the school's environment is enriched by the cultural contributions of both sections. By working and playing together from their early youth, Afrikaans and English-speaking children learn to work together as they will have to do as adults. By hearing the other language spoken at any rate and by having certain common school exercises, they have greater opportunities for the appreciation of each other's personalities and cultural and social outlook than have children in unilingual schools."

Professor T.J. Haarhoff writes: "Much, however, depends on the principal and the tone of the school. Tests have shown that the mere fact of having the two sections in the same school eliminates, under the right principal, much of the bitterness found in many single-medium schools".

In other words, according to Professor Malherbe, a school like Royal College, which may be regarded as a parallel medium school under the new policy, has several social and educational advantages over the single-medium school.

TEACHERS

I believe that there are a sufficient number of science teachers in the island who could be recruited to the schools to teach in swabhasa. With a view to increasing the supply of such teachers, extension of lectures can be organised by the University. University lecturers who know swabhasa can be asked to help. Besides, the Government Training College should be called upon to modify the course of training provided there so as to enable the trainees to learn to teach through swabhasa.

Further, in order to give full effect to the employment of swabhasa as the medium of education, it should be made clear once and for all that five

years hence, S.S.C. and the General Clerical Service Examinations will be conducted only through swabhasa. Likewise adequate notice must be given to hold (a) the University Preliminary Examination seven years hence through swabhasa, and (b) the C.C.S. five years hence through either medium and ten years hence through swabhasa only.

Moreover, as the secondary schools, which are to adopt the swabhasa medium from next year, have to depend for their teachers mainly from the University, it is well for the University to forestall this by immediately adopting the Riddell recommendation to make swabhasa compulsory both at the University Preliminary Examination and at the Final Examinations (all Faculties).

EDUCATIONAL PUBLICATION BOARD

The difficulty in making text-books available should be got over by the Educational Publication Board, one of whose statutory functions is to arrange for the publication of the books such as are valuable to education in Ceylon. For this purpose the Board should possess driving power, sympathy, and a high sense of patriotic duty.

It is unfortunate that its record has hitherto been most disappointing. The power of veto it exercises, far from facilitating the production of new textbooks, has scared away prospective writers. I think it is necessary to reorganise the Board so that it may render every possible assistance to deserving writers, particularly to capable teachers with working experience, to bring out suitable textbooks in swabhasa, which are undoubtedly a crying need of the hour.

THE UNIVERSITY

When the students who learn in the 6th standard through swabhasa from next year enter the University seven years hence, it is nothing but right that some of the lectures they attend should be in swabhana.

At the University, English medium cannot be given up altogether for some time to come. Lectures by distinguished scholars from other countries as well as lectures on some advanced subjects will continue to be given in English. Nevertheless, the students who have had their education through swabhasa will be able to follow them, because they have learnt English as a compulsory second language from their 1st standard. It is certainly a mistake to start a second language from 3rd standard. The primary stage should be set apart exclusively for the mastery of the language-technique of the mother-tongue. The optimum stage to introduce the second language is 6th standard. Under normal conditions, the second swabhasa should begin in 6th standard and English at Senior Preparatory.

In order to give an opportunity to University lecturers to get accustomed to give their lectures in swabhasa, it is advisable to organise University extension lectures through swabhasa on academic subjects.

LONDON UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS

One more impediment to the implementation of the official language policy is the alien orientation of the London University Examinations that continue to be held in Ceylon.

Each year not more than one fourth of the students who take the Preliminary Examination of Ceylon University are admitted. Of the rest, a considerable number is undoubtedly fit to go in for University Education. As a result, year in and year out large numbers of students, undeterred by the absence of adequate facilities, are making heroic efforts to get through London Examinations.

The plight of such students received the most anxious consideration of the State Council in the course of the debate on the University Ordinance of 1942, which created the Ceylon University to replace the old system of preparing for London degrees. But nothing has been done yet to help these students. It must not be forgotten that the retention of London Examinations is tantamount to the retention of the old system that was condemned by the State Council on account of its alien orientation.

Therefore, instead of continuing to hold London Examinations, we must have either an Affiliating University or an External Department of the present University. The case for an Affiliating University is very strong owing to the fact that of all progressive countries Ceylon has the smallest number of University students in proportion to its population.