

CORRIDORS OF PEACE
THE IMMORTAL PROFESSION
ITS UPS AND DOWNS



N. SABARATNAM

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CONTENTS

	Page
1. FOREWORD	3
2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT - 1	5
3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT - 2	7
4. INTRODUCTION	8
CORRIDORS OF PEACE	
5. CORRIDORS OF PEACE	13
6. UNARMED VICTORY	15
7. PRINCELY PIONEERS NO MORE	21
8. WE NEED A NEW TYPE OF MAN	25
9. WHAT ARE THESE 'COMMON SCHOOLS'?	30
10. A VERY PRECARIOUS FUTURE	38
11. WE NEED PEACEFUL PIONEERS	44
THE IMMORTAL PROFESSION	
12. INTRODUCTION	48
13. THE PENINSULAR WAR	52
14. JAFFNA CONTINUES IN COMA	59
15. FREE JAFFNA FROM FEAR	65
16. SETTling THE PROBLEM OF PEACE	71
17. WHERE IS THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE	76
18. A BREAK WITH THE PAST	83
19. AN INSIGHT INTO THE MILITARY MIND	88
20. REGIONALISM	93

	Page
21. THE PEOPLES' WILL	99
22. SIXTY YEARS AGO	104
23. MY SCHOLASTIC TRINITY	110
24. VANNARPONNAI	119
25. VADDUKODDAI VIA CHULIPURAM	127
26. INTO THE WIDER ARENA	133
27. A TEACHER BY CHANCE	143
28. THE FIRST AFRO-ASIAN CONFERENCE IN COLOMBO	150
29. W.C.O.T.P. CONFERENCE IN ROME	160
30. MEMORIES OF PARIS	169
31. A VERY FAMILIAR COUNTRY	177
32. CARDIFF-SWISS CONNECTION	182
33. SHAKESPEARE - A REVIEW	188
34. DELHI CONFERENCE - NEF	197
35. NEW DELHI CONFERENCE W.C.O.T.P.	210
36. A NEW ERA	222
37. AT THE HELM	232
38. SOME LANDMARKS	244
39. RETIREMENT SANS REST	249
40. SUMMING UP	256
41. FORWARD TO THE LAND	267
42. POSTSCRIPT?	276

1. FOREWORD

This book is in many ways a reminder of the late S. Handy Perinpanayagam whose name typifies many of the thoughts that the author has couched as the story of a school teacher inspite of the autobiographical excursion he indulges on the main theme - The Immortal Profession aptly applies to Handy master, whose name will live as an exemplary teacher for more than four decades in the annals of Jaffna College and the archives of the All Ceylon Union of Teachers. As the late Wilmot Perera of Sri Palee, who spent all his fortune on Education, modelled on the line of Tagore's Shanthiniketan said in a tribute, that Handy master was not only a Guru in the deep sense of the word, but has taken a real live interest in furthering the movements which had their beginnings many years back - to make the country a happier and richer place to live in.

The Ups and Down of the Immortal Profession that the author has modified over the title of the book aptly applies to the disappointments and disillusionments that are the lot of an eminent educator whose attraction was not to the student, but was solely due to his success in the classroom. In the larger sense, beyond the making of men at Jaffna College for decades before and after retirement - a don during the latter period and the building of a leading institution at Kokuvil, a rational reasonable mind would

find it difficult to appeal to a crisis-ridden world which cares more for worldly calculation and irrational prejudices. The impact of a personality and character worthy of the mortal profession must have an abiding influence on the world that is now seething with strife, must prove crucial among the many factors that make for peace.

We are pleased to lend our patronage to this publication, which by right is the product of the author, who is professionally and educationally a colleague of the late Perninpanayagam, who has already been honoured in his life time as a legend throughout the island and in countries where his students and admirers lived their lives on the lines of their revered Guru.

-Former Student and Colleague

2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT-1

“Education today is no longer the privilege of an elite or the conceit of a particular age. It must no longer be thought as a preparation for life but as a dimension of life, distinguished by continual acquisition of knowledge and ceaseless examination of ideas” states the UNESCO Director General of Education.

This is a very significant statement for the world of today which has to face the challenge of the 21st century. But it is not the kind of soaring idealism that prompted me to put pen to paper as one who became a teacher by chance. It was the stuttering rifle rattles that prompted me to make the best use of the lucid intervals of an intermittent ‘war’, that has still not ended. This developed into a book in the fullness of years, since there was much of raw material for its contents. I cannot afford to be cynical, though long years of retirement made me and my wife victims of miseries, that were rather rare during my working career.

It is a painful thought that the desirable qualities of a teacher are numerous and in short supply everywhere. I doubt if this book littered with numerous autobiographical sketches will in some small way help to update a community, a country, nay a world in crisis.

It is left to the readers to judge how far *“once a teacher always a teacher”* is vindicated in the pages that follow.

I am indebted not so much to the academic halls of learning, or the teacher training institutes, but to the Teachers Unions, local, national, and international such as the WCOTP, NEF, the British Council, the Headmasters Association, the NUT (England) and other such bodies.

More important, that the debates and discussions in the conference halls from Colombo to Rome, carries London and Cardiff and way back to Switzerland and Greece are the contacts of illustrious educators outside the conference hall.

My thanks are due to my wife who bore the brunt of keeping both of us alive in sickness and old age, and rewriting the entire script at regular intervals over a period of two years. A large part of the manuscript was typed by my nephew Mr A. Sivapathasundaram, my late lamented brother's son who, in spite of his heavy work as the Manager of an Engineering firm in the hill country and caught in the vortex of repetitive acts of violence was compelled to take one and a half years of the lion's share of the work.

Last but not least is the crucial task of making the document ship-shape, correcting, adding and amending portions with a portable type-writer rendered by Mrs. Puvaneswary Arulsothysivam, wife of my brother-in-law, whose skill and training as a special trained English teacher, made the package handsome enough to be sent to Madras for printing.

I will certainly feel amply compensated, if the long years of retirement have not dulled my numerous students, junior colleagues and the seniors still on this side of the shore, who will find this book readable if not lofty enough in the contemporary situation.

Jaffna,
January, 1992.

N. Sabaratnam.

3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT-2

I wish to add a personal note as to how this book was written and published. The author took up writing this book during his last days when he was sick, but was determined to complete it. He kept on writing till he was able and when he was unable to, he dictated and made me write.

The author passed away before he could finish the book. He said that he had to add a few more lines, but God decided otherwise and he was snatched away suddenly. The first four chapters were proof read by him. Any errors on our part should be overlooked and I apologise for any mistakes in the other chapters. It had been easy for the author to write, but it has been a big task for us to prepare for the printer. Though ageing and sick he was determined to finish it.

I can remember with nostalgia what he told me then, that the responsibility of publishing this book was mine. It is hence I betook on myself fulfilling his wish as a sacred duty. Now that the task is done it gives me great satisfaction and pleasure.

My sincere thanks are due to Mr. K. Sachithanathan, Proprietor of Kaanthalam, Chennai for all the personal care he has taken to bring out such a worthy volume in line with the observations of his beloved 'GURU' - the author.

Our special thanks are due to Mr. V. Sivasupramaniam - a student, colleague and friend of the author - who readily agreed to do the proof-reading inspite of his numerous duties as a teacher, a religious worker and a social worker. His suggestions were very useful and guided us in many ways to give a good finish to the book. We are indebted to his wife Sarojini who is Mr. Sivasupramaniam's right hand and eagerly helps in all his activities.

I thank all others who helped me in this task.

Thank you.

May his soul rest in peace.

Colombo,
January, 1997

Leelawathie Sabaratnam.

4. INTRODUCTION

On the eve of the my 80th year, I may be allowed to indulge in fancies than facts, at least to survive the tedium of too many pleasures that we have enjoyed on earth for too long. As G.K.C. puts it, 'The success of marriage comes after the failure of the honeymoon. All human vows, laws and contracts are so many ways of surviving with success this breaking point, this instant of potential success. 'G.K.C.'s paradoxical expression which were a rage in our youth may not appear quite impressive, but read between the lines, they are rarely obsolete.

What our country needs just now are iconoclasts - image breakers - who without hammer, would take down their idols from their pedestals so tenderly that it would seem like an act of worship. We are just now too fond of breaking them like babies, without the grace of brushing them aside as if they were never there.

I recall with some sense of due pride and joy the princely pioneers during the early twenties of this century, the origin of a powerful Union of Teachers - The All Ceylon Union of Teachers, founded and fostered long by men like C. P. Dias, W. B. de Alwis, R. H. Philips, Rev. A. G. Fraser, T. B. Jayah, Gregory Weeramantry, Mrs. Clara Motwani, Fr. Peter Pillai, Bro. Luke, Karunananda of Ananda, W. E. R. de Silva, W. D. E. Perera, R. S. Jayawickrema, J. O. Mendis, A. Kandiah, later Mr. A. M. A. Azeez who resigned the Civil Service to serve Zahira and of course quite a powerful contingent, the rest of the country looked up to from the North; Handy Perinbanayagam, Nesiah, Tamber and a host of others who spent their time in the mail train from Jaffna to Colombo, on their way to meetings of the Executive, discussing complex questions, unravelling knotty points from an All-Ceylon perspective affecting the interests of children in education and those of teachers that are vital to a profession that was far too long in the doldrums.

All these pertained to Secondary Education and some of

the best Secondary Schools in Ceylon were considered among the best in Asia - model replicas of the Public schools in England. We have today travelled quite a distance so that the identity of the original Union could be traced only in written records and witty recollections among the Old Guard leaving this Vale of tears with despair in spite of the glow, past memory evokes in fits of sweet nostalgia.

Personally, my baptism into this far formed Union which was then attempting the impossible of roping in all teachers from all categories into a Confederation, was at a time when the clash between School take over and its opposition was at the highest. I was thrown into the forward rank to find media to settle peacefully the two powerful sections which hitherto showed little trace of communal/party or ideological bias. The Treasurer of the Union was for some years a member of the Communist Party like many others active in their own private capacities as politicoes, but the Union as a body was far from any partiality to any group, thanks to such groups who were enlightened enough to realise at every turn that they were spending their hard earned money of a lowly paid profession with a sense or responsibility that could not be gauged by the comparative indifference of the government on the public to make the ranks of teachers strong enough to achieve better standards which were crucial to the progress of a country and society in the eve of Independence. The grant of complete independence to India was far too much of a stir to our small country, which in its colonial days was supposed to be in many ways superior to her mighty neighbour. "*Small is beautiful*" - True beautiful Ceylon, like her neighbour and foster father has come to a sorry pass today - after forty five years of dilly-dallying with this so-called political independence.

Progress is not inevitable as history records it, but there can be no reliable norm to achieve finality we view the world in general today. Most of my generation - the younger and middle group are reeling under heavy blows and are surrendering themselves to

despondancy in regard to their children whose growth is suddenly arrested. Are we a nation without ability to harness our own strength, to put our house in order? Or are our houses not our own but rented by the State to be taken at its whims and fancies?.

Does it not look a bitter irony on the eve of the 21st century - with a few years to reach this monumental milepost of the world - that the Napoleonic code that was so revolutionary to Europe - One Law, One Administration, One Government, should in this age of Democracy and in its name take Ceylon back to Colebrooke Reforms of 1830, an unimaginable reversal after 160 years of foreign rule, especially after 45 years of Independence for my country.

The "*Tank civilisation*" of which much is written or talked about during the rule of Sinhala kings - a great achievement - seems to vie with the present "*Tank warfare*" which the so-called ethnic crisis has created and attempted to perfect - could be a shocking illustration of creativity in the past with destruction in the present. This seems a crude statement about independent Sri Lanka seen in a contemporary perspective. Unfortunately it looks too true.

Is it not mid-summer madness to resurrect the past distortions of history to strengthen the present misrepresentations that have extened the free text-books of our pupils controlled by Free State Schools with a bureaucratic domination that seems to equate state system - a sacred responsibility with state monopoly in Education?

Have our teachers and students a mighty army, in truth mightier than their counterparts on either side of the military divide staging a tragic mock war that is slowly eating into the vitals of the nation lost their nerve to trace the evil to its very roots? Poverty is the number one enemy. Since we think poverty is the other man's problem - not mine, since the really poor cast their one vote at periodical elections, yet powerless to do anything effective.

Of this - his destiny he still thinks - we are yet apathetic - at least not dynamic enough to change this system, first to this curse by a crash programme to remove illiteracy - to allow every child to gain a firm foundation for work and leisure in a more civilised and prosperous society.

With many years of toil - defeat, dejection, sense of shame mixed with congenital optimism, I am not despondent in spite of present threats that seem to spell doom for the community and the country. I can see the demand for education even in the midst of severe risks to life and living, and it continues to increase.

It is now fully settled that the old concept of fixed ability, fate, destiny have been discarded and that heredity and environmental factors that condition educational advance. We have no reason to be indifferent anymore to put up with children from impoverished and neglected homes, to neglected schools, oversized classes to inadequate books and equipments.

We have reason to be hopeful yet if only teachers get together into stronger unions, undaunted by the failures of the past disunity, and commit themselves to the urgent tasks on a union basis, considering it to be the mighty level of educational reform. As the National Union of Teachers (England) puts it - mind you this powerful union which has reaped a rich harvest of success, won their long and arduous battles is yet not a Trade Union but has achieved considerable progress for education and the teaching profession over the years.

Poet Browning, though reputed to be optimistic is not seen at his best except when he is not so obscure as in these lines,

*“One who never turned his back but moved forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
 never doubted though right were worst
 and wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise,
Are baffled to fight better.”⁵*

CORRIDORS
OF
PEACE

5. CORRIDORS OF PEACE

"It is because I was once a fool that I am wise"

Those of us who have read C. P. Snow's "*Corridors of Power*" and relished the romantic but dangerously mysterious happenings that were subtly discussed would be swept off their feet. They could not have imagined that it was power that corrupted the minds of those in their mighty fields and brought about many a political and military disaster.

We have to counteract this all pervasive evil inherent in man's make up not by our religious learning or teaching the various scriptures or practising them in our daily lives. Such a remedy is far too inadequate to a deep rooted malaise such as in holding the world to ransom from pre-historic times.

But man has clearly evolved from beastial ancestry and gone forward to read the stars, land on the moon and realise many of the basic truths revealed by seers and sages. In the present context when science, scientific technology are ruling the roost of learning in our schools and universities, learning in our schools and universities must undergo a sea change. Geography, History, Economics and Agriculture Engineering have become so interconnected that without understanding the interdisciplinary thread that runs through these subjects that our boys and girls even in schools - Pre-primary, Junior and Secondary schools will remain stagnant piling bricks and bricks as is still done in our schools to build a colossal cathedral and install the bell that calls them for the customary petitionary prayer.

Instead, without denying in a hurry the superstition embedded in established religion or sitting in judgement on the *vedas* claim to be the voice of the almighty and the foundation of Hinduism,

perhaps the most ancient religion embracing in its unlimited fold the essentials of other religions and the mores of other races. Let us subject all the salient speeches of all spiritual truths to the scrutiny of reason. Let our laboratories in schools not be confined only to Physics, Chemistry, Biological and Agricultural subjects so much in demand for higher education, serve all those who have the capacity and not the privilege to pursue them. Let others be encouraged to follow other courses of learning, cultivate other skills which alone can make our country prosperous, not mere prosperity but co-operative effort needed at every level nursed in our schools that do not favour any particular class or creed or religious community.

The word secular, like democracy has become so dirty, that it looks almost impossible to wipe the state clean of young minds, because of the elderly parents and the general public have come to regard it as the opposite of religion. English is full of subtle nuances unless we read between the lines, secular could be the anti-thesis of not merely religious but professional and many other words beyond the scope to what is really meant.

To be secular is not to be irreligious. The positive emphasis on the negative side not showing undue regard to any particular religious group. In a pluralistic society with the idea of one world implies our schools must then do decidedly not at least now belong to any particular creed or missionary enterprise.

6. UNARMED VICTORY

"The greatest fact in the story of man on earth is not the empires he has built and broken but the growth of his soul from age to age. This has discredited heroes as easily as it has forgotten everyone else, but the saints remain."

-S. Radhakrishnan

In Hamlet, Act IV, Scene 4, Hamlet finds an expedition sent by Norway against Poland.

*"To gain a little patch of ground
That hath in it no profit but the name.
To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it;
Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole
A ranker rate should it be sold in fee."*

Hamlet replies,

"Why, then the Polack never will defend it"

He is told,

"Yes. It's already garrisoned."

Hamlet concludes that it was quite right to make war for what he calls *"this straw."*

He says,

*"Rightly to be great, is not to stir without great
argument*

*But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake."*

He concludes,

*"From this time forth
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth."*

The result was not obviously satisfactory. It is very sad, that the pages of history till today are littered with this conception of honour.

That is a very different story with the world wars and European conflicts and conflagration, not to speak of Indian, Chinese and Russian imperialistic wars which bear an Eastern perspective. Up-to-date it has become totally impossible among western powers to take up consultation seriously when instant action is necessary. Most of them including Britain are still obsessed by the memory of their former supremacy. We in Sri Lanka, our forebearers especially have had a bitter task of Portuguese and Dutch aggressions and later of British diplomatic suzerain called "*Ceylon, a crown colony*" - this pearl on the Indian Ocean. When the neighbouring sub-continent became independent after a long period of bitter struggle, violent and non-violent, it had to pay the price of partitioning the country at great price.

This understatement is deliberate, for it could effectively spotlight the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi on 30th January 1948, scarcely after six months of partition - partition needs prominence - since it led to the assassination of the Father of the Nation, ironically at the hands of a well-intentioned Hindu journalist and the decisive rebuttal of the Mahatma - heir Jawaharlal to call India, Bharatha Nadu often celebrated in some of the songs and stories from times of yore.

Ceylon which later named itself Srilanka, its pristine nomenclature unfolding a past glorious and otherwise was not slow to be stirred by the grim stories of valour of the Indian independence struggle. Leaders of Ceylon, with natural aspiration kept in intimate touch with unprecedented events, achievements and even attended the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress during some of its historic and epoch making events.

In spite of the heroic acts of our island heroes' bravery in fighting the Portuguese, Dutch and the British, independence was

announced at the culmination of diplomatic exchange between Colombo and White Hall. When the Duke of Gloucester and the Dutchess visited Ceylon as Chief Guests representing the Royal Majesties, there were unmistakable gestures, featuring of the pomp and pageantry that revealed a kind of the flunkeyism of Ceylon's ruling caste, regrettably not yet completely extinguished even after almost half a century of half-baked independence.

Although there was an indecent and alarming cry to bury English in the Beira Lake that smacked the undertone of anti-Tamil semantics, it was mainly due to the mistaken belief that if the Sinhala sat on the throne that English hitherto occupied, all would be right with the world. True there was a deep rooted belief, that English continuing as medium in any form, the Tamils would continue to score high while the mass of Sinhala population would remain illiterate in English as in the pre-independence era. But much water has flowed through the Mahaweli Ganga and thence to metropolis continuing its course to the Southern outposts of JVP which still continues to erupt in floods and fire.

This kind of topical digression is inevitable so that we may not miss the wood for the trees. The wood is clearly independent Ceylon called Sri Lanka from early times evoking a charm that could only be sung by a reputed Englishman in his own language. It was similar to the reputed service of Col. Olcott who came to the island to rescue Buddhism from its long decline under centuries of foreign rule.

Since 1948 when British rule ceased all attempts at nation building had been thwarted by what now could be called wild cats' schemes. It was seriously proposed that all higher education must be in Sinhala. Equally strange was the proposal of the first Ceylonese Director of Education wanted English to continue as the medium of education from the Junior School of course as before. Fortunately, both were abandoned and the successive governments swore by mother tongue from the kindergarten to the University;

perversely persisting with Sinhala as the official language. This was not rightly understood as is evident today, both in the North and South want English as a second language. As a vote-catching device this had lost its impact. Other devices more subtle and insidious against other minorities, affecting mostly the Tamils began to take shape. The breaking point came - Standardisation and its aftermath.

And now we are steeped far in blood and a people proverbially peaceful as the Tamils are in the grip of an unending war that has thrown out rivers of blood as if that would make their arid homeland fertile.

Jaffna was the home of a movement called the Students Congress which later on called itself the Jaffna Youth Congress demanding "*Poorana Swaraj*" for the entire country. The Congress was at its height when it invited Mahatma Gandhi to visit Ceylon in 1927.

It was really a sublime spectacle when this frail figure first visited the Buddhist areas. The Sinhala masses hailed him as a hero when he grew eloquent - eloquence was never his forte - over the greatest son that India produced. The surprise was the greater when many of them illiterate as they were thought this "*little man*", in loin cloth to be a Dravidian sage. Such gross ignorance is still found in the remotest quarters of the South, where anti-Indian feeling has been nurtured for a long period. In 1947, when the General Election for a parliamentary form of government - a prelude to independence it was called - took place, the issue of complete independence was never stressed. Parties without any form of political basis sprang up and candidates were not slow to take advantage of the factors of race, religion, class, creed and caste. One cannot forget that three *r*'s that preceded the alliterative trinity forming a more powerful one, - race, religion and rice, as the last one proved the crucial factor for the Srimavo victory.

That we have elevated sectional feelings has been clearly proved by an unwinnable war which shows that we have rejected independence itself. Has this tragic situation coerced as is still coercing outside arbitrators? One attempt has proved colossally cruel and tragic. This mechanism of outside arbitration in a world that is reaping the rich harvest of destruction caused by two world wars and the recent happenings - rivers of flood flowing through gulfs and lakes in space as well as in the huts and hamlets, killing innocent men and women born so but dying as Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese or traitors and heroes - shows that the dark ages of the past can recur.

Progress of man from the primitive stage, from that of animals is not always inevitable. Our history is littered with authentic decline and fall of mighty civilisations which were yet inspired by sages, saints and godmen in every region of continents, countries and climes.

It looks fantastic to note that man can yet claim to reverse the gear of a very high powered war machine over land, sea, air and space. But even the mad men that sit in the seats of power cannot yet become sane to stop their scientists in the laboratories from pushing on war contrivances to meet the latest varieties of bombs - atomic, hydrogen etc.

Could the "*Unarmed Victory*" which Bertrand Russel wrote in 1963 just six years before he attained mortality - the soul and solitary star be expected to shed the light in the darkest hour of the sky? But it is human, more than human to hope, and feel that the best is yet to be and that wrong would never triumph. As Browning said, "*Hell we fall, baffled we fare better.*"

But what happened centuries after the poetic declaration?. Let us view the balance sheet and we cannot feel entirely desperate though on the side of liabilities the figures are normal, there are remarkable assets on the other side.

We cannot escape the mounting cynicism on all sides just now but at the same time we cannot afford to be cynical - young or old, healthy or sick, rich or poor, communist or capitalist, theist or atheist. Though Hope is said to be eternal, the end of Hope, one way quipped, the end of Hope is the end of disappointment. Let us strive as for the last chance for there is the fear that we may not fail.

7. PRINCELY PIONEERS NO MORE

“Education is both a science and art and if it is cut off from its practical moorings it would be unrealistic and unscientific ignoring the needs of society in which man lives. Educate the child for Life through Life.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

The Roman Empire, mightiest at one time was not built in a day or fall in such haste as referred to in the introduction, *“Princely Pioneers of the All Ceylon Union of Teachers”* - once a mighty organisation that reflected very brightly the understanding that secondary English schools all over the country prevailed through the members, began its gradual decline in the very effective organisation in the island. Fortunately there were names in the need for such a body which in the fullness of time would reduce the number of unions, although teachers not fully professional in fact, and failed to win the sympathy of the parents and general public, who were not tired of their stale compliments calling it the vocation or a noble calling (forgive the tantalogy) ready to entrust their children to underqualified teachers.

Adult franchise and free-education that followed it much later could not and did not enable the common man, who the politicians thought would remain ignorant long enough for them to reap the political rewards of power from an unlettered mass. The majority that belonged to one race could be manipulated to do what their party based on parochial war could steer their way through for a considerable stretch of time.

When the Donoughmore Commission made the findings, those who belonged to the Executive Committee System - almost everyone of the few who belonged to one ministry wanted to become ministers. The story of the pan-Sinhala ministers of the State

Council was too frank and perhaps foolish to repeat the joke just when the cabinet system was about to be introduced with the parliamentary elections, just one year before independence. Our independence must have been received by post and the mail bag that carried it made history on February 4th 1948.

This included Tamil and Muslim ministers who were elected M. Ps. D. S.- still called the Father of the Nation - that no lies seriously truncated was wise enough to talk in terms of a national government. Unlike many of his colleagues he was a clever manager of men and with the help of a well profound constitutional expert like Ivor Jennings, the first and perhaps the ablest Vice Chancellor of the University on his side and Prof. C. Suntharalingam, then a very close associate of his, even in the State Council days, to get him out of unforeseen complexities of making and unmaking matters for instant solution - found it a child's play in handling a cabinet of such personalities like Sir John, J. R. and the late premier S.W.R.D. They had their try in tackling the problem of the Tamils. When D. S. fell from his horse on his morning ride on the Galle Face Green, he had proved equal to the task of winning another mighty rider indulging in the same past-time in the same venue. "*But what a fall was there my countrymen*" one feels tempted to quote Julius Caesar. The secret of the bag was out and the Governor-General Lord Soulbury was back in the saddle to execute the grand old man's last will that his son Dudley - perhaps not very keen himself - should be named his successor.

To cut this story short, the point that had to be made is that with the formation - however imperfect - of a National Government, it was ridiculously assumed by many or at least some that mattered that the main difficulties of achieving national and cultural unity have been removed.

The story of the S.L.F.P. and the Sinhala only, and all the crisis that followed in quick succession, blasted the myth that Sri Lanka and India have proved that they could learn to be democratic like their erstwhile masters who swore by the Westminster model.

Reverting to the A.C.U.T debacle it was in the self-same year when schools were to be vested in the crown - during the interlude between decision and execution that it happened to be my unenviable lot to be elected President and to be assisted by an Executive whose chief officer was deliberately chosen to be the General Secretary and he was no other than a pious Buddhist, a loyal unionist of unruffled temper and well balanced outlook - Principal R. M. Abeyawardane of Pannipitiya. He was a charismatic figure, like his predecessor J.D. Aseervatham, a history honours graduate from St. Josephs, himself a Roman Catholic but catholic enough to take the union like the Pied Piper often on his own direction. He could do this on the strength of the confidence he had won during his six year tenure. He had even retired prematurely and become a paid secretary and planned to hold the office permanently on a salary he could square with the income he could gain as a lawyer do to take his oaths.

But this change in the unions regime was generally welcome to the rank and file of the membership which was keen on security of tenure, and other benefits that a state grants to its officers.

The cleavage became critical and the majority of the membership opted for a new union, the National Union of Teachers like the well known N.U.T. of England, that they thought was the only way to eliminate all forms of rivalry among members from different denominational schools prior to the take over.

All the undue optimism that independence of February 1948 brought crashed on the rock of majority rule! The teachers' unions held together for some years, till all kinds of regional, provincial, sectarian, communal, linguistic and cultural conflicts came to the forefront.

It now looks absurd - tragically absurd to recall the communal riots of 1958 quickly followed by insincere ad-hoc meetings and conferences for peace settlements. The leaders of the top - some of them at least in a way responsible for this bloody

outburst, more frequent later - were not much concerned with the long run; they were far more concerned with the tactical advantage of the moment.

For a small and beautiful country like Sri Lanka it is a standing shame that the various communities that professed to follow the four great religions of the world and speak only two languages could not arrest the conflict nor learn from more than one conflagration that what had finally happened would happen. "*Even a worm will turn*" they say and the parties to the unending war can never be dubbed worms, although one group had to put up with a prolonged series of holocausts. The world had come to know that the guerilla war in Sri Lanka had beaten international records and had lasted for more than a decade.

The cardinal defect of independent Sri Lanka which does not extend its writ to the heartland of the Tamils is the failure on either side for the generation of a strong public opinion against the colossal evil of a racial majority trampling on the basic rights of other national entities, whose record of public service before and after independence should hold sway over the hearts of genuine Sinhala leaders who are already dead or inarticulate. Those of the younger generation have either fled to foreign countries as refugees or sought more congenial climes for professional pursuits and all kinds of extortion.

We are not yet civilised enough to realise that culture like a flower does not take kindly to forced growth. Compulsion of any kind crushes it and makes it lifeless. At the Jaffna Hindu College Centenary celebrations two years ago, I said, "A national institution of this stature is a lengthened shadow of one man and therefore it is painful to see our people labelled as emigrants, refugees, seeking greener pastures in foreign countries and yet claiming to fight from elsewhere for the ashes of their fathers and the temple of their Gods." I was brutally frank in calling them unadulterated traitors who had blatantly betrayed their peoples' country and their God's in its hour of travail.

8. WE NEED A NEW TYPE OF MAN

It was once remarked to Lord Chesterfield that man is the only creature endowed with the power of laughter.

"True" said the peer "and you may add perhaps that he is the only creature that deserves to be laughed at"

-Time Magazine

This heading is not meant to be catchy but deliberate to indicate that there is nothing new under the sun. We are familiar with the story of Diogenes. Alexander the Great, having completed the conquest of Greece was told that there was a very wise man called Diogenes in Athens. The mighty Emperor was very keen to see him and grant him any favour. When he met the wise man on the wayside watching the sun with his squint eyes, he felt disturbed by Alexander and his men. Alexander was greatly impressed by this saint of a man and asked him what he wanted, indicating that he would grant him anything for the mere asking. The old man said that he wanted nothing and had nothing. The conqueror insisted on any particular gift he could ask. *"Ah, if that is so, please move away from the sun so that I could see his light."*

Our topic is therefore related to Socrates who founded the quiz method in education. This indicated that there is nothing original in the world today which has no bearing to what Socrates introduced to his followers. This method is destructive.

He followed this with a constructive theory of his own. *"Love", he observes, "is the hunger of the human soul for divine beauty. The lover is eager not only to find beauty but to create it, to perpetuate it, to plant the seed of immortality in the mortal body. And that is why parents love children, why sexes love each other to reproduce themselves and thus prolong Time into Eternity."*

The world knows what happened to the barefoot philosopher who never put pen to paper though the world was lucky in his disciple Plato who was later to immortalise the mental and the physical endurance of his master. At the age of twenty he came under the influence of Socrates, sixty two years old at that time.

All that was thought best in education and educational philosophy pertaining to life is in some way or other appears directly or indirectly to Plato.

In the West, which profoundly shaped the thinking of the world, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle still hold the unrivalled pedestal of the trinity that influenced the world we live in. This is not to deny to other countries that philosophy, science and psychology and all the growing branches of knowledge did not find their roots in their own soil. India, China, Africa and other comparatively new civilizations of Europe and America witnessed an awakening either simultaneously on their own or indirectly influenced by these ancient thinkers. Knowledge born of wisdom has a mysterious way of spreading its depths contemporaneously.

When Mahatma Gandhi in the first insists on talking out the Indian problem of independence with his colleagues, with hard-headed Viceroys and finally agrees to attend the Round Table Conference in London and comes back with empty hands, he never dreamt that, that was the end of the discussion of a knotty problem. At any rate, like his more illustrious predecessor, the Light of Asia, who renounced his throne, his Queen and child to become a mendicant, begging for his bread in his pursuit of Truth, Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Indian since Lord Buddha as the London Times recorded his obituary, always insisted, "*Do not kill, but be ready to be killed. That is the way out.*"

Unlike Buddha and Gandhi or the ancient Plato and Aristotle, we have too often in our schools and outside preached, though without much practise in the belief - the passive belief - that God is one. We have far too often forgotten the common man, since we never seriously believed in the oneness of mankind. The

Sangam poet, Kanyan Poonkunran of ancient Tamil Nadu, has found his excellent utterance even in the Human Rights Conferences now being held all over the world

*"Every land is my land
Every man is my kinsman."*

Good and evil do not come from outside; we do not loose our head on seeing the great nor despise the lowly.

It is the West that today insists on the oneness of mankind. Thanks to the many wars and the atomic bomb that have opened their eyes.

The superficial nobilities and the artificial class distinction could only be found in the grand cemetery. Let our houses, our shelves, our schools, small and big, our tastes and faculties reflect the need of the common man. Let us rebuild the world for them whatever may or may not have happened to the many "isms" that ignore them or try to pamper them.

Ancient Tamil literature abounds in authentic utterances, even more of poets more ancient than the *Sangam* poets before the Christian era. There is some confusion among poetess Auviyar going about on foot singing single lined aphorisms or couplets like *Kural* or even stanzas. One such *Kural* is a well-known couplet as terse as that of the Tamil *Munivar*,

"Regard every living being as an offering"

We now speak of humanism as conceived in the West and philosophers seem to think that it does not require God or Almighty power in the scheme of things. Could spiritual India have conceived of it, if the poetess brought in humanism and explained it that it was a mere corollary from the fatherhood of God?

Let us stop being followers or learners, and learners whether of the West or of the East, but become founders and leaders and build our own world. To go direct to the point that will strike as

dumb in the very heart of Jaffna, the renowned seat of an ancient civilisation of poets, prophets, scientists and men of letters - a tiny peninsula as it is embroiled in war that goes on without stop. Let us take up in this very moment - without wasting out time over what we should do when peace comes, whenever it comes - the most practical problem in industry, not as opposed to cultivation, nor is it the proverbial industry of education. It is the practical problem of manufacturing teachers - school teachers - and make them the best in the world - teachers of the Tamil way. It is no joke as people may think in relation to the English or the European way or to the American way. And that means a lot if we place literary revolution as priority number one. What is the literary revolution we advocate? It simply means that the mother tongue should be built on it, to make it as modern as we can, as the most developed countries in the world. We cannot afford to kill ourselves over Sinhala only or Tamil only, but evolve a way of enriching the content of education to keep abreast of the times.

Jaffna, as they say in common Tamil is, "*moorthy small but keerthy big*". It has been said so, because the common man with or without education has inherited a rich spiritual heritage. All that has not gone during long ages of foreign rule, and in this period some of our best men have proved their worth to catch up with the greatness of their foreign counterparts.

This will not do. We are to-day lagging behind the best countries in the West and the East, not only in machines and guns, but also in democratic government and in intellectual pursuits such as history, geography, philosophy, sociology, and the modern arts. We need instant modernisation, when we call for literary revolution in education. We want this to be brought about by ordinary school teachers. They should discard the classical punditry of the mother tongue as well as a deep knowledge of other languages needed for higher education in the Arts and Sciences. Colloquialism enshrined in the poems of Bharathi and simple, lucid prose commonly found in standard magazines in the mother tongue are the model. Any attempt at nation building must take into account,

the common man who has either been forgotten or misled by adult-franchise and free-education.

We are now faced with our very own poverty not merely in economical and educational spheres, but in the development of a common culture that would elevate the ordinary man whose commonness was echoed by Burns, whose immortal lines none can forget.

*“The rank is but the guinea stamp
But the gold is worth all that”.*

The world exists for the common man who should know whoever he is.

*“There is an angel in disguise
who plays the fool”*

says Emerson. We need a new kind of virtue in the new kind of man that we could see in the common man of today - virtue with guts in it, pride in his work and justice to other workers.

We do not need princely pioneers referred to in the A.C.U.T during its halcyon days. Ironically it was such an organisation that led to the agitation for our freedom. And this freedom is now in peril for want of peaceful pioneers - a grand army of school teachers to create and maintain a warless world of courageous independent, loving and adventurous friends. We need school teachers who can build from below an integrated nation, who could create the awareness of an all-Ceylon mind - the Ceylon man no longer a member of a small racial, religious or linguistic group. Our foundation for nationhood has to be built by replacing the doctrine of state power with the power of the people. It is for the welfare of all that our young need, the Grand Army of thousands and thousands of teachers manufactured - trained not only in Training Colleges, but also in seminars, discussion groups and in the process of instructing the young in the various fields of school life - in the class rooms, in the laboratories, in the workshops, in the many kinds of get-togethers and in the playing fields.

9. WHAT ARE THESE 'COMMON SCHOOLS'?

"Woe to the man who talks with a little originality".

It was a well known Japanese sociologist, I forget his name, who said, "*Ceylon is one of the least secularised among the civilised societies I have visited.*" According to the Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan, secular ideal is a modern expression of the old ideal of tolerance. We can grow to genuine nationhood when we replace a past-oriented nationalism, with an image of a nation, when we seek to replace a doctrine of state power with the power of the people. It is for the welfare of all, that our young need this grand army of school teachers, who can build from below an integrated nation to create the awareness of an all-Ceylon mind, the Ceylon man, no longer a member of a racial, religious or linguistic group.

To use the favourite phrase of Jawaharlal Nehru, we must so build our common schools, so that they may keep the doors and windows of not merely the buildings, but also of the hearts and minds of children, open to the legacy of what is good in the ancient and the recent past, but also to all the modern trends and developments of the East and the West. There are many chambers in the schools we speak of, and children who learn in these schools will be influenced not only by what is going on in these chambers but also move among the corridors where teachers and students and even the public get the chance of talking casually over the various fields of knowledge and training that are in no way confined to any narrow creed or subject or any form of training that smacks of anything sectarian.

It is pertinent to remember that people speak of education for peace as if education can be for anything else. There is meaning

in confining education to the pursuit of peace because education has, as the pages of history tell us, done much to promote war, not only civil or national, but even imperial wars. By peace we do not mean just the absence of war but a positive climate in which communities, countries and nations can grow and develop a world of men and women who care for one another.

This is not a new idea, in fact the Nobel Prize Committee has created a prize for peace. The great giants who bestrode the world - every one of them like a colossus - were recommended for this prize. One of them Albert Schweitzer was awarded the prize though he deserved two others - Science and Theology. Bertrand Russell deserved the peace prize more than any others but he was awarded the prize for literature and the anti-climax is that Gandhi who was recommended for it almost universally did not get it and it had to be shared between two military heads of state who succeeded in stopping a war. All this shows that the accent is on the negative side that geniuses like Russell and Gandhi - two leaders of world renown who devoted their entire lives for peace in the positive sense go unrecognised.

In the past we read of wars that saw certain limited issues without causing destruction on a world scale. The recent Gulf war which caused much stir, just a couple of years ago, did not find favour with the American people, though President Bush found no other way of punishing the Baghdad Bully loosing some millions of dollars and thousands of soldiers on either side. To the American people who are on the eve of electing his successor, he seems to be a forgotten man.

People thought it natural that after Hitler's adventure that shook the entire world for some years, humanity would be cured of its craze for war for some decades at least. Millions of men, women and children had lost their lives in that adventure. But what is the move today when the atom bomb that was dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki reduced to tears the architect of atomic energy, the greatest scientist the world ever saw, Albert Einstein.

The great man climbing down from his upper chamber as the nurse rang the bell for his lunch, he heard the radio announce the tragic news. He came down sobbing and wiping his tears, with his handkerchief skipping his lunch.

Anyone of us living in this little corner called Jaffna in the north of Sri Lanka that has sent forth many a genius of spiritual, national and even international fame it would be difficult, nay impossible to imagine this little but dreadful war driving men, women and children that yet survive, away from their hearths and homes to nowhere in particular that it needs to be immediately done is to direct the younger generations away from such terrific acts into the ways of peace. And yet it is the "Boys" on either side of the divide are not prepared to talk for any kind of talk of peace. Peace to them means continued slavery in a country where the Tamil population has almost every ingredient that goes to make a nation.

It is true that civilisation cannot survive without peace in the proper sense of the term. But education for war cannot be dismissed as nonsense. It has been extolled in song and story, it has been glorified in history as it can always give a twist as it has done even in the case of victimised Tamils to some of man's best and strongest sentiments and pervert and exploit them for such airy nothings as patriotism, national honour, courage, sacrifice, discipline and a host of other virtues that would otherwise make us a powerful community. Though small, but capable enough to hold its own even with far more mighty countries.

Here it is that people are prone to indulge in such a prosaic like education for peace, that it sounds so flat, stale and unprofitable does not matter. We have already referred to the idea of a new man in a new world making for the oneness of mankind and mooted the idea of a mighty army of skilled and well-trained teachers as a prime industry to man the common schools for the common man. So it becomes imperative that education for peace should not be a separate isolated sphere of learning in schools alone but should form an integral part of the learning process of the new era in the

offing in every part of the world.

Our boys and girls cannot by any means avoid fighting for a better future in all the fields of endeavour which history in the making offers to man. We will fail in our purpose to educate for peace if we do not purposely and deliberately gear our school activities to all fields of life that are characteristic of today's man who is challenged by history here and now to create a better future for *Homo sapiens*.

We must educate a new man. If a man in Jaffna that prompts this theme swears by this creed it should sound as hard currency as it comes from a high powered personality or a super power or the head of a super power. In fact it is the super-powers that have brought the world to the edge of doom which should crusade for this kind of campaigning to sell the idea of common schools all over the world.

The corridor seems to be the key word of every aspect of the thesis examined in the entire book. I am referring to what Sir Robert Chalmer said at the first prize giving of Ramanathan College the first Secondary English school in 1913, "*First and foremost*" the Governor said, "*you will realise on entering the corridors that this is a school for girls. Education for women has been the theme of many a Tamil proverb I know. But these are not favourable to the higher education of the women. I think that the greatest gain that the East can gain from the West should be the recognition of the need for higher education for women. With all the rich heritage of a tradition and civilization of the East, you have much to gain from the enlarged civilisation which I suggest the West has added, so much is at your doors today. That civilisation requires education of women no less than men*".

The Governor was careful to add that no people which ignored its own past can hope to have any future at all. But it should not stand on the lines of the past only. It should grow on its

own routes, but enhance and enrich itself by absorbing into itself what it sees and feels to be the best from elsewhere. Though it is a girls' school where the Governor spoke and that too founded for Hindu girls, it was just two miles from what is described as one of the oldest girls' boarding schools in the country and nay they say in Asia. The point emphasised by the Governor applied to both, to the ancient Christian school whose roots were not firm in its own soil because almost hundred years to that of the latter, the western missionary, though he brought modern English education to that school was motivated by converting the heathen to christianity. It is not surprising therefore that the ancient school carries on as efficiently under native principals as before when the foreign missionaries were at the helm. But mark the difference, though it is not so exclusive as before, it has not developed the academic higher education half as well as Ramanathan College whose girls can be spotted anywhere by their gait, by their clothes and the mildness of their manner.

But this is not to deny that all christian schools are pockets of reaction, unable to sift the grain from the sand in adding to our own culture, the best elements that modern education especially in English can give. The two pre-eminent christian schools in the city of Jaffna have marvellously changed over from the alien tradition which corrupted the young girls seeking higher education before the forties. The 40's saw significant educational advance, heralding the country's independence. Central schools all over the country without any distinction of caste, creed or class were opened up at that time and the universal declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed in 1948 and with free-education rocking the country well in advance, English was replaced by Sinhala and Tamil.

The two prestigious schools I mentined, one C.M.S. and the other Wesleyan, were quick to change over even before state system came into force in the 60's. In fact one remained private and the other quite willingly accepted the take-over. Both these schools built themselves up not only physically but also with an

equipment of qualified staff to raise their status as two of the best girls schools in the island with eminent principals, products of the very same school very tactfully changing over to adapt themselves to the needs of girls from remote areas for higher university education while actively encouraging Tamil law and learning and the allied arts that have earned the esteem of the parents both Hindu and Christian. They were no more elite schools for the rich or the feudal aristocracy that hitherto blocked their gates which were now opened to all deserving children from any part of the area, merit mainly counting.

What we call common schools may sound unduly dramatic or too simple to understand the concrete difficulties inherent in this concept. But it is no joke that such schools alone can prepare the new man we speak of, for a social life that is based on social equality, another much maligned phrase.

In speaking of common schools, it needs no special effort that in a free country people should feel free to live their way of life. The English medium has for long divided the people into two nations as it were. This must not be confused with the two nations in the offing, as long as independent Sri Lanka is hell bent on Sinhala only as the state language. The few who govern and the many who are governed, are unable to talk the language of the other, denotes a dichotomy is a clear negation of democracy.

A national language makes for the most powerful means of developing national consciousness. If people are to live in peace and go about their pursuits, within the established order there can be no divisions based on language caste or creed. Freedom and peace, like fish and chips, cannot be divided and a community or a country can no longer afford to think of education and freedom that cannot generate a sense of belonging together. It is mainly through the mother tongue that international and a world outlook can be built in the minds of men.

It is in this context that the role of English becomes

appropriate. It is no more the first language, but its role has become different. It must continue to be studied. It is rich in literature humanities, scientific and technical knowledge. Under sentimental reasons we cannot afford to give up English. Just look at the mushroom tutorials in highways and byways that teach English to students and elders in the most slip shod-manner. Such unbecoming sights are a reflection of the unbalanced view of those who had gone crazy in the first rush of independence in all matters to its roots.

We must not forget our *Yuga Dharma*. Willy-nilly a sense of oneness of the world has to be clearly developed and a continuation of a language which is widespread will be of immense use.

It is a really agreeable irony, that Macaulay's minute has proved a blessing in disguise and that philosopher-statesman Radhakrishnan's terse statement that English is not an unfortunate imposition is pregnant with wisdom. It's true as even D.H. Lawrence said that it is psychologically barbarous to freely force down English on the throats of millions of people who have nothing to do with English. But in the case of our country, it's a different story. We have reason to continue English not as a first language but as an important second language compulsorily to be studied, if our backwardness for centuries has to be removed.

We cannot and will not renounce our rights and duties to the land of our forefathers in regard to our language and culture. At the same time we cannot avoid inter-dependence of all countries and continents which will exchange the know-how and share our cultural achievements and solutions of social problems.

The Jaffna University, yet very small and of recent origin, has already blazed the trail of building contacts with universities in The Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. These peace loving nations of the world that do not hit the headlines, can guide us in educating our youth for peaceful living.

Patriotism is different from chauvinism if we consider that throughout the centuries. Social conditions taught people to value inequality and superiority, seek private profit at others expense and issue or obey orders, then the new kind of man we seek is an urgent "must" and will himself be a reality.

Such a man must be shaped for new forms of labour and trained on a much higher scientific level. The demand for workers including teachers who are unskilled will drop rapidly and the demand for skilled workers will soar. The services and the professions will continue to be crowded and gain importance, encouraging increase in numbers.

And so the kind of chauvinism, like calling oneself Sinhala-Buddhist or Tamil-Hindu or demanding a separate slice for Islam or a separate state for Tamils called Eelam will not cause serious reaction as it has hitherto done. Our youth has to be educated so as to comprehend a historical development of their own little country as well of the world and its unification.

The differences among nations at the present level are many, but despite all differences, we should start a common course in the fight for progress and for the fullest development of man and his nationality that will prepare him for a life, free of phobias and meaningless prejudices.

10. A VERY PRECARIOUS FUTURE

“People with an excess of stupidity hope to chain up that hydra-headed monster called Revolution”.

It has become a trite statement that scientific progress made during the last two hundred years has eclipsed the entire achievements of the thousand years that preceded the period. We are also tired of hearing that we are living in one world now. It was also said in the same strain that what the world needed was an efficient economic safeguard for individual liberty and the preservation of democratic government.

The last war ended as we see it now in complete disgrace. The efficient economy of Russia, the individual liberty of America and the democratic institutions of Britain were then spoken of as the victorious outcome of Hitler's attempt to conquer the world.

And what do we see here in this tiny island as well as among the super powers. If man's primary need is food, Russia has begun to beg for food. America, the land of Lincoln and Jefferson, has not seen yet the government for the people. And as for Britain the least philistine nation in existence as someone said had to lose her empire and world supremacy, and what is worse they have come far behind some of the noblest traditions set by their pre-eminent statesman - Gladstone, Disraeli and in our times Attlee and Churchill.

In the midst of such international turmoil, even in Japan and China and the rest of America, not to speak of the changed situation in Europe with a bitter irony of socialist France topping Britain in wealth and other countries in Europe, the international scene including Africa and Asia is yet far from the prospects of peace, not merely the absence of civil and national wars, but positive

prospects of civilised living to the majority of people living in the dark continent as it is yet labelled.

And so we, in Ceylon and in this little corner called Jaffna, cannot be condemned if all that is left to our lot-the lot of those who survive an unending mad war on "*cynicism*".

Our country like many others belongs mainly to the man living on his land. It belongs to the farmer, but the farmer with all our tall talk of large scale cultivation belongs to the poorest section of the community. We still hope that agriculture with the help of applied science will solve all our problems of food and what's more can rewrite history by exporting it, if a new scheme is translated into action with vigour and imagination. An imposing project plan for the new Faculty of Agriculture that rightly is a main priority for the Jaffna University that I had the joy to see and read through is still-born.

All the sciences, natural and physical, chemical, engineering and architecture taught and introduced to the A.I. students in the bigger schools has not so far sent out from our schools a stream of determined men and women who could build up an efficient economy for their mother country. We are yet scrambling over the total marks required as per different regions developed and backward or is it Tamil or others to enter the much competitive rat race for admission to our universities. So far our science courses have creamed off our finished products for lucrative posts abroad. This has come to a boiling point in a historical village called Chulipuram in the Jaffna peninsula, which had as its motto "*Manners maketh the man*" inscribed prominently in the imposing hall that still stands as beautifully as it was perched on an iron rafter during the last half of the 19th century. Moral character, tolerance, fair play, free speech that are vital for the democratic way of living have gained general acceptance in many parts of the modern world and in this little island. Its northern capital was a proud illustration of how students in secondary schools even in

remote areas had their initial training as far back as a century and a half.

Today we have to produce a new generation which can see the points of view of those individuals with whom we have to live.

The well known story of an American who went back to his own country was flourishing his walking stick for joy until it came into contact with a protesting neighbour. "*Am I not free to wave my stick in our part of this country?*" said he. The reply came "*Your liberty ends where my nose begins.*" Tolerance shows itself in good manners and behaviour. It is now quite evident that the cinema, the press and the modern novel has done much to degrade the outlook of our young people, leading to a deplorable low manners during the last half-century. That horrid spirit must be rebuked. The brute in man has to be tamed and watched. Unless education refines and builds up character more urgently than it does today some of the precious things that still survive for us to feel confident, will be lost for ever.

We are on the verge of destruction and chaos not exactly as in the past but by the barbarism within ourselves. Let us remember the pyrotechnic display of the Jaffna Public Library a few years ago. All these and many other disasters usually make the teacher a scapegoat with the usual finger of scorn and the cynical inquiry, "*Who is the teacher who taught these men this kind of thuggery while at school?*"

It we have to build a true culture, I feel I am at a disadvantage to pontificate from a pensioner's sick bed as to what should be done. Can I risk the inevitable question? What were you and your colleagues doing for a quarter-century of independence. The idea of a public library was at least indirectly one of the fruits of a country's independence, when Sri Lanka was in the list of countries that needed resources for such public welfare.

It is almost tragic to think now that we have never been

fully independent except in a limited sense that the foreign is not in our soil now. But there are continued connections that are weakening our country in more sense than one. Those of my generation have gone through two stages. One the negative calling the old tradition good and the other initiative when we say that the new was better.

Let us now come to what is really relevant to the future. It should be suited to the modern way of life. We have to get our young ones in school into the 'creative' age which is not exactly equivalent to modern!

After two hundred years of liberal ideas gathered from all parts of the world not exclusively through British connection, we have to develop a culture of our own. Can a country as small as Sri Lanka or for that matter Jaffna, the capital of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, whose civilization and language has gained renown, can dream of making any serious impact on world civilisation with its originality? Someone may ask in scorn. It is small countries like ours that have grown cultures that could compensate for their size.

History and geography have conspired and will conspire to make such wonderful contributions if we can find a way of putting out the present fire within its own house. We are ideally suited to be the bridge or the meeting ground between the East and the West. We are a people professing four religions and can prove to the world that this is a secular country, secular not in the sense that it is spiritual and well known for its religious toleration, not mere toleration but complete understanding of each others spiritual aspirations according to the scriptures that belong to all.

Internal solidarity is the crux of the problem; genuine friendship among the people that have been living here from early times. Our only hope in the present impasse is our children and therefore we think of our schools. It is some kind of achievement that they have come under state control, except a few private

schools which are not allowed to have their own way as in the past. Though this is a step in the right direction, a lot more that should have been done by now remains a dream and this is largely responsible for the many disasters that have plagued this country from 1958 till now. Many of the schools in our villages and most of the teachers who have been teaching there have faced utter disappointment when the lot of the Tamil and the Sinhala schools called *vernacular* under colonial rule had seen no perceptible change in the teaching of modern science, mathematics, and other social sciences, no visible improvement in equipment, teaching standards and more qualified teachers, though the salary discrimination between *swabasha* and English teachers have been removed.

We must admit that the odds were heavy at the start but after thirty years of state system there is strong evidence of the state's woeful ignorance of our rural conditions is surprisingly strong.

Real Sri Lanka, and for that matter real Jaffna, though Jaffna's villages had at one time a highly literate population with many a scholar in the Tamil classics from ancient times lives in our villages. They are yet ridden with caste, creed and other petty differences of wealth and poverty. We must concede the old idea of depressed classes at one time called untouchables has virtually vanished. In fact a large number of the young women have come up and some of them have reached great heights like the highly placed compatriots. But there is yet the consciousness of caste which still persists must be driven out if we are to think of '*common schools*' at all. If Education in our schools still needs the most indispensable ingredient, it is love. Where a pupil has no respect for the teacher and where the pupils delinquency has not touched the very being of the teacher there can be no real learning.

Let me repeat; love is the cornerstone of every educational philosophy back from the time of Plato to Dewey of today or from the ancient Tamil *Sangam* poets of Madurai to Mahathma Gandhi's

Wardha scheme of today which has suffered severe criticism. Let us stop and look back without harking back, but at the same time let us note the vast changes especially in modern science and technology. Let us change the face of the world, not only economically, but even culturally. Our concept of common schools will be empty if we as parents and teachers and members of the public fail to grasp the essence of a world view starting from our own village and town and in ending up as a crow of flies in the entire world.

11. WE NEED PEACEFUL PIONEERS

“The teachers and students are the two eyes of any school and the teachers need to capture the students mind and with it his enthusiasm and confidence.”

It is true at least today that no other form of government promises greater fulfilment of man's needs than democracy. But as for its future it is still evident that the tender mercies of the mighty can manipulate its working so artfully that when they occupy the seats of power often forget to live up to their promises.

We are only too familiar with the somersaults often made by such reliable men - men of the calibre of Arthur Greenwood of Britain and the well known Rajaji, the last Governor-General of Indian Dominion to occupy that mighty seat of Vice Regal status, to realise what power could do, when he broke away from Mahatma Gandhi's Congress to form a new reactionary party called *Swathanthra* ignoring the ordinary man on whose eternal vigilance only democracy could develop.

And so it is what the country or the communities that compose a plural society needs in "*peaceful pioneers*" in the place of princely pioneers to whom we referred in glowing terms when we were working out an excellent system of secondary schools during British rule with all its space setting progress in the field of English education; still remembered are the rulers who came out to the colonies with Bible in one hand and sword in the other bidding 'good bye' to God on the eve of departure to a land of the heathens.

Power in its picturesque representation of opportunism is yet fresh in the mind of the Tamils in our country, that men who prided openly over their reckless devotion to principles, especially to minority rights within a brief career in the corridors of power

were not slow to greet the Tamil M.P.s with "*Oh thosai and vadai come and gingelly oil too!*" Does it not create a kind of mistrust for these champions, whose culture and integrity is a kind of thin doctrine often learnt from books and lending suspicion to foreign influence of *isms* that bear not much relevance to the problems that beset the land of their birth?

Do we not then realise in this hour of trial in our country or elsewhere, that just as war originates in the mind of men, "*the seeds of peace*" must be sown in the congenial climate of the nations of schools?

And what better machinery can be devised as we all attempted to work out defectively the progress and development of the common schools based on the philosophy to our people, "*the oneness of man*". Let not the red herrings of political parties sabotage the system either as champions by supporting them vociferously or as opponents espousing the "*status quo*" for indefinite periods with a delayed tactics that will find favour with the diehards who cannot see that much water has flown from the time when church and state or the village temple and the school shall always go hand in hand and that the schools should not raise their heads to question pre-ordained tenets of the scriptures, the immortal voice of the Gods.

THE IMMORTAL
PROFESSION
ITS UPS AND DOWNS

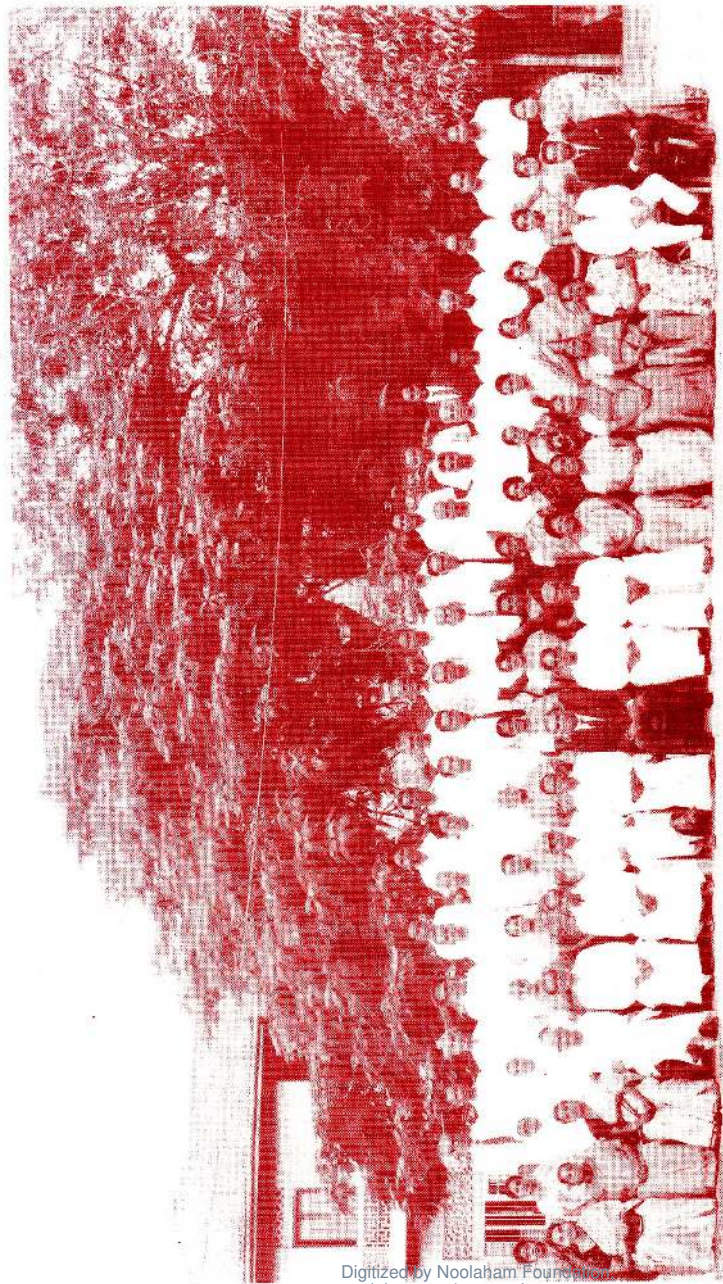
12. INTRODUCTION

It is only in times of public calamity when some bad news reaches us that we take any interest in life. In spite of killing and being killed, or perhaps because of it. There is a renewed zest for life which eludes the indifferent observer. Just watch the crowds that throng the Jaffna Supermarket in North Ceylon once curfew is relaxed after dangerous fighting or rioting, and then the secret becomes revealed.

There has been up to the recent past, a tremendous exodus of men and women, or whole families, from Jaffna seeking safer shores and greener pastures into the bargain. Consequently, there has been a wholesale breakup of the home in many parts of the peninsula and other parts of the troubled region. Still, we as a people, believe in the family as the essential unit of our society. Just read the obituary columns of the local Tamil dailies. How lengthy and detailed are the references made to the dead, no matter how high are the rates of advertisement. It comes from our inherent sense of stability that a family feels, at the supreme hour, when death takes away one member of it.

There is, however, another darker side to this picture. As a community, we are essentially incomplete men and women who, having renounced the religion from which they were born, are rapidly losing the culture that is based on that religion, and the humanity that is based on that culture. By religion is not meant the narrow bands that separate men from one another. On the other hand, it is the soul of all religions, that our people profess, which indeed is one and indivisible.

In our times, indifference to religion has grown so fast, no matter what the reason is, that it has become easy enough for



Principals of Northern Schools
- author in the first row.

political propagandists to preach that religious conflicts and conversions were things of the past. On the other hand, the culture that is built upon our religion, has become elastic enough to include infinite possibilities of social manipulation. It is easy for the Hindus to say that theirs is not an exclusive religion that there is room in it for the worship of all the prophets in the world. Though this is true, it weakens the tradition that is the hallmark of a practising Hindu. Only wonder then, that people in power have to reckon with the majorities who hold that their religion and culture cannot be watered down by the new doctrine of secularism. The ordinary Hindu or Buddhist will not be able to grasp its meaning - that to be secular is not to be irreligious.

Secularism comes out of a profound realisation that to be truly religious is to cross the barriers that men have erected between one group and another.

The remedy does not lie in harking back to former times, when faith in ones own religion was so simple and naive that any other faith was considered false and alien. Politics today is trying to sweep all pretensions to religion under the carpet and everywhere the war is between other substitutes to God - Communism and Anti-Communism, Asians and Europeans, White and Black, Capitalists and Socialists; and such wars between countries, or within one's country, "*take a local habituation and a name*".

How can learning which goes on in our schools, cope with the disaster that is engulfing many a country, including our own? Could teaching the young be effective enough to insulate them against the destruction that threatens our society of which schools are an integral part?

In our own country, people living in the North and the East, have been subject to riots and oppression for years and, today, this has spread out to the entire country in the form of insurgency and armed rebellion. Naturally, education has taken a sound beating;

and, in another sense, books and school instruction have been able to breed the conflict silently. How does this compare with the '*philosopher king*' Radhakrishnan's remark that the nation is built on its educational institutions.

Most of the schools are run by the state. It was always welcome that the state should be responsible for the education of its children, but did that mean that the state, itself, should do the education? Most of our schools were run by denominational bodies before 1960 and had enjoyed enough freedom in the running of schools. That tradition has been the bedrock which thirty years of the state system has not entirely changed. The state system, not regulated by the pressure of public opinion, tends to produce mental slaves who hear only one side of the burning questions of the day; and could be inspired with feelings of hatred and horror towards the other side.

One wonders, who wrote those books that openly teach race hatred? Textbooks were prepared by the Government and were distributed free as a supplement to free-education and free-attack is not yet on the agenda of national development.

Whenever there is an authority that sits tight on publication, school publications in particular, whose permission is required before a book can be printed, the results are disastrous, as we can plainly see.

What can schools do? As one who had spent the best part of his life in the classroom, I cannot afford to be cynical, though the question smacks of cynicism and despair.

I recall to mind what the late V. Sivasupramaniam, retired Justice, told me, when we met at the Human Rights Seminar at the Sri Lanka Foundation in December, 1980. He had gone out of the way to suggest to the organisers that I should be asked to read a paper, on behalf of the Hindu group, as to what Hinduism has to say on the subject. He had been a regular listener to my Hindu

talks in English over the radio for years and had mistaken me for a competent person to deal with the subject. He was, however, satisfied that I rose to his expectations, but more strange was his request that I should find time to write my memoirs which he hoped would have some impact on my colleagues in the South. There were others who had suggested the same thing even earlier as the only way to save myself from growing senility. Luckily for me, a long period of retirement did not mean absence of occupation. Numerous were the calls for continued public activity; which meant that I was able to manage leisure with grace. I am, however, beholden to the late Justice, who became very intimate with me after that historic occasion when a complimentary dinner was given to him by the O.B.A. of Jaffna Hindu College at the G.O.H., Colombo as a rejoinder to the government for his belated elevation. He, like many others who were there, said that he could never forget the speech I made in responding to the toast of the College - his *alma mater*.

Both of us endorsed and admired Bertrand Russell's comment whenever we met to discuss the present crisis. "*If men desired their own happiness more than the misery of their enemies, they could possibly unite themselves into one people and abolish poverty - the basic form of every form of conflict.*" Common sense should counsel people to forsake any wrong belief, hatred and folly. It is in such hope and expectation against overwhelming odds, that I felt impelled to review the past in some personal way, while I had the time and mind for nothing more challenging to my pen. I am also fortified by the love of a good mother - the most precious experience granted to man and inspired by the love of a good wife which is precious too. Nor can I ever forget the Spartan discipline and the wise direction my father blessed me with, though fate in its cruelty robbed the family of its future - especially in the cause of higher education.

13. THE PENINSULAR WAR

Jaffna is neither a city nor a country to the people who have lived long enough to trace their ancestry to the time of their forefathers. To them, it means a cultural climate. It stands for peace, good neighbourliness, and a community life based on the excellence of family life. The best of men and women, once most industrious and adventurous, have in their history sought more opulent climes in quest of wealth and returned to enrich the family coffers, and thus helped to make the community self-sufficient, and even prosperous.

It is in such a background that a war which started with a series of riots since 1958 came into the heartland of Jaffna. People had been in a state of turbulence for many years, but ever since the Sri Lankan army started its invasion of the northern part of the peninsula, under the pretext of quelling the Tamil militants, people hoped against hope that it would not develop into a horrid war. When bombing started in the city of Jaffna, there was a public outcry for help; the only hope was India, which could step in and prevent the destruction of the people. When at last we were told in 1987 that fighting had stopped and that there would be no more war. People praised India first for lifting the siege and supplying food and other essentials, first as a token by military planes and then by ships. The truce that began with the supply of food resulted in an Accord between Sri Lanka and India, when the Indian Prime Minister came to Sri Lanka to sign it on the invitation of the Sri Lankan President.

What a miracle! All was quiet on the Dutch Fort front in Jaffna. Shelling for almost four years had come to a stop. Normal life began to sprout slowly, buses began to ply and, within days, even trains that came to a grinding halt for years began to run. That tooting of the Yarl Devi was unmistakable. First, in fear and

hesitation and, a few days after with perfect confidence, transport began to pick up.

All this short-lived joy that the so-called Accord brought, suddenly snapped and, in October, 1987, started what may be called the "*Peninsular War*." No-one seemed to know exactly how it started or when it would end. There was a contradiction in the situation and it fitted well with the times when great people lived by the courage not of their convictions but of their contradictions. The Indian Peacekeeping Force, which was hailed as a saviour at first, seemed to change over from its mission of protecting Jaffna from the rape of the Sri Lankan army to another kind of war, when it suddenly called upon the citizens of Jaffna to leave their homes and seek safety in schools and temples. The order announced on the radio was very brightening; but we were not to question why. While people ran helter-skelter it was too much for the aged and the infirm to seek the doubtful safety of schools and temples. As a septuagenarian, and afflicted with an illness that had condemned me to my living room for some time, I could not join the thousands that fled from the terrific shelling and firing of the Indian military. My own house had tasted the sharpnel that damaged the boundary wall.

My infirm wife and I could only cross the road and seek the shelter of a strongly built house - a bit of a "*fortress*" - that was comparatively safer. The occupants - rather the owners - obligingly gave us shelter while they themselves, according to military decree, sought refuge at the Nallur Temple. For three days and nights we had to live in fear and trembling. It was a continuous attack of the artillery or mortar shells. Each evening made us mournful and each sunrise brought back some brightness and, with the day and night curfew for days on end, we had to live on the barest necessities available. Death's shadow was at our very door and, if there was any comfort, it was that both of us might be summoned in the self-same-hour.

What happened to upset the brief concord which this Accord at first brought? It is still a mystery to the ordinary man who was called upon to pay the price in hundreds, or even thousands, of lives. How did India in a truce send a massive military fleet to Jaffna, not to protect it as we yearned, but to subdue it, it seemed.

What is the time today, as the calendar indicates? It is "*Kanda sashdi*" day, a day on which, in normal times, all roads of Jaffna lead to Nallur. It marks the beginning of a six-day fast - quite a rigorous one - when it is normally forbidden to eat or drink anything except a cup of milk and that too in the evening after a bath. Contrast the age-old custom with what is happening in Nallur today. The war has turned it into a refugee camp where people, in their thousands, are praying for deliverance.

The six-day fast ends with a festival which portrays the epic battle between Lord Murugan, the Almighty and Sooran - the King of the Asuras. As I write these lines, shells are pounding the city with helicopters flying and regulating their targets. No-one knows how these engines of destruction behave, except that the schools and temples may be spared, but even that belief has been belied.

Dread in the faces of men, women and children seems infectious; minds quite vacant are minds distressed and, in today's battle at Nallur, who wins? The Lord, of course, but on whose side are these pitiful refugees ranged? Ramayanam and Bharatham are epics describing the war between good and evil. The Gita, a part of Bharatham, appears as a small poem - only seven hundred verses in length and according to a German scholar - William Humboldt, "*It is a poem of crisis, and even more so a crisis in the spirit of man.*"

Its appeal is as strong today as it ever was in India or Sri Lanka. Have we, as a people, as an ancient community living in this part of the island, known or faced such a severe crisis ever before?

According to learned commentators of the Gita, like Tilak or Aurabindo Ghose, there is a place for violence and warfare in human life for righteous causes; but Gandhiji's interpretation is totally different. He does not see any justification for violence in this immortal song.

What does the Mahatma say? It may look ridiculous to solicit the testimony of the Apostle of non-violence at this hour when we see the streets and the city of Jaffna littered with the various parts of the human anatomy. Corpses are seen rotting without end for days, without anyone to burn or bury.

Gandhiji believes that Duryodhana and his supporters stand for Satanic impulses in us and Arjuna and others stand for Godward impulses. Gita, according to him, does not describe an actual battle in the physical battlefield. The poet 'seer' regards the body as the battlefield. He knows from experience the problems of life and has given us a faithful account of the conflict which is internally going on within us. Gandhiji does not suggest that violence has no place in the Gita. The Dharma which it teaches, according to him, does not mean that a person who has not awakened to the Truth of non-violence, may act like a coward. Both Tilak and Aurobindo interpret the battle fought on the plains of Kurushestra, north-west of Delhi, 2,500 years ago B.C., to justify violence and war in the conquest of evil and the pursuit of Dharma; but Gandhiji thinks that there is only one Dharma - non-violence. Non-violence means Moksha, which does not countenance, under any circumstances, running away from fear.

Where do we stand in the midst of these conflicting laws laid down by seers and sages that we have seen and not seen? On the face of adverse fate we have to learn two things: When to accept it and when to resist it. We know by experience that there are times when good gifts are cups of poison and they should be rejected; there are also times when misfortunes are cups of blessing and they should be accepted..

How do we tackle a situation which is manifestly ominous? Do we run away from it as men usually do and leave the hearths and homes of the land of our fathers, who toiled that we might live in love and happiness? Thousands and thousands of people in the South as well as in the North had fled to foreign countries - not only as an escape from dreadful realities but in search of lucrative employment. Does this exodus ease the situation here? It brings in income for the families left behind who are otherwise stranded. Even the Government encourages this exodus, partly to shift the responsibility off their back to an unknown quarter and, partly to benefit by the revenue, that totals a mighty sum that cannot be dreamt of if these expatriates sit vegetating at home in the midst of this turmoil. Is that the end of the story? What happens to the dependants, to the wife or the husband left high and dry to look after the children? Is family life intact? We read of some stories and of the lewd life of women employed in the Middle East, of the men that break up their homes, and the children driven to no-man's land. Nor is everything all right with those who pack bag and baggage to the more developed lands of the West, or to India our near neighbour, where they could live comfortably in their affluence.

Let me come back to those of us who, either by necessity or choice, are still wedded to the soil that is now watered by the rivers of blood. Like the old man in "*Macbeth*", one feels tempted to say "*Three score and ten I remember well, within the volume of which time, I have seen hours dreadful and things strange, but this sore night hath trifled former knowings.*" I have in my diary, a record of such a sore night, when we both sat straight with our backs to the wall in the narrow confines of the 'strong room' in this extensive mansion, counting time by the clock. Shells to the right of us, shells to the left of us and shells in front, volleyed and thundered; it was said to be a decisive night when the combatants on either side made their bid for the Jaffna super-market. We had to munch cream crackers silently - rather swallowing the rare luxury after liquefying them in the mouth. We sat with bated breath.

till sleep overwhelmed us. Sunrise saw more dangerous deeds. The victors were smoking out the delinquents hidden in byways and homes that appeared deserted. By 8-00 a.m. the all-clear was just visible.

As I made the hazardous crossing to my house opposite, for a change of clothes and a wash, I could see at a distance on the road two huge corpses - the one, the familiar milkman, caught in the crossfire; the other, a middle-aged man, who ventured to lock up his house and return to the Nallur Temple. He was shot down in his own house when he moved about to pluck a wood apple to break his fast. Such events were typical of the military exercise to quell the might of Tamil militants that were warring against the IPKF.

In distant Katmandu, the SARRC - "*Shark*"- summit, brought the partners of the Accord to discuss the delicate problems that persisted in the agreement. Could they include some kind of civil rule? people ask; they wonder how a Delhi rule over Jaffna would be like. How long would it take for a people that have been fed on untold agony to feel the warmth of a civil rule? Not for quite some time to be sure! Civilisation, or culture the gracious fruit of centuries of co-operative effort has been mortally challenged by the might of brute force. This has become an arbiter between right and wrong. We have long been talking in the hope of misleading each other and putting off the evil hour which has turned up far too soon.

Communism is said to consider religion as the opium of the people but here in Jaffna it is politics that fits into such an image; else how should an internal, a very domestic issue, bloat itself out of proportion to international levels and court the intervention of an outside power?

We are all guilty, in that we lack the moral and intellectual vision to use our opportunities correctly; our energies are wasted in fratricidal conflicts. In an era of political independence, we find

that we are slowly led up the garden path, not to gather grapes of the good life, but to collect grapes of wrath.

It does not matter what party one belongs to, or whether one does not belong to any party at all, but it does matter, profoundly, whether a person has honestly and intelligently come by his opinions and has accepted that as a conviction, or has merely borrowed them from some glib salesman who has played on his feelings and prejudices.

14. JAFFNA CONTINUES IN COMA

To the average man in Jaffna, a holocaust elsewhere, be it in far away Punjab or in hamlets called Kokkadicholai or Aranthurela in the East of our island, is a mere item of news with the cold figures of those killed or injured. It is due to the lack of imagination which has blunted his sensitiveness and sympathy. He is incapable of translating the figures catalogued in the daily paper, or over the radio, into living and moving pictures of what they imply-live uprooted, families wiped out, life-saving institutions ruthlessly destroyed, hopes dashed to the ground, and all the suffering with want, hunger and disease.

Do we now realise that we are face to face with a kind of Nemesis that is out for a heavy toll for the indifference we have shown to stark realities across the fence?

With a war in the peninsula, which has paralysed our daily lives, we are tempted to recall some of the costly mistakes India made on our behalf. At a time when the Tamil cause was espoused very courageously, in the eyes of the World, New Delhi quite thoughtlessly made a dawn attack on the Tamil militants in Tamil Nadu, which resulted in the seizure of a large amount of sophisticated weapons and arrest of some prominent leaders. This was hailed as a convincing proof of the excellent morale of its police force. While this inflamed the militants to the extent of quitting the Indian soil, it embarrassed the Delhi Government which kept on denying any militant training camp in Tamil Nadu. It was done perhaps to make way for the Sri Lankan President Jayawardene's visit to Bangalore, without the slightest risk to security arrangements; but what a bitter irony does it remind us of, when the Indian Prime Minister was in Colombo on 30th July, 1987? His very visit to Colombo to sign the Agreement should be deemed doubly courageous-since feelings against India and the Indian

Government were running high here amongst the Sinhala section of the country. The Indian P.M. was even advised not to risk his visit to Colombo and, how true this advice was proved to be, by the shocking assault on the Prime Minister by a Sri Lankan sailor, who was part of the closing guard-of-honour ceremony when in Colombo. The whole world was greatly relieved that Rajiv Gandhi escaped. It was by a rare kind of '*corner-of-the-eye*' anticipation and '*agility*' as he, himself, called it, to duck away from the crunching blow to his heart.

Without further digression, I must refer to the Accord which was said to be an attempt to '*wage peace*', as the Indian President - Venkataraman - called it. We were all - perhaps naively counting on the Indian Government that acted on our behalf to persuade the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam leader to accept the good faith of both governments, within a context that was being heavily guaranteed by India. Many of us had a hunch that, wrongly handled by any of the parties, things could go out of control but, at that moment, the Agreement seemed vital to our very existence.

So, where and how, did some of its strings snap; was it by choice or chance? How did the L.T.T.E. leader, who was reported to have said the other day "*we love India and the people of India*", signify the transformation of an armed guerilla organisation into another kind of political body? Was it under the weight and moral persuasion of new historical circumstances? As the Sri Lankan President, in an interview to a prestigious Indian daily, said "*I have forgiven the Tamil militants; let them lay down their arms and join the main stream of political life and be elected into positions of power.*" Was it an attempt, a tragic attempt, all too familiar of misleading an aggrieved minority which had shed so much of innocent blood? What has gone so grievously wrong for the militants to harp on a permanent solution and to pitch their guns against India, whose troops were supposed to save us from aerial destruction of Jaffna, and who appeared to be on

friendly terms with the militants? A number of "isms" are bandied about - the terrorism of the Tigers which seems to be very repetitive with the Government, the Hinduism of the Tamils in the North and the militant Buddhism in the South. Is it a case of three-in-one as one kind of oil is often referred to?

Foreign journals - the American papers in particular - are describing the present conflict as between the ruling Buddhists and the Hindu minorities of Sri Lanka. Perhaps they have a hindsight in matters political and could delve into the depths and bring out old sores that keep on festering beyond the recognition of new arrivals on the scene. If it is thought that the parent religion that dominates the people of India is opposed to the Buddhistic way of life, then it betrays profound ignorance of both the religions and their present impact on the respective adherents. They seem to be quite ignorant that Hindus here are not minorities in any sense.

Here is an eloquent extract that settles the doubt: *"Of what can we be certain except this - that we are fertilised by mysterious circumstances? Where is man's truth to be found? Truth is not that which can be demonstrated by the art of logic. If orange trees are hardy and rich in fruit in this bit of soil and not that, then this bit of soil is what is truth for orange trees. If a particular religion or culture or scale of values of one form of activity rather than another brings self-fulfilment to a man, then that scale of values, that culture, that form of activity, constitutes his truth."*

This is not to imply that in a soil, so congenial for the palmyrah, jak trees cannot possibly grow but, just as the Tamils that inhabit the North and East find it natural to embrace Hinduism, even so, in the South - particularly in the deep South, Buddhism lives in all its strength unaffected by the shifting sands of politics.

In any case, India could not have insidiously crept into Sri Lanka to settle the fundamental differences amongst the inhabitants of a neighbouring country; and India swears by the territorial

integrity of Sri Lanka! How comes it then that a very large army has been commissioned to keep peace here and to disarm the militants of their weapons?

In a highly infectious atmosphere of panic and fear when reports come rushing in of men killing one another so easily, I find it difficult to kill time; watching the clock that doesn't seem to move.

By my side there is Nehru's *'Discovery of India'* and I turn over the pages to find some comfort to questions that may have struck the reputed statesman and writer. At last I am able to spot the relevant extracts that deal with geo-politics, something that is on everyone's lips today, particularly after the Indian army crossed over to Sri Lanka. The military reality in the name of keeping the peace in the North and East is appearing oppressive to the people in these parts, particularly in Jaffna, seems to be a blatant repudiation of Nehru's hopes and prophecies. This is what he says, "*Geo-politics has now become the anchor of the realists and its jargon of 'Heartland and Rimland' is supposed to throw light on the mystery of National growth and decay. The war was fed on the dreams and ambitions of World domination on it and finally reaped disaster. No nation can isolate itself, or be indifferent to the political and economic fate of other nations. If there is no co-operation, there is bound to be friction with its inevitable results. Co-operation can only be on the basis of equality and mutual welfare, on an elimination of parochialism and domination. But the mind of man lags behind the course of events and adjusts itself only slowly to them. Self-interest itself should not drive every nation into this wider co-operation in order to escape disaster in the future and build its own free life on the basis of others' freedom. But the self-interest of the realist is far too limited by past myths and dogmas and regards ideas and social forms suited to one age as immutable, and as unchanging parts of human nature and society, forgetting nothing is so changeable*

as human nature and society.”

How aptly do these ideas portray the constant conflict between idealism and realism which influenced Nehru's thinking at every turn, and how well they fit in with the happenings in Jaffna since the arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force. Nehru, who laughs at “*Geo-politics*” of the old order and the war which was its inevitable end, would not easily reconcile himself with what is now happening in Sri Lanka. Could he be certain that the outcome of the entire adventure would have the blessings of the peoples of India and Sri Lanka?

To be charitable to Nehru, I have advisedly used the word outcome as a proviso; in spite of the present atmosphere of oppression and fear that has gripped the hearts and minds of the peace-loving citizens of Jaffna who, from very early times, venerated Gandhiji, Nehru traditions. Much water has flowed between the Pamban bridge and Palk Strait since Independence for the world to believe that the ‘*fiasco*’ of Finland - or what is now called ‘*Finlandisation*’ will not be repeated. The Tamils of Sri Lanka, however intimate their connection may be with India, and Tamil Nadu in particular, are an entity by themselves and part and parcel of Sri Lanka - the land of our fore-fathers; but, in our struggle for the preservation of our integrity as a people, we do expect the sympathy of our next-door neighbours when we are confronted with a crisis in our identity. Whatever be the present despair that has crept into our lives, as a people we cannot shake off the inherent traits of our character, which are normally ascribed to our Dravidian origin. The well-known song of the *Sangam* poet, Kanniyar Poonkunran, does not in any way exaggerate the virtues that have come down from the ages. Here is a translation of the poem that dates back to two thousand years ago:

“All lands are our home, all men kin. Evil and good are not from others, nor are pain and its abate. Death is nothing

new. We do not rejoice life thinking sweet and if pain comes, even less do we find it a cause for grief. Through the eyes of those who see deeply, we have come to know that life takes its hard course, as if it were a raft in the water of a mighty river, ever roaring and beating on rocks, after a cold rain pours from splashing skies. So we do not wonder at the great and, still less, do we despise the small."

15. FREE JAFFNA FROM FEAR

Could you spot the true insomniac at a glance? I wish you could. If that is so, you may be able to follow me better if my distracted brain takes me at a tangent.

Insomnia has been with me for years and sedatives that change with the change in medical fashion do help me to control it. Last night, in particular, there was a ghastly relapse. I lay curled on my bed like a shrimp or cashew. The second pillow on the side was no more hospitable than the first. The prevalent mood in Jaffna, I find, has bred a number of hypochondriacs like me.

It was 2-00 a.m. I was wondering whether I should take another pill - no - to borrow from Shakespeare's Othello: "*Not poppy, nor Mandrgora, nor all the drowsy syrups of the world are worth a dam.*"

Past 2-00 a.m. and, after what looked a long time afterwards, it was only 3-00 a.m., and I dozed off fitfully until I woke again at 6-00 a.m. Tired in the morning, I was more concerned with the accent of the word - on which syllable it falls in "*Mandrgora.*" I recollect a passage somewhere which could keep my spirits up at this moment. In a trice, I could lay my hands on it and, here it is!

On the fateful evening of the 8th August, 1942, Gandhiji said: "*We must look the world in the face and with calm and clear eyes, even though the eyes of the world are bloodshot today.*"

When did he make this historic pronouncement? Just after midnight on 8th of August, 1942, in a stifling hot Bombay meeting hall Gandhiji, naked to the waist, sent out a call to arms to his followers of the All India Congress Committee. His voice, it is recorded, was quiet and composed, but the words he uttered carried a passion and fervour utterly uncharacteristic of Gandhiji.

"I want freedom immediately", he said, "this very night, before dawn, if it can be had. Here is a Mantra, a short one I give you", he told his followers.

"Do or die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt. We shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery." In the morning, the '*Quit India*' resolution he moved galvanized the entire nation into a new outburst of confidence and courage.

The courage that was couched in those words was just the thing that we need today. We need a Gandhiji - a mini at least - that could evoke in our countrymen the courage that could rid us of the fear - the fear that has entered into the innermost recesses of the hearts of ordinary men, women and children after the merciless massacre that we have been through at the hands of two armies. In the glow of warm candlelight-even a candle is a rare commodity in Jaffna now - or in the misery of utter darkness, people sit glued to their seats to hear if any battery radio could bring any soothing news to halt this continuous massacre.

Oscar Wilde was right when he said that the tragedy of old age is that one feels young. Was it not President Roosevelt who, during the Second World War, enunciated the four freedoms to Congress on 6th January 1941 - Freedom of speech and religion, freedom from want and fear? Was it not the same President who roused the Americans to join the war against Hitler with the words: *"It were better to die on our feet than to live on our knees?"*

We, in Jaffna, are not worried about the freedom of speech or religion, or freedom from want. What we do want, now, is the freedom from fear.

Every minute, every hour, brings us the usual tidings of Jaffna's youth killed. Everywhere, we hear the rapid rattle of the rifles.

Just now, I remember the occasion years ago when I held a distinguished audience of my colleagues in Colombo at the Post-graduate Training Course and their teachers spell-bound, when I took a model English lesson on Englishman Wilfred Owen's "*Anthem For Doomed Youth.*" As you read the poem that tells the harrowing experiences of the First World War, you realise the irony of the situation today, which I never dreamt of when I tried to recreate the pathos in the poem almost forty years ago to the senior students of Thurstan College. The original effect of the poem was highly appreciated.

When I finished the lesson, there was a two minutes silence, not of homage to the doomed youth, but a silence born of admiration for the lesson that went down with the entire audience. One must read the poem to realise its relevance:

*"What passing - bells for those who die as cattle?
 Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
 Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
 Can patter out their hasty orisons.
 No mockeries now for them, no prayers nor bells
 Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,-
 The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
 And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
 What candles may be held to speed them all?
 Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
 Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes
 The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
 Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
 And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds."*

Could Jaffna which received Swami Vivekananda late in the last century, brought Mahatma Gandhiji to the shores of Sri Lanka, and hailed the Nehru family in the Jaffna esplanade as messengers of independent India, brook to see these barbaric acts that could baffle any Indian or, for that matter, any man! The cream

of Jaffna's youth, who were called "*freedom fighters*" by the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, are being cut down on their own soil, especially when they have won the admiration of the world for their bravery in war - a war to free their kith and kin from the tyranny of the majority, from repetitive riots, murder, arson and rape for three decades or more!

The city of Jaffna has been awakened today, according to my diary, to an eight-hour break from all day cruftews for days on end, and what do we hear? Gruesome tales from the suburbs of the city where Saturn has been aggressively active. Of the many horrors that we hear of, there is one particular piece that stands on all fours with Shakespeare's Macbeth - the description of the "*fell swoop*" which fits in so appropriately except for this difference - that MacDuff who was safe in England inquired for the safety of his wife and children and servants who were snatched away by the "*hell kite*" in Scotland. What happened here at Kondavil, just three miles away from the city, was among many other incidents the total elimination of a family - the husband, wife, son and two servants who ran for safety to the backyard of their mansion.

How true to life was Shakespeare, to the very detail, when he described the "*fell swoop*"! To describe this particular scene in my own words, rather than to quote it, is to vulgarise the tone of the tragedy couched in this phrase:

Here is the extract:

MacDuff - *Stands Scotland where it did?*

Ross - *Alas, poor country! Almost afraid to know itself.
It cannot be called our mother, but our grave; where
nothing, But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile.
Where sighs and groans and shrieks, that rend the air
Are made not mark'd; where violent sorrow seems
A modern ecstasy; The dead man's knell
Is there scarce ask'd for who, and good men's lives*

Expire before the flowers in their caps,

Dying or ere they sicken.

MacDuff - *O, relation Too nice, and yet too true!*

Mal - *What's the newest grief?*

Ross - *That of an hour's age doth hiss the speaker;*

Each minute teems a new one,

MacDuff - *How does my wife?*

Ross - *Why, well.*

MacDuff - *And all my children?*

Ross - *Well too.*

MacDuff - *The tyrant has not battered at their peace?*

Ross - *No; they were well at peace when I did leave them.*

MacDuff - *Be not a niggard of your speech, how goes it?*

Ross - *Your castle is surpris'd. Your wife and babes*

Savagely slaughter'd. To relate the manner.

Were, on the quarry of these murder'd deer.

To add the death of you.

Mal - *Merciful Heaven! What, man! Ne'er pull your hat upon your brows;*

Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak.

Whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids its break.

MacDuff - *My children too?*

Ross - *Wife, children, servants. All that could be found.*

MacDuff - *And I must be from thence! My wife kill'd too?*

Ross - *I have said.*

Mal - *Be comforted. Let's make us medicines of our great revenge.*

To cure the deadly grief.

MacDuff - *He has no children. All my pretty ones?*

Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?

What, all my pretty chickens and their dam.

At one fell swoop?

The family that was thus extinguished in Jaffna was not much less distinguished than that of MacDuff in Scotland. They were closely knit to the highest in the land; and when news of this atrocity reached the Metropolis, where their next of kin lived, they found comfort in the wry humour that it was providential that they were all packed together with none left to tell the tale - a veritable hell on earth for the survivors.

What makes me feel sick with shame and sorrow, is the thought that those who were left to watch this orgy of blood were not live enough to denounce these inhumanities, unknown to the civilized world. To die like cattle, leaving carcasses to the wind and weather, without the mockeries of prayers or burials, is too much to swallow, even to those whose trade is to spill blood.

We are now left with a generation supped full of horrors, with minds and emotions warped and diseased. Their re-education to normalcy is the most challenging problem of the future.

16. SETTLING THE PROBLEM OF PEACE

Radical philosophers through the ages have advocated a revolution every generation. They argued that each generation should make a clean break with its predecessors and shape the world according to its own ideas.

What we see in our country, seems to illustrate what these advocates dictate or demand. It was said of Clemenceau, the French Premier - one of the Big Three that sat at the Peace Conference of 1919 - perhaps the ablest, that he had one illusion - France, and one disillusion - Mankind, including Frenchmen. Does this remark not fit in with the Leader of the LTTE, who has reason to be disillusioned with Mankind, including Tamils, but who still clings to the conviction that Eelam is the solution to the problem of peace?

States and societies are distinguished not by size or geography but by the social system. Sri Lanka itself, is not big in size nor distinguished by its geography, but it has a history of long and enduring cultures. I use the plural advisedly, since neither Sinhala Culture nor Tamil Culture could, by itself stand the test of political independence. For the last forty years, independence has not been able to build a social system that could reconcile the two communities into a unified nation. The war in the North, as well as in the South, cannot be dismissed as terrorism on the part of some misguided youth.

It is easy to condemn violence in any form, by quoting the self-evident truth that nothing enduring can be built on it. All experience of non-violent methods proved futile; which opened the hearts of the young militants to violence. The young militants of the North - most of them were not born when the Satyagraha campaign of 1960 was launched before the Jaffna

Kachcheri. Stamp of Independent Eelam which was then issued - would now look ridiculous to the young militants who had sacrificed thousands of their compatriots in armed warfare.

It may be said, as Gandhiji said, "*To answer brutality with brutality, is to admit one's moral and intellectual bankruptcy.*" Undoubtedly, it starts a vicious circle as it certainly did in our case. Our young men, like those in the South, were not educated in a justly planned social environment. Our social fabric is based on greed, rivalry, exploitation and injustice. How could even the best of schools and colleges inculcate abiding habits of co-operation and selfless service in such a setting?

On the other hand, how can we transform an immoral and competitive society into a moral and co-operative organism until the minds and notions of men and women are trained along more sensible and healthy lines?

Social mal-organisation, so palpably prevalent in the discredited and degenerated system of caste and dowry and such social evils, and the educational pattern, are tied up together in a vicious circle. "*The problem of reform*" as Aldous Huxley, of "*Ends and Means*" fame puts it, "*is a problem of breaking out of a vicious circle and building up a virtuous one.*"

Who is to bell the cat? The problem in our community is complicated and has become intractable through a social system that has become "*sanctified*" in the name of Hindu culture. It has thus seen long years of neglect and cannot be solved by futile discussions or hypocritical plans of direct action.

But there comes a time in man's history, at some stage of it, when patience can sit no more like a silent monument. At such a time, we get a small group of selfless and determined persons, so devoted to a particular creed that they would be prepared to give up all temptations of worldly success for the sake of their cherished ideals. They are the men who could deal a frontal

assault on this elusive problem. In the context of our struggle for national identity, our young men were, obviously, impatient of the systematic racial rioting, torture and killing of their elders; they were eye witnesses to the progressive deception that successive governments, after our independence practised on the Tamil political leaders. It seemed to them impossible, both in the political and moral plane, to salvage the struggle that was being extinguished through political expediency, except under a leadership of a mighty personality who could lead an armed struggle and win the sympathies of friendly countries. Though violence at any time is neither lawful nor moral, does it not become inevitable when a series of acts of injustice are committed on an obviously defenceless people? It is offered in self-defence, seen in the right perspective. Gandhiji, in his "*Young India*" of 4/8/1920, has said that he would risk violence a thousand times, rather than see the emasculation of a whole race. This shows that Gandhiji was a spirited radical even at fifty, having led several campaigns of social uplift in South Africa with success.

Does this not apply to the rulers of one's own state, who have reduced one section of the population to virtual slavery under a government not approved by them nor consonant with honour and dignity?

Let us now come to the serious problem of a permanent peace, which could only come about by involving the Tamil militants in a rational form of government where they could feel that their people are masters of their fate. Granting that they had adopted arbitrary methods to seek redress to their grievances and problems, it would only be realistic and prudent to accept them - whatever the cost - as the chief negotiators for a lasting solution.

It has now been found that the Peace Accord has taken too much for granted, and that neither party - North or South - is backing it with all its heart. India, therefore, should not stand too much on prestige in readjusting the Accord by accommodating

international opinion, and be guided by the counsels of neutral powers to mediate between the principal partners in a fresh bid to settle the problem. The Indian P.M. can still save his face by his open-minded approach to the problem that persists over a long period on account of one important gap in the Accord. The LTTE-which had borne the brunt of prolonged war, is not just one military group. True, all military groups must participate in the negotiations, but nothing substantial will be achieved if this one group is left out.

It was really tragic, and history will record this tragedy in all its blackness, that the Sri Lankan government harboured long the thought that it was on its path to victory in effecting a military solution. The whole country now is awake to this tragedy which has plunged it into irrevocable disunity and disaster. It will take several decades to restore normality.

No-one, not even the alleged offenders, really enjoy violence, terrorism, bloodshed, torture, rape, and similar actions in the long term. We had to suffer these for such a long time because we sowed the wind and now we are left to reap the whirlwind. The irony of the situation is that the Sinhalese, Tamils, and the Muslims of this country, are basically peace-loving, progressive people that belong to a highly respected ancient culture and religious background.

No party can continue to be intransigent at this stage in the blind belief that it has outwitted its opponent and, to the ordinary man living North or South, it is sometimes not clear who the opponents are on the other side of the fence. The presence of the Indian army seems to be a common target; and this clearly shows that this complex problem continues to be complex dividing the country into racial strife. Persons in authority, who were temporising with this problem, appear to have shifted all the burden off their back on to India, not realising that the solution is a two-way process. There can be no sincere and successful peace while killings continue in the open or on the sly. It is dangerous to trifle with

guerilla warfare which for centuries has continued a conflict between England and Northern Ireland that, even today, is a threat on the life of the Head of the British Government. Peace cannot succeed in an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, anger and hatred.

It is, of course, unrealistic to expect the fighting parties and the feuding militant groups to start being friendly or love each other, but a good working relationship and minimum level of mutual trust in each other's desire to solve the problem must be established. India can, and must, try again to rouse the Sri Lankan Government to honour its commitments to the Accord which remains still born on account of the cussedness of a government that still dreams of misleading the masses.

The militants for their part, the LTTE in particular, will do well to disabuse their minds that in being partners to a just settlement they are defeated in their objectives. There is no total win in any war at any time.

India must, by words and deeds, extricate itself from the opprobrium that is cast on it by the events - most unfortunate and unforeseen - that followed the Accord, and pull its full weight to grant greater weightage to a problem that cannot be solved with the sop of a provincial system of government, unless it means real autonomy or home-rule - call it whatever you will - that will end the sufferings of a people who had shed more blood than total independence demanded.

17. WHERE IS THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE?

It should be a part of education to reach the young minds, to use words with a precise meaning, rather than with a vague mist of emotion. That we have failed in this respect is evident in the present crisis. No two words had been more abused than democracy and science, but they still remain the most powerful words in our age. Democracy aims at liberating man and strives to win for him his full human dignity and status. Science aims at releasing his mind from superstition, ignorance and obscurantism. It also enables him to control the forces of nature and bend them to the service of his purposes. These two definitions are quoted from Russell in his book on "*Education*."

How do these two concepts operate in this little world we call our own. Democracy demands the good life, which consists in proper distribution of material and cultural resources among our people without being the monopoly of the few. Science could be regarded as one of the most powerful means for such distribution. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, was never tired of telling that rulers of countries today must have the scientific mind and be intimately concerned with the proper use of science, even if they are not experts in this field. Food, clothing and industrial development of a growing economy cannot be met without scientific planning and production.

Today, we are also confronted with a dilemma between science and democracy. They are so closely connected that life in our age could not be regarded as an unmixed blessing. Many men, owing to confused thinking, can act under the direction of bad passions. Intelligent men could exert their influence and induce people to act in a manner less likely to promote strife.

We could see today, the rivalry between the linguistic and religious groups and the bad passions that political parties promote. These indicate the extent of our failure in the field of education and the disastrous consequence to the younger generation. Politics today is organised to increase the forces of intolerance and insane self-assertion. In this struggle there is little scope for logical thinking, and so it becomes a definite, though difficult, task for schools to inculcate correct and clear thinking.

How would the large masses of semi-literate people in a forty-year-old independent Sri Lanka, voting at general elections once in six, or maybe twelve years, show any deep understanding of democracy? One accepted definition is "*government with the consent of the governed*". The Sinhala Only Act of 1957, is an open contradiction of this definition, for the simple reason that the Tamils have not accepted, nor are they likely to accept, this Act in the future. This fact makes the Act a mockery of democracy.

Added to this is the problem of land. It was in 1958 that "*Emergency 1958*", written by Tarzi Vittachi, raised the fundamental question, "*Have the Sinhalese and Tamils reached the parting of the ways?*" How many racial riots and rule by emergency has this country seen up to date? They have all fuelled and refuelled the determination of the Tamil youth to fight for a separate state. It was no decision or determination taken by raw or inexperienced youth on the spur of the moment.

Successive governments since independence have taken positively discriminating measures against the Tamils besides the Sinhala only Act. Standardisation, which became so notorious, state sponsored Sinhalese colonisation of Tamil majority areas and such monstrous acts of injustice had relegated the Tamils into the backwaters of the country's political administration. The Tamil M.Ps. could not, for all their long years of struggle, stem the tide of this onrush. District councils and designation of Tamil as a national language were half-hearted attempts that came too late

and gave too little to conciliate the determined youth, who could see through the trap laid for their future.

It would seem proper at this moment, to quote from a piece of research done on the South Asian situation by U.S. Bajapi, a former Secretary of the Indian Foreign Service. This is what he said:

"If ever there was a country in South Asia where the two-nation-theory might hold true, it is Sri Lanka. History, religion, race and language divide this island into two sharply distinct entities - Sinhala and Tamil - which were brought together under British rule. With independence, the era of peaceful and even co-operative co-existence gradually failed, and was replaced by a Sinhala attitude, bordering on chauvinism, that reduced the Tamils to second-class citizens. The Tamil demand for equal treatment developed into one of secession, as conciliatory promises remained unfulfilled. The psychological problem is complicated by the fact that both Sinhala and Tamil claim Indian origins which induces contradictory moods of pride, on the one hand, and fear and antagonism towards India on the other."

How does democracy operate in a country that is openly admitted to be multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic? This is indeed a circumlocutory expression to describe the struggle that the Tamils of this country have been valiantly carrying on against Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. The language used to convey this simple truth is as inflated as the economy of the country that lies in shambles after excessive borrowing and inprovident spending.

The role of the parties of this country has been remarkable in focusing the rival politics in its true perspective, but they have failed to throw up a leader of national stature to create national consciousness, hence they failed to win the influence of an enlightened majority that could have averted this national catastrophe.

If this is the state of the nation in regard to democracy, the villain of the peace is the rivalry to rule the country on a dynastic basis - the Senanayakes, the Bandaranayakes, the Jayawardenes, and such others in that hierarchy.

So, where is the government for the people in our country, even after four decades, where all legitimate reactions against wealth, power and undue influence of the elite have taken an anti-Tamil overtone? It would not be easy to unravel the various strands of the anti-Tamil complex - the Duttu Gemunu - Elara syndrome - which was very much on the lips of the rulers when battles, not merely of words but in the field, were fought.

It is said, with some truth, that in today's world mad men are in the seats of power, while the thinkers are employed in the factories. This is indeed a scathing criticism against nuclear powers who have conscripted, as it were, their scientists to produce more and more scientific weapons of destruction. Science has been diverted from its creative role in increasing people's health, prosperity and education, to destructive ends.

Let not the advance of science be allowed to slacken, for knowledge is power; and, the pursuit of truth is one of the eternal imperatives. Let us not allow science, as T.H. Huxley said, "*to be divorced from morality.*" We may have different views of morality from age to age and country to country; but we must agree that moral rectitude is another of the ultimate imperatives, and that it is linked with something outside ourselves.

The evils of civil war are too well-known to thinking people, nor are they deaf and blind to the perils that partition has seen in other countries. Besides, in a land whose spiritual and material interests are sanctified by two religious cultures and strengthened by four great religions of the world, where is the need to embark on an unending war which has cost thousands of innocent lives.

Unless the men at the top are able to think in the true scientific manner, this beautiful isle, where every prospect pleases and could materialise, will continue to be prostituted for the pursuit of clannish power; and, the development of a modern state - in spite of Mahaweli and other high-sounding schemes - is mere moonshine.

If there is to be any palpable change in outlook, such change must invade the schools of the entire country. They must be so oriented that they will develop basic qualities of character - a passion for social justice - and a sensitive conscience, so that our young men and women will learn to demand for others - whatever their race or religion - the good things they desire for themselves.

Democracy will not thrive in a land, unless the various communities feel confident that their cultural differences will be respected. Critical intelligence needs to be cultivated so that it may be a bulwark against shallow demagogues, who pose as saviours of the people. Both the Sinhala nationalism and Tamil nationalism, truly conceived, will embrace Islamic culture and this 'trinity', without any taint of rivalry, could build-up a genuinely united country where there will be no exploitation of ruler over the ruled.

Nothing is more dangerous than to plant seeds of fear, hate, and intolerance in the minds of the young, which often blossom into full-scale crusades of persecution. History records numerous instances of the disastrous consequences of this kind of education. Hitler's Germany was not the only example.

It is only in a spirit of free inquiry that learning can take place. 'Free' does not mean eccentric, but guided by the more mature wisdom of the teacher, who could hold the scales, even in a class of opposing teams, and pronounce the verdict in favour of the individual or group based on objective evidence, and not dogma or belief that can be refuted.

Peace can never be permanently secured until the education of children sees further changes. Warlike heroes in our country or elsewhere, such as Nelson or Napoleon, or Wellington, should not be glorified - a retrograde step - even meaningless in the world of today. People have seen, and are seeing the sufferings of war too well to admire generals and war heroes. We have been so much soaked in blood in this little peninsula called Jaffna, that code words have come into common usage after 1986. "*It is raining in the super-market*" means "*Shells are falling*"; "*Weapons*" are "*toys*"; "*Tanks*" are "*frogs*"; "*Fighting*" is "*playing*"; and you don't say "*dead bodies*", you say "*Chocolates*"! Let us believe that mankind is all one family; and we can all be happy or we can all be miserable. The time is passed when you could have a happy minority living upon the misery of the great masses; or the rule of the majority in the name of democracy oppressing an intelligent minority.

We cannot, in spite of our unparalleled despair, afford to think that human nature cannot change. We should, in our enlightened self-interest, strive for a society where individuals grow freely, and where hate and greed and envy die, because there is nothing to nourish them. Though this looks too optimistic, the point is that our eyes must be on the future generation which, as it looks now, could be mere survivors and not inheritors.

The most unpromising prospect, however, is that in a world of even more tension, more chaos, more war, we are resuming our talks of those glorious days which will not come back in Sri Lanka. As it stands today, I have often felt the dread that Sri Lanka could easily turn out to be another Lebanon, a country of only three-million people, only 130 miles long and about 30 miles wide, where less than a fifteenth of that area is controlled by the government, and the rest by two-dozen armed groups, in ever-shifting alliances, fighting each other, primarily killing civilians. This morass of anarchy and suspicion, abduction and assassination, and periodic massacre, must be a grim reminder and timely warning to

all the participants, that in an unwinnable war like ours, the wiestest thing is to find shelter in some kind of peace through compromise. Let us remember, that we cannot change the world without changing ourselves first. Nor should we pretend that we can. To governments- politics, economics, and their own security, are most important; but, to the people with their backs to the wall for years, humanitarian problems are urgent and such problems are also opportunities to build-up international goodwill. We have to take what we can get in the face of conflicting issues that tend to drag on, and build on it, lest a bad situation becomes worse by intransigence. Protecting humanity is more important than military necessity.

18. A BREAK WITH THE PAST

We are face to face with an unparelled experience. Neither we nor our ancestors known to history, have had such atrocious events to face; though there were plenty of happenings in the story of ancient Jaffna - mythical and real - to merit our attention.

There is the story of an eminent psychiatrist who taught a new logic which, as he frankly confessed, he had learnt from his patients - lunatics. When he died, he left a will founding a professorship for the teaching of new scientific methods. Unfortunately, he left no assets. Arithmetic proved intractable to lunatic logic. The story is true, according to Bertrand Russell, who tells it in his inimitable manner. On one occasion, a man came to ask the renowned philosopher to recommend some of his books for reading. Russell did so, but the man returned the next day saying that he had been reading one of them and he found only one sentence he could understand - and even that one seemed to him to be false. Russell asked the man what it was, and he replied that it was a statement that Julius Ceasar was dead. When the author asked him why he did not agree, he drew himself up and said "*Because I am Julius Caesar*".

The problems involved in national and international politics or in society are serious, and when mad or semi-mad men are in power and intellectuals are at their word of command, what has happened, or is happening here, as in many other countries, will not stop unless the right rational men regain control of the regime. In the '*one man, one vote*' business which is glorified to be the last device of democratic government, this can never prove to be the end to be fair to all. The kind of political structure that can save us - blind imitators of British Parliamentary system - is one in which power is apportioned with more intelligence than in the past.

The central problem is: How do we combine that degree of individual initiative, so indispensable to progress, with a degree of social cohesion which is necessary for survival?

Survival, individual as well as social, is our immediate concern. As I write these lines (according to my diary of 19/11/87) people in panic rush into my room with the now unreal story of having seen three bodies of men shot to death and rotting by the road side, a few yards away from our gate; this is an area that is forbidden to the pedestrian just now. Once out of my gate, we could sense the stench of the carcasses carried through the wild wind. The soldiers at the barrier used old tyres to burn the bodies and quench the evil smell that the decaying, dead bodies sent forth for days on end. At least one of the victims was the familiar milkman, a strapper who braved the risk in his daily round of milking in a neighbouring milk farm. This is the kind of carnage that was on the lips of all during the darkest period of this dirty war.

When will this kind of menace end? Bonfires of dead bodies are the substitutes for the holy rites of cremation in normal, natural death. To survive, that is the question, not thrive, that is long afterwards. For us, living in Jaffna at this hour, we have lost many very precious lives in this protracted conflict that has eluded all our expectations of an early end. It is the self-same question, on an extended scale, that baffles the super-powers who are in the continuous process of competing in arms production.

Who then are the salt of the earth in the world, when affluent countries that could lend a helping hand are engaged in a mad scramble for destruction?

The only silver lining that one could see is the chance of something attempted, something done at the Summit at Washington, scheduled for next month in the early part of December 1987. How remote is the impact of any little success there for us in Jaffna whose villages, until yesterday, were pictures of peace and are now washed by rivers of blood.

Vanity is a motive of immense potency; this is indeed the extreme opposite of rational thinking. One need not be partially gifted in the art of correct thinking if he is a politician or a petty leader amongst the masses; he has merely to reason out, observe such facts as will enable him to discover general truths governing facts of the kind in question. A scientific opinion is one in which there is some reason to believe. Unscientific opinion is one which is held for some reason other than it is probably the truth. When a man tells you that he knows the exact truth about anything, you are safe in thinking that he is an inexact man. He may even be a politician. It is he who, almost everywhere, often repeats, parrot-like, the proverbial platitude. He may say human nature cannot be changed. With one stroke of such vanity, we often feel confident of convincing the unthinking masses over the extreme position we take up on a particular situation.

One of the troubles about the vanity with which our society is saturated, is that it grows with whatever it feeds on. Even with my limited experience of editing a daily paper in Jaffna, I can safely propound the dictum: *'The more you are talked about, the more you will wish to be talked about.'* Even those who kill in cold blood are pleased to see the proceedings in court, if the report in the local press gives them enough prominence. Politicians and the so-called literary men are in a similar position and, the more famous they become, the more difficult the papers or any other publishing agency finds it to placate them.

Leaders, even in the midst of a catastrophe like the present, persist in the belief that people would continue to look upon them as deliverers and men actuated by altruistic ends. Under the influence of excitement - like mass drills and military bands, mob oratory, Kandyan dance, Bharatha Natyam or village awakening (*Gam Udawa*) and the ethnic war, which are regarded as stages on the development of excitement - there is reason to believe that these men who are strangers to the reasoning process, think that tense situations if allowed to continue will be more favourable to

deceiving the unthinking public.

I have been harping on about the rational approach too much. I believe it is necessary since sane thinking is not so common, even among those well-versed in science. One can, and must, nurture this spirit of rationality; you may call it an advanced form of common sense-surprisingly so uncommon among the educated. On the basis of the tragic stories that are in circulation, one could realise the stark ignorance, or the utter lack of common sense, probably stifled by too much learning that have led whole families to instant destruction in recent events.

We must have enough faith in ourselves and the environment to believe that neither misery nor folly can be any part of the inevitable lot of man. It looks impudent to say this in so many words just now; but we dare not deny the fact that confidence now, more than ever, can save or salvage us. Intelligence, patience and even eloquence of the right kind can, sooner or later, lead us out of our tortuous struggle into which we are inevitably caught. We must develop the kind of intuition that stood our sages and seers in the past - even in the recent past - in good stead, even if we have to start from scratch in this land ravaged ruthlessly by vicious men. We cannot and dare not assume that the human race will exterminate itself before we regain normalcy.

If the present chaos cannot make us saner on this basis, and leads us to believe that all these evils were unnecessary and could be overcome; if we believe in knowledge that can remove ignorance - the sole source of false beliefs and passions, then we have a hope. Although we find men in this dangerous situation, who seem to be in love with misery and get angry when hopes are mentioned, we are not justified in thinking or feeling that we have no hope and must make a clean break with the past.

Be it remembered that many were the tribulations that the Hindus of Jaffna suffered under Portuguese rule; fasting on religious days was forbidden; and the women-folk showed

superhuman courage to keep their chastity intact. How tenaciously the Hindus held fast to their faith is seen in the well-known story of a devout Hindu Gnanapragasar Swamigal who refused to supply a cow to some Portuguese official who was entitled to it by his own law. He crossed the sea in a solitary boat and fled to Chidambaram in South India. There is, even today, a tank in Chidambaram by his name. This adversity was an opportunity to the Swami to write an authoritative commentary on *Sivagnana Bodham* - a basic text of Saiva Siddhanta.

19. AN INSIGHT INTO THE MILITARY MIND

It is a Latin proverb that states: "*It was fear that made Gods in the World.*" But we are a people who do not believe in gods, but in one God; and still it is fear that stalks our land more than armies locked in fight. Franklin D. Roosevelt, who held the unique record in American History by becoming President for four consecutive terms, said: "*The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.*" Our present predicament is similar to what Oscar Wilde, in his '*Ballad of Reading Gaol*' said:

*"We did not dare to breathe our prayer
Or give our anguish scope!
Something was dead in each of us
And what was dead was hope."*

We have been living in perpetual fear like prisoners under closed doors, or men condemned to the death row. Men in military uniform with the inevitable gun on their shoulders do not understand this, but think differently.

There is a striking contrast between the behaviour of the military men which is based on the moral code of their cast and that of society in general. There is a novel by Stefan Zweig which, in its English translation is titled "*Beware of Pity.*" It is a true story narrated by the writer himself. The chief protagonist of the story describes it as an odd story; but it may serve to show that courage is nothing but inverted weakness:-

The year 1937 was the year when almost every conversation in every country in confused Europe was dominated by speculation about another World War. A lawyer who hosted a dinner at an hotel, opened the discussion on the topic. He put forward the usual airy nonsense: The present generation knew all about war and would not be tricked innocently into the next war as it had been into the last one.

Hoff Miller, who had his first-hand experience backed by a discerning mind, felt annoyed by the smug assurance which was displayed by the opening speaker in dismissing the possibility, though he felt confident of telling a strange truth to prove the opposite. It was a time when in thousands of factories, explosives and poison gas were being manufactured.

The writer, however, did not wish to be the father to the thought so he protested with true firmness: The military authorities who ran the war-machine had not been sleeping while misguided men were toying with Utopian ideas. They had taken full advantage of the interval of peace in order to organise the masses in advance, and have them ready to hand, at half-cock so to speak, even when Europe was at peace. The general attitude to servility, has through modern methods of propaganda, increased tremendously. The fact was that from the very moment when news of mobilisation came hurtling through loud-speakers there was absolutely no opposition. The grain of dust that was man no longer counted as a creature of volition. The writer had warned the audience against cheap optimism; but it was particularly unwelcome, he felt at a moment when a grand dinner was awaiting them in the next room. The instinct of self-deception in human beings makes them want to banish dangers of which they are perfectly aware by imagining they are non-existent.

Now came the gallant hero - Captain Hoff Miller - who was introduced to the writer the previous day. Quite against all expectations to the contrary, he condemned war, called it sheer nonsense to try nowadays, the willingness and unwillingness of human material; *"For us the next war,"* he said, *"all the fighting would be done by machines and men would be reduced to a kind of component part of a machine. Even in the last war, the First World War,"* he said, *"he had met many young men at the front who had, without any doubt, opposed the war. Most of them had been whirled into it, like a cloud of dust, and had simply found themselves caught up in its vortex; each one of*

them tossed about like a pea in a great sack. On the whole, more men had escaped into the war than from it. Don't let us, therefore, deceive ourselves" he continued. "If in any country, when a recruiting campaign were to be launched today for some horrid war in Europe or in some corner of Africa, thousands and thousands would rush to the colours without really knowing why, perhaps merely out of a desire to run away from themselves or from disagreeable circumstances. But for any effective opposition to war, I would not care to put it above zero. It always demands a far greater degree of courage, that is dying out in these times of progressive organisation and mechanisation. At present, the only courage I came across was mass courage, the courage that comes of being one of a herd; and anyone who examines this phenomenon more closely, will find it composed of some strange elements; a great deal of vanity, a great deal of recklessness and even boredom but, above all, a great deal of fear - yes, fear of being sneered at, fear of independent action and fear, above all, of taking up a stand against mass enthusiasm of one's fellows. It was not until later on in civil life that most of those reported to be the bravest at the front, were found to be very questionable heroes. Oh - please don't misunderstand me", he said, turning politely to the host, who was pulling a wry face, "I do not by any means exempt myself."

He was not, evidently, talking for effect, when he declared that for years, nothing had been a greater bore to him than the Maria Theresa medal for bravery in the battlefield. It was far too conspicuous for his liking. He felt, quite honestly, that when it was awarded to him out there at the front, bowled over, absolutely. After all, he had been brought up as a soldier and, as a cadet, he had heard that order spoken of as something almost legendary. That one order, that came the way of perhaps no more than a dozen men in every war - was a positive bolt from the blue. For a young chap of twenty-eight that sort of thing meant a devil of a lot. All at once, one found himself standing alone before the whole

brigade. Everyone gazed up reverently, as something suddenly sparkled out on one's breast like a little sun and His Majesty, the Emperor - that unapproachable deity - shook you by the hand and congratulated you. But a distinction of that kind only had any point in a military world; and, when the war was over, just because on one occasion he had acted with courage for about twenty minutes it seemed, to him, ridiculous to have to go about for the rest of his life labelled as a hero.

When he entered civilian life he was thoroughly sceptical about his claim to be called a hero. After all, he knew better than any others who gaped at him, that he was anything but a hero - was even, definitely, the reverse - one of those who rushed headlong into the war to extricate himself from a desperate situation. To live in a halo of glory seemed, to him, unendurable, and he felt genuinely relieved when he was no longer obliged to strut about with his heroic history largely displayed on his uniform. He felt he was compelled to tell the writer with his own lips by what tortuous paths he had attained this status of a hero. It was indeed an odd story and, yet, it might serve to show that courage was often nothing but inverted weakness.

That was how Captain Hoff Miller - a man genuine to the marrow of his bones, unlike the many who had been to the front - came to tell his story to the writer who had made a marvellous, true novel in regard to the authenticity of all the details.

The writer, Stefan Zweig, says there are two kinds of pity; one the weak and sentimental kind which is really no more than the heart's impatience to be rid as quickly as possible of the painful emotion aroused by the sight of another's unhappiness; that pity is not compassion, the instructive desire to fortify one's own soul against the sufferings of another; and the other the only kind that counts, the unsentimental but creative kind, which knows what it is about and is determined to hold out in patience and forbearance to the very limit of its strength and even beyond.

We are living in such times when war and suffering have been the lot of our countrymen. Though it does not compare well in men and material with what happened in Europe, yet to people long used to a peaceful life, this confession of a distinguished soldier reveals the myths and mysteries that make up war and stir pity of the weak and sentimental kind, disabling a whole community which might otherwise concentrate all its best energies to create, build patiently and courageously, making up for all losses and thus qualify itself to be called a nation worthy of its culture.

If we face our problems in proper perspective, it sounds ridiculous that a Ceylon Army Commander, unveiling the statue of a soldier at Diyatalawa recently, made profound pronouncements typical of the military mind. He said that the period of blood and tears was over and the country had returned to peace and that everyone should contribute his mite to the complete return of normalcy. The climax (or the anti-climax) was reached when he declared the dictum: "*A country - small or big - needs an army for many reasons. It is the duty of the army*", he said, "*to safeguard the country.*" A stark irony, when the so-called war had not ended but taken a very strange turn kept the whole country guessing. Even the belated ceremony of honouring the "*Vadamaradchy Heroes*" appeared to be very antique.

In striking contrast, this was the attitude of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, which had thrust itself into the very heart of the Jaffna University and was brutally frank in stating that it might take years for normal university life to return to the campus!

How many armies, how many states! The statue of the soldier at Diyatalawa - was it a symbol of courage and patriotism? Listening to the other, utterly cussed pronouncements of the military officer - a study in contrast, one feels utterly sceptical of the empty show that war entails, that Captain Hoff Miller was speaking out from the innermost recess of his heart when he exposed the entire fraud that war has perpetrated on generations of people who are left to reap its endless miseries.

20. REGIONALISM

"A diversification among human communities is essential for the provision of the incentive and material for the Odyssey of the human spirit. Other nations of different habits are not enemies; they are Godsend. Men require of their neighbours something sufficiently akin to be understood, something sufficient by different to provoke attention, and something great enough to command admiration." These are the words of the very eminent philosopher, A.N. Whitehead.

As we look upon the agonies of our times, the frenzied passions, cruelties, deceits and lunacies, it is miraculous that some of those who have survived were able to keep their head. As we read the daily press, it was patent that most of the papers were swayed by the fanatic mob; flattered the demagogues or ran with the political pack. It was evidently difficult, almost impossible, to keep themselves above the fray, to lead the reader quietly and to trust the people - their ultimate judge and jury; and if any dared to be non-partisan they were baptised with fire and brimstone.

There was little or no comment in the editorials or the learned commentaries, on the one problem that baffled the government and people of this country. I refer to the concept of regionalism that could have helped to solve, without much bloodshed, if it was understood properly.

Where did the conflict really begin? How did it proceed? Has it really ended? These simple questions will make us sit up and think even at this late hour, though the answers can never be as simple. Those who claim to have fought for freedom for their people were not some small group of local malcontents who started off with a ridiculous agitation. If we keep ourselves clear of such bogeys as "*terrorism*" and "*separatism*" for the moment, we

could agree on the major proposition that a national culture is the resultant of a number of local cultures. Ideally, each village or each town in the Tamil region and the Sinhala region far down South has each its own peculiar character. Culture is a way of life, intimately connected with religion down the ages. Fortunately, the major cultures in our country, fostered by the two national languages, are, to this very day, animated vigorously by the great religions, which are not exclusive of those of other minorities.

When there is a danger of one assuming superiority and attempting to swallow the others, people resent and finally rise in revolt. The political forms of revolt are a manifestation of the sub-conscious threats to one's culture.

A man should feel himself to be, not merely a citizen of a particular country, but also a part of the particular country, with local loyalties. In spite of the present mass exodus of our people to foreign countries, it would appear to be by far the best that the great majority of the people should go on living in the place in which they were born. Family, group, and local loyalty, all support each other; and, if one of these decays, the others will suffer also. It is the instinct of every living thing to persist in its own being. A threat to its basic rights, or a resentment against its absorption, is sometimes strongly felt and most loudly voiced. History tells us that any vigorous small people want to preserve their individuality.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka are no small people, nor are they wanting in bigger achievements. The war and bloodshed that has been their lot, clearly proves that in preserving their identity in the land of their fore-fathers, they will stick at nothing.

We know only too well, or at least in bare outline, the story of the independence struggle of our neighbour India and the evils of partition and, what is more opposite, the struggle of linguistic provinces to regain their lost rights.

The picture of India on partition, should have been a grim warning to the rulers of Sri Lanka, who were never tired of swearing by the unity and integrity of the country. It would be salutary to refer to the grim horrors that India faced when it became two independent countries. Thousands and thousands and thousands of incidents happened in quick succession, where men witnessed a massacre of their children and the rape of their wives; women had their relatives' throats cut before their eyes, people despairing at the totality of their loss; uncollected corpses littered the streets of Delhi. When Gandhiji was staying at Birla House, policemen were heard to say that it was no longer possible to distinguish between a dead man, horse, or a buffalo.

Of the innumerable atrocities, the story of Wicky Noon, the beautiful English wife of Pakistan's most important man - Sir Feroz Khan Nonn, immediately after the partition was the most hideous, not very well-known in India itself. The twenty-year old girl remembered one line that two new American converts to Buddhism taught her; "*Everything is transitory.*" Wicky Noon, in her flight for safety, sought the help of a Hindu Rajah, who himself had to feel like hundreds of thousands who were flooding the roads and railways of Punjab.

The life of the beautiful English wife of Sir Feroz Khan Nonn depended on the contents of a small, round tin-can containing mahogany polish. She was bathed in potassium permanganate to darken her skin and her face was stained with shoe polish to convince any Sikh on the lookout to kill her, that she was an Indian. Killing, mass killing, as a way of solving communal troubles that crop up during political upheaval, has made human life a cheap and meaningless thing. The animal in man becomes so uppermost that one is reminded of the story of the man who killed his father and mother and then threw himself on the mercy of the court as an orphan. Not merely killing but an outpouring of sexual savagery seems to be part of the tragedy that litters the pages of history.

We cannot feel comforted by these orgies of violence, but it helps us to understand the malignant forces that assume control when a holocaust, even on a smaller scale, reaches its zenith. Another feature, common to such conflicts, is that no-one would even know, for certain, how many people lost their lives during the peak period; so chaotic are the circumstances surrounding them, and so complete is the collapse of the Provincial Administration that it is impossible to make any correct estimate.

It is a tragedy of the Sri Lankan Government and its people, to have watched with indifference the struggle of the Tamils for forty long years to be liberated from the clutches of an oppressive majority in a so-called free country; and now, when the threat of partition seemed almost inevitable, India stepped in to stop the unending war and broach peace in terms of an Accord that speaks of an autonomous state for the Tamils within the framework of a unified Sri Lanka.

I remember reading in some journal, an accredited political writer stating that in 1987 there was no country in the world so politically embroiled as Sri Lanka to split itself into two states. India, which is totally opposed to partition, perhaps for very important reasons of its own, would have been disturbed by this pronouncement. Its constant assurance to the Government of Sri Lanka was that its peace efforts in the island would never endanger Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity. With the Accord now in force for more than a year, the question constantly asked here, is: Has India over-reacted? When partition came to India in the wake of freedom, Winston Churchill, so long an enemy of Indian freedom, appeared to enjoy the travails that the country faced. From London, he commented with open satisfaction on the spectacle of a people - who had lived in peace under the broad, tolerant, imperial rule of the British Crown - throwing themselves on each other with the ferocity of the cannibals. The disappointed war hero, who had developed an inexplicable allergy to Mahatma Gandhiji, was wise enough to realise that man was the only animal that ate its own kind.

In the case of India, there was a time when Premier Clement Attlee wondered if Britain had not taken the wrong course and gone too fast with the solution. Lord Mountbatten believed, and this was endorsed by Nehru, Patel, and even Gandhiji who opposed partition to the very end, that speed was essential if India was to be saved from disaster. Even Jinnah said: "*Get out of India immediately.*"

In our case, the Tamils never feared similar perils of partition which, at no stage, was so imminent, because India, the interested neighbour, was opposed to it politically as well as militarily. Almost similar to Mountbatten's freedom formula, came the now controversial agreement, called the Sri Lanka-India Accord, like a bolt from the blue on 29th July, 1987. Its positive achievement, was the end of the dirty war that the Sri Lankan army commenced with Blitzkrieg tactics in Vadamadachy with a futile threat to enter the gates of the city of Jaffna.

Barely nine weeks afterwards in October 1987, the crack in the Agreement began to burst open when the Indian Peace-Keeping Force was involved in a sudden assault on Jaffna - the very venue India was insistent on saving from the Sri Lankan army. In fact, there was deeper warning from India that in the event of an attack on Jaffna by the Sri Lankan army, consequences would be serious.

There was widespread sympathy for the Tamil militants, both at home and abroad, for the bravery and sacrifice in a protracted struggle against a cussed government that was seeking a military solution; but, against the sudden bombing that went on recklessly against an unprotected people there was little that the "*boys*" could do to avert the wholesale destruction of an innocent people.

When India stepped in first with food parcels from the air and then their ships carrying provisions to a besieged city, there was jubilation and, even the LTTE which was in a commanding

position throughout the war, welcomed India's timely intervention. What happened afterwards, especially after the Accord, was most shocking. That India, which came to help the cause in general and the interests of the Tamils in particular, was at war with the LTTE who had borne the brunt of the entire military campaign on behalf of the aggrieved Tamil people, was a phenomenon best left to experts of military history. India has become an expert in espousing the cause of regionalism nationally and internationally. Regional autonomy is not something which is completely equivalent to the full freedom of the people. It is a feature that is challenging India at home. In spite of this, our mighty neighbour came out to settle our disputes on the basis of genuine regional autonomy.

Everywhere in Sri Lanka, the consensus of opinion is that India is not absolutely altruistic but is fortifying its position in the region, which is becoming a hot bed of super-power rivalry. The evidence to the contrary is not yet adequate to assure an aggrieved people who were driven to pin their faith in a neighbour who, at all times, appeared to be sympathetic to Tamil aspirations for life in freedom, which alone could help independent Sri Lanka into a homogenous nation.

21. THE PEOPLE'S WILL

Any plan or pact that looks excellent on paper is inherently beset with too many doubts. The Sri Lanka-India Accord is no exception. There is bound to be vacillation in course and direction; and major mistakes of omission and commission will prove costly, as has been borne out in this case.

One of the basic premises in the agreement is that the whole thing must be understood and acted upon in the spirit of a friendship exercise. This cannot be taken as superficial advice, nor should the course of events be allowed to get deflected off course by suspicions, objections and obstacles.

Speed was of the essence in reaching the agreement between the two partners; and that was something wonderful about it. With one more party, in all probability the Agreement would have been stillborn. Subsequent events have proved that the Indian P.M. had taken too much for granted on behalf of the silent partner the Tamils of this country. The siege that Jaffna went through for a second time, a dreadful tale that time cannot dim - would have been averted if greater statesmanship had been displayed at the initial stages of implementation. The positive goodwill of the LTTE would have made all the difference, and that would not have been obtained by sweeping the tigers under the carpet.

What happened in India just after independence could have been an object lesson for this small neighbour. How did India solve it finally? At the bottom of any solution to a crisis situation there is a dynamic personality, not the might of arms. This is a basic truth. Let us see if this is so. How did the first Prime Minister of India, who in the fullness of time became one of the world's eminent statesman, act when the Vesuvius - like eruption rocked the country in the wake of freedom.

Three people were present, Mountbatten, Nehru and Patel, so goes the story. The two Indian leaders were sad, visibly depressed men; they looked to the Governor-General of India - now a dominion - like a pair of chastened schoolboys. The situation in Punjab was out of control. The migration was exceeding their worst fears. New violence in Delhi threatened to bring down the capital itself. *'We don't know how to hold it'*, Nehru told the Governor-General. *'You have to grip it'*, Mountbatten told him. *"Well, we have to find a way to disguise it, but if you don't do it, we can't manage."* The Admiral was back on his bridge with an emergency committee of the cabinet selected in the next fifteen minutes! India, after three decades of struggle was, once again, for the last moment, being ruled by an Englishman.

This story is told at this length to show that desperate diseases need desperate remedies. In medicine as well as in politics, this has proved effective. Survival is of the essence. It takes a lot of courage to be afraid, and still more courage to say so.

Ironically, like some kind of anticlimax, the military presence of India in our island has so far not been able to create the understanding congenial to the correct working of the Accord. Was the Indian Premier well advised when he made the statement, often repeated, that a comparatively small group of armed men were holding a whole community to ransom by their destructive violence? Why was not the people's will ascertained well in advance with greater diplomacy?

It is another piece of tragedy that the fast unto death of the truly brave Dileepan, the Tamil militant, was misconstrued as a gimmick, particularly on the Indian side. Dileepan, by some kind of intuition, felt that the Accord was a hoax played on the Tamil people. Disappointed that the Tamil militants would not be able to take on the Indian army which was called the I.P.K.F. he called for a change in tactics - stop fighting and start non-cooperation on Gandhian lines. He did fast unto death beside the historic Nallur temple in Jaffna. Lakhs of people who went to see him bestowed

tears of pity on him without attempting to understand the possibilities of peace, at some sacrifice, in the drastic step that he took. Both India and we, allowed him to die and, what was worse, the corpse was paraded along the highways of the peninsula - a tragic leap from the sublime to the ludicrous. Is satyagraha which has been freely bandied about in many mock heroic fasts in this country, and even in India, such a simple thing that it can defeat the might of arms of an aggressive state?

In America, amid the fear and oppression of the "Mc. Carthy era", a victimised teacher sought the advice of Einstein about two years before his death. The ailing scientist wrote: "*What ought the minority of intellectuals to do against the evil of reactionary politicians trying to suppress the freedom of thought and deprive them of their job and to starve them out?*" Mark well, Einstein's answer: "*Frankly, I can only see the revolutionary way of non-cooperation in the sense of Gandhiji. Every teacher ought to refuse to testify - i.e. he must be prepared for jail and economic ruin; in short, for sacrifice of his personal welfare, in the interest and welfare of his country. If enough people are ready to take this grave step, they will be successful. If not, then the intellectuals of this country deserve nothing better than the slavery that is intended for them.*"

How did this bright idea of satyagraha that gleamed across the Nallur landscape suffer such quick demise when the talk all round was: "*Peace around the corner*"? How did India belittle this event which might have been crucial for settling the unfortunate war between the Tamil militants and the I.P.K.F.? Did it take a leaf from Nehru's notebook which called such a thing - '*Political Blackmail*'? When Potti Sri Ramulu of the Andhra State undertook such an exercise, Nehru was determined not to give in and allowed him to die; but the tension that ensued after Ramulu's death was so great that Nehru was compelled to defuse the threat of linguistic regionalism by giving in gracefully over his plan for the state's reorganisation.

It is difficult to resist the belief that the Indian army was determined to teach the "boys" a lesson after its initial set-back in the battlefield of Jaffna. I cannot vouch for the entire truth of the story of how Indian troops fared in their first attempt to capture the LTTE leadership on the evening of 11th October 1987. It was reported to be a bloody disaster to the Indian army and the eighteen hours heroic offensive by the LTTE was able to cut down all the men except one who was taken prisoner. This looks too bad to be true; but still the only survivor gave out the story which was reported in a Colombo newspaper. This grievous episode, it was believed, had so shocked the Indian ambassador, Dixit, that he couldn't brook the LTTE's atrocity - a radical turn of mind that was the chief ingredient of India's uncompromising stand against coming to terms with the Tigers. The columnist adds: "*On 12th October every year, their men will hold a special order to remember all their thirty lonely and gusty comrades on the killing fields of the Jaffna University.*"

Such miscalculation based on the underrating of the LTTE may have induced the expectation of a dramatic victory over the LTTE and the quick disarming the Tamil militants; but it was soon evident that the lost offensive had to be retrieved by the all important lesson of not taking any highly motivated and reasonably well-armed adversary lightly.

It was, by all accounts a very unexpected encounter on the part of the Indian army which suffered severe reverses during the first fortnight of the month. Even when the battle of Jaffna was supposed to be over, the Tamil militants continued to command the widespread support of the people. How did Indian diplomacy fail to broach a reasonable settlement with the Tamil militants - the LTTE - which was almost insistent on its pound of flesh? In spite of the numerous attempts to wage peace with the Tigers, India was driven, at long last, to befriend other groups which obviously did not cut much ice with the Tamil people. This failure has not brought much credit either to the Accord or to the Indian

Government which was unable to put down the challenge to the armed might of a mighty neighbour.

It is natural for the people who were silent victims of the entire period of war during the onslaught of the Sri Lankan army and, later, with the I.P.K.F., to believe that the much-vaunted Accord is a dead sea fruit. It is even natural to suspect that the Indian mountain laboured and brought forth the mouse of an empty North-Eastern Provincial Council.

People want peace but you cannot get peace either by warring against each other or by merely talking about it, nor is it the inevitable consequence of the end of fighting in the battlefield. The tolerance of a people long-used to peace has been tested to the full; and now when they are continuing to live in panic, something more drastic should be done to win their support other than the silencing of guns.

22. SIXTY YEARS AGO

I remember some great man saying that there is nothing a man can do to improve himself as much as writing his memoirs; and no-one can be considered too small for this task. I am therefore tempted to terminate my ruminations, prompted by this enforced exile, and attempt what may look silly for a small man to do.

According to my diary, today 26/11/87, is an historic day; this date has been a constant reminder of Mahatma Gandhiji's visit to Jaffna, exactly sixty years ago. These sixty years of my life have been very much influenced by what I saw and heard on that day as a young boy of fourteen. That was the day that I saw the man of whom Einstein said: "*Future generations will scarcely believe that such a man ever trod on earth; wherever he walked, it was holy ground.*" The greatest scientist the world ever saw, had this to say about Mahatma Gandhiji when he was shot to death on 30/1/48. I was careful enough to note this in my diary of that year; but had no diary when Gandhiji came to Jaffna and, even if I had, entries would have been unequal to the occasion; but times and life change, and I was compelled to keep a diary when I opened a bank account. Even that was done by necessity rather than choice. My assets were meagre as a schoolmaster. But when my monthly salary was paid by individual cheques, there was no other way and banks induced teachers to open an account with concessions.

Without digressing very much, I must say that diaries can bring balance and perspective. This had been my experience these forty-five years. My diary has taught me to fret less, to stop and smell the jasmine as I hurry to my gate. That apart, the bills that came crowding in to me had to be tackled - rent, light bill, medical care, insurance and, years later, the car. Where is the money to come from? Somewhere, somehow, the money came, so says my

diary. Things are not as bad as they seem is the one revelation that one can be sure of, if he keeps a diary. How many times have we heard people say: The history of my family, or my life, would make a book! Well, if I am one of these, why not start my book now? Memory can be a feeble, ephemeral thing. Every human life is a free-fall through time. Lives of great people are accorded posterity, but what of the ordinary man's - your life and mine? As we travel through our time, our own space in this world, should we not leave our own record? Those who come after us will want to know where we - thus they, came from.

So let me resume my reference to Gandhiji's visit to Jaffna. It was a unique moment in my life when, for the first time, I beheld a man whom I felt to be God in man's flesh. Who was this man - Gandhiji? Nehru posed this question during the difficult days when the Indian National Congress seemed to him to be a petition-writing body. He said: What could we do? How could we pull India out of this quagmire of poverty and defeatism? Look at his own eloquent answer:

"And then Gandhiji came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths, like a beam of light that pierces the darkness and removes the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upsets many things but, most of all, the working of people's minds. He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling conditions." "Get off the backs of these peasants and workers." he told us, "All you who live by thier exploitation, and get rid of the system that produces this poverty and misery."

"The essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth and action allied to these, always keeping the welfare of the masses in view. The dominant impulse in India under British

rule was that of fear - pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear. It was against this all-pervading fear that Gandhiji's quiet and determined voice was raised. "Be not afraid." I have quoted the relevant passage from Nehru to illustrate what is generally regarded as one of the momentous epochs of history, not only of India, but of the world. The Gandhiji-Nehru era, Arnold Toynbee, the eminent historian, compared it to the celebrated Buddha - Asoka period of Indian history. I could add two more, ancient and modern, without too much offence to scholars of research, the Socrates - Plato and Ramakrishna - Vivekananda periods that have left an abiding impact on the thinking of the world.

How could agnostic Nehru get on so long and so well with a man whose constant refrain was: *"Not a blade of grass moves but by His will."* Secularism, or even agnosticism is part of Hinduism and is in the ultimate integral to Hinduism. Secularism does not denote that one is religiously illiterate. It could mean that one is deeply spiritual and not narrowly religious. Excessive religion was the criticism against India. Gandhi came as a corrective. He forcefully stressed on the negative aspect that God did not live in one's own religion only. He was compelled to reverse his earlier stand - *"God is Truth"* to *"Truth is God"*, or even to deny this. It was this phenomenon called Gandhi, that Jaffna was blessed to receive on 26/11/27. That was the only occasion on which he visited Sri Lanka and it was Jaffna that sponsored his visit. Looking back at the misty, cold morning when Gandhi arrived at the Jaffna railway station in the Governor's saloon attached to the Jaffna mail train, I still remember how the heavens poured forth joy - the rains that kept the Mahatma waiting at the platform in the midst of a restive crowd. It was a frail figure that folded its arms in prayer to the whole crowd all around. My diary for many years has carried a sonnet composed by Mr., later Dr.C. Narayana Menon, who was my English teacher at Victoria College, Chulipuram, to welcome Gandhi when he visited the college. This is how it runs:-

*"Our shrines are sacred
 for the feet of Saints
 Did tread their precincts and their songs were heard
 Within their walls. And today the word of one so pure
 and truthful falls like rains
 Within our minds and souls are scoured and washed,
 By your bright presence.
 From our hearts are poured
 Our thanks, such as our words can never paint.
 Moved by our Mother's state
 God sent you down
 To show how men grow fearless, upright
 As the Palmyrah aspiring
 Straight to the stars.
 With winds of heaven fanning its stately crown
 To praise and blame indifferent you do right
 Bless us and school to break our baneful bars."*

Principal Sivapathasundaram, known later as 'Saiva Periyar' all over - here and in Tamil Nadu - garlanded the Mahatma as he entered the college and, when the song was read, Gandhiji was quick to ask for its author. When Menon presented himself, a picture of profound humility, the Mahatma blessed him. It is interesting to add that, within three years, Menon obtained his Ph.D. and, later, became Professor of English at the Benares University and Dean of the Arts Department, being awarded a D.Litt for his literary research, which earned him fame even in the West, acting as Vice-Chancellor many times and was a key figure in settling one of the many strikes that afflicted the University. On his retirement this Mahatma born scholar of international renown preferred to live permanently in the vicinity of Lord Kasi Viswanathar at Varnasi.

The Jaffna Esplanade was the venue of the first public reception on the very day of Mahatma's arrival. It was an awe-inspiring sight. This frail ascetic, accompanied by Kasturibai and

Rajagopalachari, (Later the Governor-General of the Indian Dominion), popularly known as Rajaji, and a band of followers, ascended the rostrum specially erected in the open space beside the Jaffna clock tower. It was an unforgettable evening to the many thousands who thronged, unmindful of wind and weather, to catch a glimpse of "*Darithra Narayan*" - one of the thousands of names by which humanity knows God. It means God of the Poor. Gandhiji, half-jokingly, assumed that name and told every audience that he had come to Ceylon with a begging bowl for the starving millions of India to whom God can only appear as bread and butter. Jaffna in the late 1920's was in a very receptive mood to meet the man whom destiny had marked to be the Saviour of the Indian sub-continent. As Shakespeare says "*The apparel oft proclaims the man.*" His loin-cloth proclaimed the man was Mahatma and nothing less. His astounding victories later in the satyagraha campaign like Dandi salt march, the wonder of his victorious fast unto death culminating in the "*Quit India*" resolution of 1942 were yet to follow. But, by some kind of intuition, the ordinary man and woman in Jaffna were cute enough to foresee that this unique personality, animated by some kind of divinity, would lead his countrymen to freedom in his lifetime.

Many of my illustrious contemporaries who organised this visit and made it such a success are not in the land of the living today. Some of them were respected teachers, educators of national fame, who instilled into us the right spirit to understand the greatness of this hero, who like Caesar of old, came, saw and conquered, and remains victor still in his immortality.

Jaffna received Gandhiji with inestimable reverence, which cannot be imagined by the youth of today. Much water had flowed down the Elephant Pass during the sixty years. Jaffna, of all places in Sri Lanka, is in an unenviable position with regard to India in its fortieth year of independence. Though both the Sinhalese and Tamils in the island claim ancestry from India, the majority of the community are surprisingly anti-Indian - a stance generally caused

by age-long complaints that the big neighbour was able to swallow Buddhism in the very land of its birth.

The present conflict is more due to geo-politics - a new weapon in today's political vocabulary. The late Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, was credited to be the author of the dictum that derives as a corollary of geo-politics. In simple terms, it means that no nation can isolate itself, or be indifferent to, the political or economic fate of other nations in the region. If there is no co-operation, there is bound to be friction with its inevitable results. When in 1983, savage communal riots broke out in Sri Lanka, the government was driven from pillar to post for foreign aid - even military aid. When it ignored India, the then Prime Minister Indira, made a timely reminder to President Jayawardene of this much maligned dictum and sent relief post-haste to the victims of the massacre - the Tamil refugees.

Looking back, one could feel that the Sri Lankan grouse against India was like Jinnah's congenital hatred of Hinduism which is not difficult to understand. Independent India is yet seen as a threat to a country, though a small one, which is one of the few places in the world where Buddhism is preserved in Sinhala culture.

Today, the situation is much more complicated with the presence of India's Peace Keeping Force, yet busy disarming the Tamil militants in accordance with the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. In such a situation it is no wonder that the young men and women in Sri Lanka, or even India, mistake Mahatma Gandhi for one that belonged to the dynasty of the present Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Such a colossal ignorance is the only explanation for the vast distance between Gandhiji of the Indian independent struggle and his followers in the present. How does the apostle of ahimsa fit in with the present happenings that engulf both India and Sri Lanka? It is not easy to answer this question; and the dilemma is heightened by the inescapable fact that it is India's turn to see the Tamils of Sri Lanka out of the woods. Is that easy, if unforeseen events complicate the regional situation?

23. MY SCHOLASTIC TRINITY

Gandhiji emphasised communal harmony to students of Jaffna when he visited the peninsula. He warned them to take a leaf from India's book. Nehru, who came four years after, cautioned the Jaffna youth against utopian idealism which would disillusion them sooner or later and might poison the rest of their lives with frustration.

Sixty years after, we are able to realise how true their message is. If one adds up the two ideas of these prophets, one could understand the tragic irony of the presence of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in our midst today. It is time I laid this topic to rest here, and proceed to recount how my own life, both before and after November 1972, ran its course. While the early days are naturally green in my mind as words carved on stone, the period of adulthood could be gleaned from the diaries I kept of important events and their reaction.

I must apologise again to the reader for my digressions. It had become a part of my nature from classroom experience. It is, over the years, not an easy job to keep a crowd of thirty or forty young barbarians under control. These departures from the lesson of the day kept them delighted, but in their pastime of encouraging me off the topic they did not often succeed, as I came back to the point surprisingly soon; naturally, they felt disappointed.

We talk loosely these days, of equality of opportunity in education, as if it could ever materialise in the full sense. From my own life, I know the value of the parental interest in the child's schooling. Unless this is extinguished, this talk of equality amounts to a myth. My father, a very orthodox Hindu who took to trade after a brief period of schooling, to support a large family on the death of his father, was so devoted to learning that he cultivated

the company of learned men to make up for the lost knowledge of books. He seemed to have intuitively imbibed Thiru Valluwar's dictum on the aural method (*sevi-chelvam* - luxury of hearing) which he calls the most effective method of acquiring knowledge. Two men stand in my memory, whose influence on my father had its impact on me right through life. One was Swami Vipulananda, whom he met at Karaitivu in Batticaloa where he had his business, and the other was Saiva Periyar Sivapathasundaram who was Headmaster at Victoria College and became his guru through frequent contact as his younger brother was schooling there.

An enthusiast of Hindu education that my father was, he still did not mind my three years of primary schooling at the neighbouring American Mission School. The headmaster, himself a Christian, was in a remote way connected to our family. That apart, he was as much a son of the soil as his more illustrious kinsman, Professor Allen Abraham Ambalavanar of Halley's comet fame, who taught mathematics to the London Inter-Science students of Jaffna College and was primarily responsible for starting the class. I still retain the regard and love for the Headmaster's kindness. Allen Abraham Ambalavanar predicted with accuracy the appearance of Halley's comet in 1910 and this brought him international fame. He was the first Ceylonese to be elected F.R.A.S. In spite of much publicity given in the press and other media when the comet re-appeared in 1985, this renowned astronomer, who watched the star through his own telescope, perched among the Palmyrah groves of Karainagar, his home town, seems to be a forgotten man. My headmaster, affectionately called "*Apputhurai Upathiyar*" was a mountain of a man that could match the height of Haputale. He was running the school managed by the American Mission in my hamlet called Valanthalai in the north of Karainagar. The school could boast of many talented pupils who started writing their Tamil alphabet in dust with fingers carefully manipulated by this mighty man, to whom work was worship. It is significant that he was the only headmaster whose funeral I felt fated to attend and in full accompany him to the graveyard at the

now famous Casurina beach of our island home, a tourist paradise in the vicinity of a renowned Hindu shrine.

One incident that strikes my mind is the reward he gave me when I answered correctly a difficult question put to the whole assembly of boys and girls from Grade 1 to Grade 6. I was then in Grade 3.

The question was: "*What is the rarest thing on earth?*" My answer was 'man'. Thanks to Avaiyar, whose poems were often recited by my mother at home. He announced publicly, "*You are invited to accompany me in my cart to Uduvil Girls' School this week-end to see your sister who is boarded there.*" His daughter, too, was there for post-primary studies. He took me in the bullock cart on the long journey to Uduvil. That of course was my first trip outside my village and my mother was pleased that I could take a parcel of home-made sweets to her daughter and friends, who were naturally homesick. It was a pleasant journey all the way from Karainagar to Uduvil, full of novelties in the various parts that we covered. When we reached the Manipay junction, the headmaster played a practical joke on my fanciful fear. He said: "*We are approaching the famous Maruthady Vinayagar temple. There is yet only a short distance to the school; you are a small fellow and naturally timid too, to face a Saturday morning crowd of girls, let loose in the college quadrangle. In their merrymaking, they will pounce on us visitors. I will tell you of a plan to ward off this danger. You see your Maruthady Vinayagar temple at Manipay*", pointing to the gopuram across the fields, "*with our church towering opposite. You must knock ten times on your head in prayer to your deity; otherwise the girls' school will recede into greater distance to keep us away indefinitely. I will myself pray to the Lord Jesus.*" I did exactly as he told me, counting loud the number of knocks. He said: "*We are now through, you are a smart fellow, you can stand up to the threats of all the girls giggling and cackling in the quadrangle at our arrival.*" Out of sheer fear of the

Headmaster, I did not tell this story to my sister; but to a raw fellow like me, not used to such sights, the jeers and gesticulations of the large bevvies of girls released like prisoners from their cells, as it were, were terrific and I imagined, in my innocence, that Headmaster was right in invoking our ancestral deity to my aid. I dedicate this little episode to my departed sister and hope that her two daughters, now resident in Malaysia, will recall and relish the memory of their dear departed mother at this distance of sixty-seven years. The romance behind such recollections is undeniable, though somewhat regretful.

I recall the religious atmosphere in which I was transferred from the Mission primary school to the Hindu English school in my village. The four years I spent there could, in retrospect, be termed a period of incubation. My grounding in the rudiments of the English language and my interest in the Indian national politics took firm root here. To those of today, it would look incredible that a boy of that tender age - twelve to be exact - reading in Grade 6, could read, understand and speak English with the phonetic accent of Daniel Jones; and edit a hand - written bulletin on the lines of Ramananda Chatterjee's 'Modern Review'. There was at that time a fresh wave of interest in the teaching of English, the language of education, and experimenting with intelligence tests to find the aptitude of the students in the elementary schools. Two men from the Inspectorate figured prominently in these projects. The late H.S. Perera, who later on became the first Ceylonese Director of Education, was then Chief Inspector for schools of the north. He made frequent visits to our schools and organised numerous courses for teachers of English. English, according to him, was to be correctly spoken, spelt and written. He did pull our teachers by their ears as it were. "*In whatever way you teach or learn English and for whatever purpose, it is stark stupidity*", he would say, "*to de-link the literature lessons from the language.*"

The other was his chief adjutant, the late K.S. Arulnandhi, who later had to be content with his elevation as Acting Director

of Education. He was exploring the validity of the many intelligence tests then in vogue. He would often drop in and commandeer the whole school for this project. I remember I was often spotted out as one of the best in the performance of these tests. It is interesting to recollect that he was able to place me through the various stages of my career - as a boy in standard six, as teacher of Skanda Varodaya when he came to inspect the school founded by his Guru - Upathyayar and, finally, as a post - graduate trainee at the Government Training College, Colombo. It is also interesting that this intellectual who earned the distinction of the London M.Sc., was a gifted Tamil poet. In 1941, when I was invited to deliver the Founder Memorial Address at Skanda Varodaya, I quoted Arulnandhi's entire poem in homage to his guru, his Upathyayar, and held a large audience spellbound in interpreting the nuances of that piece. In his period of retirement, Arulnandhi did some useful work as a Reader in Education at the Ceylon University on the invitation of Professor Green, who was then at the helm of the Faculty.

To resume my story at standard six, I must refer to my classmaster, the immortal Ambalavanar, who enthused me as no other teacher did, before or after, both in English and in other subjects all round. His project - the hand - written weekly bulletin, called "*The Hindu Review*", in English, of four pages - was the talk of the entire school, and students in batches would come to read it with great interest on the classroom notice board. "*Simple words, make the best sentences.*" He would often stress this, though it was difficult for me to realise the inherent truth of the axiom in all life. "*The Poets' corner*" was the first lesson in the Highroads of Literature - Book III and, when he taught it, it was then that my interest in Shakespeare was truly born! He lived long enough to see me as his colleague on the staff and was proud to greet me after my tour of the West, including my visit to Stratford. He listened with joy to the anecdote at the British Council at Davies Street, a few hours after I landed in London. When I wanted to visit the Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey, quite close to the

Council headquarters, I was asked if I was impatient to see the grave of my favourite poet, Shakespeare. I couldn't be plucked by that question and I said: "*No, I know that Shakespeare was buried in Stratford.*" On hearing this, Ambalavanar beamed with joy at the success of his lesson thirty - three years ago. I couldn't restrain my tears at the sight of my immortal master.

My father was not satisfied with what I was taught in this elementary school and, very much against the will of this revered teacher and even of the Headmaster, had me admitted to Victoria College, Chulipuram, where S.Sivapathasundaram, his Guru, now its Principal, was running a model secondary school noted for its spartan discipline, to the benefit of the Hindus, especially the poorer sections of the community as well as to the drop-outs of the more prestigious secondary schools in Jaffna.

Victoria College was founded almost two decades earlier than Jaffna Hindu College. It was the work of one Hindu Philanthropist, Canagaratna Mudaliyar who overcame overwhelming odds to run the school. It was mainly meant to stem the tide of Christian influence and conversion that threatened English education in an area which was able to preserve Hindu culture in its orthodox form.

My time at Victoria was during its hour of crowded glory. The best of teachers for the various subjects were hand-picked by the Principal, who himself was able to teach efficiently any subject up to the Senior Cambridge. The late P. G. Thambyappa, a stern disciplinarian, who later became Principal, and the late S. Chidambarapillai, B.A., B.Sc., were both inspiring teachers of Physics and Chemistry. Mathematics, taught by the Principal himself, had the lucidity typical of Professor Casperz of the then Ceylon University College. This was the opinion of the late S. Chidambarapillai, B.A., B.Sc., who was a loyal understudy of the Principal to whom he owed all his fortunes. A prominent lawyer, who had watched the Principal's powers of incontrovertible logic,

compared his brilliance to the late H. V. Perera, the greatest lawyer Ceylon ever saw.

It was in the midst of these dedicated men, that Mr. C. Narayana Menon (later Professor) descended like a star from the firmament. A gold medalist of English with his first-class University Honours of Madras, he came to teach the subject in the upper classes. He was passionately fond of Shakespeare, even as he was committed to the Indian Independence struggle, then in its full fury. Soft-spoken, humble and simple in his ways, clad in coarse khaddar, Menon would occasionally stray from his lessons and relate to us crisp anecdotes of the leaders of the Independence movement.

Menon, during his four years stay at Chulipuram, had become a legend in Jaffna. When he received his doctorate of philosophy, he was accorded a reception at a hotel in Jaffna where the now well-known Ambassador, K. P. S. Menon (Sr.) then the Raj Agent made a very witty speech. I have in my study a picture of a young man in hood and gown presented to me by the residents of Chulipuram.

Chulipuram itself, with its "*Arnold of Rugby*" discipline and efficiency in classroom learning, was not adequate for higher academic studies. My father who knew that Latin was a must for the London Inter-Arts, slowly removed me to Jaffna Hindu College as soon as I passed the Government exam - the English School-leaving Certificate. Principal Sivapathasundaram tried to dissuade him from taking me to Vannarponnai, which with its unrestrained atmosphere was not suitable for a young, mischievous lad like me. Though he was proved right in his prophecy, I joined Jaffna Hindu College, a few days after I had *darshan* of Mahathma Gandhiji in its prayer hall. It is one of the sweetest ironies in my life that Vannarponnai remains prominent in my long career - as student, teacher and Principal. Chulipuram, Vannarponnai and Vaddukodai could be termed the three theatres in which I acted the various parts of my active life as boy, student and teacher.

I owe this to my father, but for whose parental control and responsibility I could not have shaped myself during all the unforeseen adversities after his early demise. Though he did not live to see me a full-blown man; he is yet an example, to those who do not understand fully the crucial role of parents in the education of their children. Those who discuss, endlessly, their dogma of equal opportunity do not realise what it means; that such a responsibility of the parent is automatically passed on to the State. One cannot easily arrogate the right of the parent to choose the right school, the right college, and the right university, subject of course, to the reasonable limitations set by the State.

24. VANNARPONNAI

"Swami Vivekananda was a fine figure of a man, imposing, full of poise and dignity, sure of himself and his mission, and, at the same time, full of dynamic and fiery energy with a passion to push India forward. He came as a tonic to the depressed and demoralised Hindu mind and gave it self-reliance and some roots in the past." The eloquent mind of Nehru is seen in this description of the Swami, whom the Americans called the *"Cyclonic Hindu."*

It looked as if the Jaffna Hindu College founded in 1890 was waiting for this *"cyclone"* to push itself forward to make up for a late start. It was in January 1897 that the Swami on his return from an historic trip to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, touched on Ceylon and came to Jaffna. The only meeting which he addressed in any school in the country was at Jaffna Hindu College. It is pertinent to recall and record that as a landmark in the annals of the college, which is reaching its first centenary in 1990. In a stirring address, he said, *"We Hindus have narrowed ourselves, gone into our shells and lost touch with others. How can we go forward with a "crystalized" civilisation? Social organisations should change with the changing times. Our religion is in the kitchen; and our God is in the cooking pot and our religion is: Don't touch me, I am holy."*

People who listened to him in the college quadrangle on that day, considered his visit a pilgrimage that consecrated the entire school and the community with something precious. My father, then a young boy, did not attend this meeting but he would often repent to me the Swami's divinity was awakened by his Guru - Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and was well known in the world to have the touch of the divine fire. In later years when he learnt more of the Swami, he was full of regret that he was not blessed

enough to see him during this visit.

It was no mere accident that the Swami visited Vannarponnai, which is not a mere geographical landscape in the Jaffna peninsula. It is the seat of ancient Hindu culture, nursed over the years by sages and seers. Sri Arumuga Navalar, the champion reformer of Hinduism, had his headquarters here. Until very recently, it was the centre of the spiritual activities of Siva Yoga Swamigal, who used to walk daily from Colombuthurai to Vannarponnai to meet his disciples. In fact, during the last part of Yoga Swami's life, an ashram was built at Vannarponnai, which continues to spread the message of the mystic to this very day.

Swami Vivekananda's visit in the closing years of the nineteenth century was very timely, for the College was founded by the Hindus of Jaffna in protest against the domination of the western customs and habits which ate into the normal fabric of our people. The Hindu parents of Jaffna who wanted English education for their children had no school to go to unless they were ready to put up with the indignities imposed by the missionary schools. The only English school, started by Sri La Sri Arumuga Navalar, had failed because of the Government's hostility. It was in this context, that the Swami's word worked like a real tonic and, with that start, the College marched steadily forward and had reached great heights during its history of a hundred-years. This momentous event was fresh in the mind of many who had passed through the school, or had any connection either as teachers, parents or well - wishers.

It was no small joy then for me, as I was entering the portals of the holy ground which only a few days before had been blessed again by Mahatma Gandhiji. Entering the Principal's office, I beheld the Acting Principal, Sabaratnasinghe, a tall and corpulent man with a brisk moustache. He was a respected senior citizen of Jaffna, whom I saw four weeks before, controlling the massive crowd at the Jaffna esplanade when Gandhiji made his first public

appearance. Since the permanent Principal, W. A. Troupe, an English Theosophist, was away on furlough and his return was doubtful, Sabaratnasinghe, the Vice-Principal, was in charge. School administration of a college like Jaffna Hindu, was not the forte of the Vice - Principal who was called to fill the breach. I was readily admitted to the College and, within a short time, the College had the privilege of getting another eminent Indian - V. R. Venkataraman as its permanent head.

At the induction ceremony of the new Principal in the College prayer hall, the Manager, Mr. W. (later Sir) Duraiswamy, very briefly introduced the new Principal. He said, "*you will be proud to know that we have in our midst Mr. V. R. Venkataraman an M.A. of the Madras University who has specialised in both English and Philosophy. He was the Head of the Department of Philosophy of the University College, Madurai when Professor Marris (the present Principal of Ceylon University College) was a lecturer in his department.*" We sat with bated breath and looked in wonder at the tall lean figure with the typical stoop of the scholar, waiting to speak to us; and, when he stood up clad quite carelessly in coat and trousers, he drawled out his words rather haltingly, and most of us felt that eloquence was beyond him. It was a wrong impressin that was refuted within a short time.

Time told us that he was no ordinary Indian graduate, but a philosopher par excellence, with an independence of mind that set at nought the arbitrary decisions of the Governing board. It was natural, therefore, that the management waited patiently for five years to terminate his services at the end of the contract.

Venkataraman set about his task to expand the work of the school and co-ordinate the classroom teaching with appropriate extra mural activites. He very easily established a keen rapport with the Senior Cambridge and London Matric classes. He insisted, effectively, on extra-reading, renovated the library, and installed a

reading room within the limited space available on the verandahs of the main building. "*Reading, no doubt, makes a full man*", he used to say, "*but I am interested in making you a ready man through conference.*" His logic classes for the London Matric, generally during the last period of the day, were a conference, and students didn't grudge missing trains and buses in order to enjoy the cut of argument which he encouraged in his students.

It was easy therefore for the Principal to organise the Lyceum - the literary union of the seniors, who edited the '*Courier*', a fortnightly magazine. He also started the college dramatic club which, in the course of six months, most successfully staged Shakespeare's Julius Caesar at the Royal Theatre, now called The Windsor, to the delight of students, teachers, and the general public from all parts of Jaffna. But the Principal himself was most absorbed in setting up an exclusive society called the '*Sathiya Darshanam*', whose members were hand-picked by him. Sathiya Darshana means the Quest for Truth. It functioned like an informal symposium held at various times and places generally at his whims. When I was in the pre-senior class, I did not have access to some of the stirring changes that the new Principal had made. I was keen on my English and Latin, and Latin in particular was taught effectively by the late N. Sangarapillai, who went out of his way to cover two years' lessons so that I might be just in step with the rest of the class. "*Latin Sangarapillai*", as he was called, gave me a thorough grounding in the art of construing Latin unseen passages, which stood me in good stead and enabled me to offer the subject for my London degree through private study.

When I came to the Senior final, I was able to come to grips with the Principal's breadth of outlook on men and matters. A number of like-minded students followed him everywhere, caught him in thoughtful moods and enjoyed his witty conversation. Unlike the other senior students, who belonged to the senior-hostel in the campus, I was admitted to the junior-hostel located at Neeraviady, a few hundred yards from the College. Because of my age and

size, this anomaly became a necessity. Very soon I became a problem to the Boarding Master, who believed in spartan discipline and considered me a colossal nuisance, chiefly because he could not cope with my spoken English. My father was in sympathy with his complaints and constantly warned me that I might be expelled even from the school. But the Principal was very tolerant, though he cautioned me against excess that might compel him to transfer me to the 'den' of the seniors.

As a member of *Sathiya Dharshana*, I had the company of the late P. Kandiah, my classmate, known later as Communist M.P. for Pt. Pedro; the late S. Saravanamuthu the well-known Colombo lawyer; and the late M. Sri Kantha, who later became Permanent Secretary; the late N. Nadarasa, another eminent Colombo lawyer; N.A. Vaithialingam who retired as Chief Engineer of the Ceylon Railway; and many such bright students, while most of them were equally keen on their studies for their exams, I was known to be critical and fond of articulating my thoughts on the subjects discussed, neglecting classroom work. I must admit that I, unlike these men, was cutting classes, going to the theatre and indulging in extraneous fun around the town, with or without the permission of the Warden.

The Principal's sympathies for me reached breaking point when one day he called me to the office about an editorial in the hostel bulletin on a diet literally called "*Salt and Flour*" (uppuma). *"I can understand all your nonsense, but I cannot allow you to disrupt the well run hostel by inciting students to strike."* As he spoke, he appeared angry, but was willing to argue. I stood my ground for a while, arguing that if that bulletin was read - reading between the lines - it would never incite anybody to do anything. When he saw P. Kandiah informally dropping into the office at that moment, he said: *"Look here, Kandiah, you are bringing your problem to me. I don't mind helping you out, but look at your friend here, he is a problem himself."*

I was only too used to Principal's sarcasm and biting irony, to be offended by the remark. As far as I could recollect, he had no problem students or parents. He did have a few problem teachers and he sacked three of them unmindful of the consequences. I remember there was a black flag demonstration against the discontinuance of one teacher and the Principal refused to give a testimonial to one of the ring-leaders who had to join the University College through outside influence. Later that student became senior civil servant and Permanent Secretary in the Government. Venkataraman was head and shoulders above most of his colleagues, with his profound knowledge of psychology, logic and the English Classics. He could understand the trials of adolescence and would treat many students like me with sympathy.

He was keen on starting the London Inter Arts class and made many arrangements for it. Since he was banking on a bunch of us who could make the grade when the Cambridge Senior results were out. During his time, the College hostel was opened by Governor Stanley and I could see the amusing spectacle of the old folk and young students all agog to catch a glimpse of the King's representative, but Principal Venkataraman bestrode the campus, like a Colossus with his betel juice dripping around his lips, quite unmindful of the customary paraphernalia awaiting His Excellency. He made a speech introducing the Governor that visibly upset the distinguished visitor. He said: "*I feel oppressed like one with a knot in my throat*", and continued: "*Nationalism is of many kinds but there is one kind of nationalism that denationalises man and dehumanises man and, Mahatma Gandhiji in his independence struggle, is warning us against this kind of nationalism.*" These words, which were by no means complimentary to his Excellency, sounded terrifying to the management at that time, since one word from his Excellency would be enough to cancel the grant the school received from his government. But the audience listened with rapt attention and the drawling manner of his speech was particularly attractive on that occasion.

Elated by this inspiring speech, many of us attended the opening of the Stanley Central School the next day (12th July, 1929) by the Governor, where our Principal was the guest speaker. It was not many who could follow the depth of his thoughts concerning children and their interests in education.

There was another event which shocked the management, but was popular with the students and teachers. In a by-election to the Legislative Council for Jaffna, H.A.P. Sandrasegara, K.C., an eminent lawyer and a Roman Catholic - very few here were more catholic in outlook than he - was contesting a Hindu philanthropist and a member of the College Governing Board - R. Sivagurunathan. "*Merit*" was the watchword with the student community, even then as it is now. They all worked for H.A.P. with the quiet sympathies of the Principal. H.A.P. won and the public reception for the new M.P. was held at the College hall with Mr. Venkataraman in the Chair.

During the last term of the examination year, he adopted a ruse to relieve my Boarding Master of many pinpricks I was supposed to be giving him. Almost every week-end, he would call at the hostel and tell the Boarding Master, "*I do not want you to be harassed by some of these young devils.*" He would call me by name and say, "*You fool, come on, come with me on a long walk and that will cure you of much of the offending Adam in you.*" We would then go through the whole of Vannarponnai, go past Kokuvil and Kondavil. It was hard to keep pace with his long stride; and when we felt tired, he would drop into any home on the wayside that had plenty of young coconuts on the king's crown. Having drunk the juice, he would talk to the English educated and say: "*I may look a Brahmin all right, but I am a born Bohemian.*" None of us understood the word, although we would pretend to know. I guessed it. It was not as if he were irreverent to religion and God. In fact it was said that the high priest of Vannarponnai's Sivan temple, kept the high gates open until Venkataraman returned from his long walks to have the last darshan

of Sivan for the day, before he reached home.

When the results came out during the first term of the next year, the Principal was disappointed that I came down but he was not as perturbed as my father, who regretfully realised that his guru's prophecy was proved right. He had me readmitted at Victoria, just when its Principal was sending a message through one of his teachers inviting me back and assuring my father to make good the loss. The story of my return to Victoria for that brief refresher course under the personal care of Principal Sivapathasundaram, who kept me in his own Ashram for six months, is an important interlude between my unique experience at Vannarponnai and the academic cum Christian atmosphere I was introduced to at Vaddukoddai. I must conclude this chapter with a gist of what this Indian left to his disciples as a legacy. I am just attempting a summary of what he thought and felt about life in general and education in particular.

"If people are unhappy, it is because they choose to be so, because they have ignorance, habits, beliefs and passions which are dearer to them than life itself. Have you ever seriously thought on our College motto? Does it speak of God or Gods or religious rites and practices? Do you not realise that the founders of this school have thought on the deep difference between knowledge and wisdom and have chosen the correct couplet from Thirukkural to illustrate it."

"Our age surpasses all previous ages in wisdom and knowledge, but agreement ceases as soon as we attempt to define wisdom. Wisdom is the much needed corrective to the lopsidedness that increased knowledge promotes. Modern medicine has succeeded in enormously lowering the infant death rate in Asia and Africa but has it not almost unintentionally made the food supply inadequate and lowered the standard of life in these most populous parts of the world? Specialists, in their pursuit of knowledge, rarely care for

wisdom in the sense of compassionate vision. Do we not find men whose knowledge is wide but whose feelings are narrow?

This school stands for wisdom; and it does not consist of mere mental instruction.

“Kasadara” (means “correctly”), refers to precise knowledge, but this can be harmful if we do not live by it. We go to temple on Fridays and are on our best behaviour on that day, but if we do the most ungodly act on other days, that is not wisdom.

A sense of proportion is one of the most important factors that contribute to wisdom. It is capacity to take into account all the important factors in a problem and to attach to each its own weight. It is possible to make a continual approach towards impartiality by knowing things remote in time and space, as well as by giving such things their due weight in our feelings. It is the approach towards impartiality that constitutes the growth of wisdom.”

Whenever I reflected on these words, I could understand why I had to return to Vannarponnai twice again to consummate my career, almost in the manner in which Principal Venkataraman prophesied though not in so many words. When I learnt *Naladiar* as a Tamil text, for my Inter Arts, I felt doubly convinced by this particular poem, which in translation means:-

One’s worth cannot be judged by the cut of one’s coat or the curls of one’s hair, but by one’s sense of judgement which is the hallmark of true education and morality.

25. VADDUKODDAI VIA CHULIPURAM

One reason for raising the limit of compulsory schooling is the desire to protect the adolescent, and fortify him against the more degrading influences when a student leaves school. The importance of the family, or rather the parents, is great and, sometimes, the parents or guardians are at their wits end in choosing the right school for their wards.

I saw this even as a schoolboy in my teens, when two eminent Principals thought differently how adolescence should be tackled in my case. Minor delinquencies could be magnified into mountains of misbehaviour. A liberal atmosphere, devoid of the right restraints, could be damaging to the young, both at home and at school. I was living in school hostels for most part of my secondary student career.

Principal Venkataraman dissuaded my father from removing me from school. He told my father that students of my calibre could change more easily in a free atmosphere rather than under strict-care. "*You will not be surprised*", he said, "*if this fellow will one day sit in my seat if he so cares.*" My father who knew the ways of his wayward son, decided against this unwitting prophecy, which turned out true later, though he did not live to see it. He was impressed with the one that had already come true; and, so I returned to Chulipuram, crestfallen, for a six months exile in the home of the Principal, who was confident that I would make good the loss sustained during my urban escapades.

In the closed atmosphere of the "*Ashram*", which Saiva Periyar maintained, I led a very austere life. Many years later, when I went to Sevagram at Wardha, I recalled that my life during this brief period at Victoria was quite similar to what the Wardha System of education was trying to do for India. But my exile was too short to leave any lasting impression of what the "*martinet*" kind of discipline can do for teenagers. I was able to secure an

honours pass in the Senior Cambridge examination, and exemption from the Matriculation examination, with good grades in all subjects except Mathematics, where I got a credit pass, thanks to the vigilance of the Principal himself who handled the subject with clarity - very rare among schoolmasters. The only other thing I remember was a study of Shakespeare's Henry the Fifth, which Professor Menon taught with a sarcastic emphasis on "*Prince Hal*", pointing to me intermittently while he cracked jokes on the wild oats I had sowed; he was comforting enough to create confidence in me for the success of my "*crown*". I can never forget the line: "*There is a source of goodness in things evil*" in the play. At every stage of my life, I saw this truth which came to my rescue in moments of acute adversity.

My father, a diabetic from an early age, felt that his means would not be equal to my needs at University College, Colombo. He was constrained to send me to Vaddukoddai, at least for my Inter - Arts, in the hope that something would turn-up to continue my degree course at University. He had decided upon Vaddukoddai where the London Intermediate course had somewhat stabilised itself over the years but his mentor, Saiva Periyar had no liking for the *Padiri* school, "*But there is a man at Vaddukoddai called Handy Perinpanayagam*", he said, "*There is a ring of sincerity in the man which I could find in very few learned men. Ask him to keep an eye on this fellow.*" And that is how my educational triangle, in fact my cultural triangle, shaped itself.

Halfway through this difficult hurdle, my father died; and my hopes of proceedings to University College were extinguished. Vaddukoddai was, for all intents and purposes, the only '*University*' I attended. I am here reminded of the Welsh barber that cut my hair at Cardiff, where I went to attend the Summer School of English as British Council '*Scholar*', a quarter-century after. "*How well do you speak your English sir, what is your college*", he asked. His jaw fell, when I said: "*It's only a fortnight since I landed in this country. I come from the University of Vaddukoddai - not easily seen on the map of Ceylon.*" "*Ah,*

Ceylon, we know. In fact we drink its tea almost daily. In what part of Colombo is it? sir", he asked. That showed the ignorance of the Cardiff barber who, in spite of Lloyd George, Bevan and the Webbs, was still dreaming like many of his ilk, of erecting Welsh as the mother tongue. It took me some time to note that he, like many other Welsh men, had a deep-rooted prejudice against English, imposed from outside, although very few spoke Welsh even in their homes.

To resume my story of Vaddukoddai, I must stress that it was the slight lever that lifted me up and put me into the wide world, when the logic of subsequent events made my development a matter of course.

If Gandhiji's visit to Jaffna was number one landmark in my entire life, its impact grew gradually from Victoria to Vannarponnai and reached greater heights at Vaddukoddai where Handy Perinpanayagam was expounding his gospel of *Poorana Swaraj* (meaning complete independence) for Ceylon to the general public while teaching us Latin in his classroom. If Shakespeare became a passion with me, it was Dr. Narayana Menon who initiated me into the secrets of the poet's dramatic poetry. If ever I was known for independent thinking or intrepid speaking, it certainly originated with my contact with that eminent Indian Venkataraman, especially in the very informal, but certainly edifying, conversations in those long walks. Comrade Karthigesan, an English Honours graduate of the London University, who was my colleague for many long years on the staff of the Jaffna Hindu College, happened to write an appreciation when I retired, to one of the daily papers; the article states: "*But Mr. Venkataraman was not an administrator who delegated all disciplinary activity to his cane; the correction took a less painful form. Quite often, when going for an evening stroll, he took young Sabaratnam for company. As they went along, they would discourse on topics edifying if not educational, and may be the halo of headship of Jaffna Hindu rubbed off then itself on the awe-inspired, but intelligent student.*"

It was this kind of mental furniture that I was carrying with me when I entered Jaffna College for the last lap of my high school studies. Principal Bicknell, one of three architects who influenced my life in general, was away in America on his furlough. The Acting Principal who admitted me to the Inter Arts class was very impressive with his correct English accent and right intonation. He had, himself, returned recently from America after attending a World Conference of Churches, with this unique blend of English and Tamil Literature which he had mastered. He was a resourceful speaker and writer. In his retirement, he translated some of the Tamil Sangam literary works into English. In spite of his literary scholarship, he was no match as an administrator to Rev. Bicknell. Until the Principal returned, Handy Perinpanayagam was my pole star. His discourses and informal chats outside the classroom were more effective than his Latin lessons which, in themselves, with his "*obiter dicta*" were eloquent commentaries on Roman civilisation and culture and allied disciplines. I recalled this experience during my tour of Rome, where I went for a World Conference of Teachers almost twenty-five years later.

I must here, advert to my earlier reference to the educational triangle. I did not use the word education loosely, nor did I attempt to equate it with culture, when I mentioned cultural triangle in the same breath. I am only reinterpreting my school experience in the light of more mature years. Whenever I entered the Jaffna College library, I was reminded of Carlyle who said: "*A university is nothing more than a fine collection of books.*" The College library, a unique institution in one of the oldest schools in the island over the years, made me realise what a school like this could do with such opportunities to those denied the benefits of a university education. Culture, as I see it, is a way of life of a particular people living together in one place as seen in its interests, social system, habits and customs and attitude towards religion. It is not a mere addition of all these things, but much more. In a healthy society, one could find both the less cultured and the more cultured. It is not a division that is determined exactly by more or less schooling,

but they are all parts of the same culture; and the education, with all the influence of a family and the environment, does, significantly, contribute to the growth of culture. Vaddukoddai was a standing example.

In my formative years, I was fortunate that the three secondary schools which I attended had their part to play by strengthening the religious roots of the community I was born into; where I was able to - at the same time - gain competence in the two languages - Tamil, the language of my home, and English - an important link with the outside world with its ever-growing scientific knowledge and a medium for the rich literature of other cultures; and at Vaddukoddai, the arc, as I recollect, must well have become a full circle where the two strands of religion and language were subtly woven into a well knit fabric to reinforce it.

To resume the story of my days at Jaffna College, I am not tired of repeating the quip that I often made - Jaffna College, for the brief period when Bicknell was away, was like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. When Bicknell came back about six months after I joined, I found my experience in the words of what Nehru said about Gandhiji when he made his first contact with the Mahathma: *"He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take a deep breath."* He bestrode the College campus like a Colossus and his presence therefore, was more felt than seen. Though my academic career was not a bed of roses, nor much in its achievements that more fortunate ones could boast of, it was rich in the influence of some very great men that were ever born on earth. Quite a number of these I met in the College library, a meeting that was not less impressive than seeing them in flesh and blood.

Swami Vivekananda, the chief-disciple of Ramakrishna, was a kind of bridge between the past and the present of India in the last decade of the nineteenth century and, as I said before, he came as a tonic to the depressed Hindu mind and the only school in Ceylon that embraced his footprints was Jaffna Hindu College.

Tagore and Gandhiji have, undoubtedly, been the two outstanding and dominating figures of India in the first half of the twentieth century. I had already met Gandhiji in 1927. It was in 1934 that I joined a batch of students to meet Tagore during his stay in Jaffna at the Jaffna Residency as the guest of the then Government Agent, Edmund Rodrigo and his charming wife. Principal Bicknell, who failed to induce the poet to visit his school - Tagore, never visited any school in Jaffna on medical grounds - made a special arrangement for a select group of students to make this pilgrimage to Gurudev. This experience - the informal chat, the lisping voice of this good man - left an abiding impression in my mental make up. That apart, Vaddukoddai, to me, was more than an institution. It could be termed the summit where three empires of the mind met and mingled with one-another. The mind of the Hindu in the rich soil of Tamil heritage, and the acquired assets of English civilisation and the ancient culture of the Romans. Nor was it narrow, even in those days when very few knew much about what happened in Russia except for the stray visits of a few leftist political leaders who were wooing the Jaffna voters with doctrinaire communism which split itself on the roads of rival creeds.

But one thing stands out in my mind, even now. My hostel mate, the brilliant son of an erudite scholar, known for his scholarship in Tamil and Saiva Aaraichee (*means research*) was a confirmed admirer of Lenin. In one of my notebooks he wrote out one quotation from Lenin which has, ever since, gone into my records as well as in my memory. My friend later graduated with Honours in the General Science degree of London and became an Inspector of Schools. While he was blossoming into a mature thinker and educator, he met with untimely death. Whenever I think of him, I recollect Lenin's words: "*Man's dearest possession is life and since it is given to him to live but once he must so live as not to be smeared with shame of a cowardly and trivial past; so live, that dying, he can say: All my life was given to the first cause of the World - the liberation of Mankind*".

26. INTO THE WIDER ARENA

Truly may it be said of him, "*There was a man sent from God and his name was John.*" They were the last words of Handy Perinpanayagam when he made his very moving speech at the funeral of the Rev. John Bicknell at the Ottley Hall, Jaffna College on 18th December, 1936.

I had left college and moved into one of the rooms of the Jaffna Y.M.C.A. then in Main Street, Jaffna. I was giving tuition in English and Latin to London Matric students, while preparing for my degree exam. The sudden death of the Principal, sent the entire city into shock waves. Quite a number of men and women had soon gathered together with wreaths, bouquets, garlands and flowers to pay their last homage to the Rev. Bicknell - "*Aiyaru*", as they lovingly called him. I rushed to Vaddukoddai by bus and was in the midst of those openly sobbing. As we listened to Handy himself, muffling his mouth and wiping his eyes with his handkerchief, he found it difficult to read his written speech. It was considered a classic and was later published in the various papers and in the Memorial Volume of Handy Perinpanayagam almost forty-four years later. It stands as a living monument to both the Guru and the disciple. I had never witnessed such a grand manifestation of grief at any other funeral, either before or after.

As for me, the late Rev. Bicknell's kind humility and quiet compassion had been tasted to the full by my family. My father moved with him quite intimately as a parent and, when he died in 1933, the Principal was away spending a long vacation at Kodaikanal. On his return, he called on my widowed mother and, in simple colloquial Tamil ringing out in his nasal twang, consoled her with the firm assurance that he would look after her son until he finished his course. He did as he said.

Once out of school, I was left to fend for myself. The country was in the throes of acute financial depression. It was almost impossible to get a job, even as a stop-gap on the staff of any school. It is true that in 1934 the gates of the Government General Clerical Service were open after many years. Recruitment was made for clerks in Grade III on a salary of 40 Rupees a month. Many of my friends, some of them more affluent and even more promising, rushed headlong into the service like famished wolves let loose on their prey.

I wasn't stirred, in spite of my dire straits. It was then said that men like the late K. Kanagaratnam and M. Kanagasabai entered the clerical sub-service with their Junior Certificate and rose to be Acting Auditor General and General Manager of Railways. It was true that although these men were exceptions, there was scope for promotions to high posts for talented young men who took the ladder from the lowest rung. My preference was not pronounced in any particular direction, though I openly disliked to clerk in an office to begin with. I wanted to consummate my father's last words when I saw him last at the Green Hospital Manipay: "*Proceed with your studies, come what may.*"

Very soon my practice as private tutor became quite lucrative and the spacious room in the Jaffna Y.M.C.A., facing Christ Church, was bristling with activity with adult students doing Latin as a supplementary subject for Matric to proceed with their London Inter or enter the Law College. My board and lodging at the Y.M.C.A. was comparatively costly and the need to keep the home fires burning made me a full-time tutor. It was a tight schedule to endure the boredom of a full day teaching in half a day batches.

In 1934, Principal Sivapathasundaram had retired and gone into residence in the Sylvan Hermitage of Kandavanam at Valvettiturai and, almost immediately, the world saw his epoch-making book "*The Saiva School of Hinduism*", published by George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London at their own expense. Tributes poured from all parts of the world. The London Times said: "*Upon*

the merit of his writing, there can scarcely be two opinions. It is at once a remarkable performance." The Liverpool Post called it: "*An illuminating study of that important section of the Hindu religion.*"

Located as I was in the Christian environment and in the thick of what was largely regarded as western culture, I tried to read this book, which was quite costly and difficult to procure. At my first reading, I could not comprehend the consistent logic and abstract arguments of the author's exposition, nor grasp the essentials of the book in all its depth; but its clarity was no surprise to me. I was rather proud that such a renowned book was written by one who influenced the course of my life, saving me from many a pitfall. This book was one of the many urges that took me on a pilgrimage to the holy shrines of Southern India, now called Tamil Nadu. Even from my early days, religion was caught more by the atmosphere at home than taught at school. "*Saiva Siddhantha*" was the ruling creed of our forefathers and their temples. I was now setting my foot for the first time out of the country to see the original home of Saivism which had attracted several European scholars for the intellectual satisfaction found in its philosophy. The Rev. Dr. G.U.Pope, a protestant christian and Oxford scholar, who translated *Thiruvacakam*, calls it the choicest product of the Dravidian intellect. It is most elaborate, influential and, undoubtedly, the most intrinsically valuable of all the religions of India. It is peculiarly the essence of Southern India and Tamil religion.

My attitude to religion was at no time narrow, in spite of the exclusive stand that "*Saiva Periyar*" took in regard to orthodox Saivism. At Jaffna Hindu College, I was able to understand the tolerance of Hinduism in a wider perspective. The College provided a national outlook for Hindu culture which was quite accommodating to other religions and other cultures. At Jaffna College, thanks to the great Christian missionary, Bicknell and the radical thinker, Handy Perinpanayagam, with his well-known scepticism on matters religious, I was able maintain the balance, weaving into my mental fabric the various strands of christian

civilisation and its Western ways of thought, without the dichotomy that fanatics on either side of the fence were trading.

Whilst I was ruminating seriously on what I would do with myself in the secular world, this monumental work provided great relief, particularly when misfortune came in quick succession. My sister, who went to Malaysia after marriage, could not bear to hear the news of my father's death. So sudden it was, that his first letter to her followed the telegram of his demise. A few months later, she fell ill and was warded in one of the hospitals in Malaysia. My mother, fresh in the grief of widowhood, had to respond to the S.O.S. of my brother-in-law, and so she made the journey to Malaysia in the company of my younger brother, both of whom had never left the shores of Sri Lanka before.

This was really my first taste of real adversity, but I do not want to sentimentalise on it now, nor did I do so then as men usually quoting Shakespeare: "*Sweet are the uses of adversity*" or "*adversity sees miracles.*" There was nothing sweet or miraculous about the unenviable position I was in. Here I was looking for a livelihood, a job which was not there, and torn between the present temporary assignment and the need for an outing that would be an escape from the harsh realities. I had to wait for some months in the hope that clouds would clear. In fact they did clear when the news from Malaysia was good. Added to this, my popularity as a Latin tutor won for me a teaching post in the only tutoring in Jaffna which was running a London Matric class. I was asked to do a part-time job teaching Latin and Logic. I was therefore money-wise, more steady, and could maintain myself until I got a permanent job. After about two years, this silver lining egged me on to the South Indian tour which was in abeyance for some time. Though this project was considered an escape from an unhappy environment, the urge to see the sacred shrines of South India was engraved on me from my boyhood. It was born of the environment in which the sacred texts of the Saiva Saints were rendered to music almost every day at home and in the

neighbourhood where my grandfather was the keeper of a small temple which was well-known for *Purana Padanam* (recital of religious epics)

Purana Padanam refers to the regular practice of reading the sacred text *Kanda Puranam*, in particular, and the music of the leader and the pundit who explained the text had to be in harmony. It was an enthralling experience to the gathering at the temple heightened on certain occasions when well-known scholars were brought to do the exposition.

It was a crucial moment that threw me headlong into a month's tour of South India from Travancore to Madras. The South Indian Railway offered a concession for the first time - with its "Go as you please" ticket. Each ticket was valid for two weeks with a maximum of two tickets covering a whole month at the cost of 25 Rupees - from Danushkodi. Even this concession was not within the means of many, for money was scarce then. In the excess of my wanderlust, I roamed for about a month, getting tired finally, with the feeling that "*South or North, East or West, home was best.*" My first halt was at Madurai. The Meenadchi temple with its huge turrets and towers and colossal gopurams swept me off my feet at first sight. The travellers' guide book compared it to the "*Pantheon of Athens.*" Instinctively, I felt the comparison was hollow, though I had to wait twenty-years to visit the "*Pantheon*" in Athens. I could imagine all the difference between the materialistic West and the spiritual East when one viewed the two temples in a manner that can detach exterior magnificence in the comparison.

I was not the typical pilgrim, though it was then a pilgrim season that saw thousands and thousands of devotees in all the famed temples of South India - Madurai, Kanchi, Kumbakonam, Tanjavur, Chidambaram, Thiruvannamalai and in the South, Thiruchendur and the Pathmanatha Swami Temple at Trivandram.

I was really struck by the art that was unique in all these temples, though I took more time to see that in Madurai. My travels

in Ceylon, hitherto, were confined to excursions to the ruined cities which were remarkable neither as cities nor as ruins. By some kind of perverse fate, Sri Lanka once reputed as a fairyland, is at present, adding to the ruins that will soon qualify for intense archaeological research. Was Bishop Heber right, when he said of us: "*Man is only vile where every prospect pleases.*" But what I saw in all the temples I visited in South India were awe-inspiring edifices, obviously raised to inspire the divinity in man. It is interesting to quote Nehru's comments on these world-famed temples: "*I have an aversion of the heavy carvings in detail found all over that disturbed me and filled me with unease.*" But in spite of his well-known scepticism in matters religious, he quotes E.B. Havell, an eminent art critic who appreciated Indian art and applied new standards of judgement to correct the "*incorrigible Nehru.*" Havell says: "*The intention of Indian art was to make the central ideas of religion and philosophy, intelligible to the masses. That Hindu art was successful in its educational purpose may be inferred from the fact that the Indian peasantry, though illiterate in the Western sense, are among the most cultured of their class anywhere in the world.*"

Havell continues, "*We must look back with admiration, perhaps with envy, to those glorious days when the creative and aesthetic faculties of the people found expression in such masterpieces as the great temples of South India which will ever have their fascination for those who have eyes to see.*"⁴

The two most moving experiences in my tour, were the sight of Lord Murugan - the Baby God - amidst the Palani hills. One could go straight to Him, walking up the stairs of the small hill, garland Him as He stands with all the roses that were in plenty, sing and praise Him in song, undisturbed by any intermediary. The other was, of course, the sight of Lord Nataraja at Chidambaram, which I have visited several times subsequently. The piety that was eloquent at Kanagasabai - the golden temple of Lord Natarajah - does not need any comment; but I was not able to understand the significance of the Natarajah's image until I read Kala Yogi,

Ananda K. Cumaraswamy's elucidation in his "*Dance of Siva.*" Saint Manickavasagar's Thiruvacakam has been a household Bible in all our homes from time immemorial, but Kala Yogi's interpretation was unique and acceptable not only to the world of art, but to all savants of the Hindu religion and culture. He says: "*Now to summarise the whole interpretation, we find that essential significance of Siva's dance is threefold.*"

Firstly - it is the image of his rhythmic play as the source of all movement within the cosmos, which is represented by the arch.

Secondly - one purpose of his dance is to release the countless souls of men from the snare of illusion.

Thirdly - The one place of the dance, Chidambaram, the centre of the Universe, is within the heart."

He goes into raptures when he says "*How amazing the range of thought and sympathy of those Rishi artists who first conceived such a type as this, affording an image of reality, a key to the complex issue of life, a theory of nature, not merely satisfactory to a single clique or race, not acceptable to thinkers of one century only, but universal in its appeal to the philosopher, the lover, and the artist of all ages and all countries.*"

Many a pilgrim, the likes of me, was struck by this, by the sexual love depicted in all the carvings in the temples and, particularly, in one gopuram. Ananda Cumaraswamy not only explains, but defends, the sex symbolism that plays an important role in the devotional and doctrinal literature of Hinduism. He says: "*In India, we could not escape the conviction that sexual love has a deep and spiritual significance. There is nothing with which we can better compare the 'mystic union' of the finite with its infinite ambient, than the self-oblivion of earthly lovers locked in each other's arms, where each is both.*"

Every time I returned from Chidambaram, I looked up "*The Dance of Siva*" and everytime I attended the *Aruthra Tharishanam* of Lord Nataraja at the temple in my hometown, famed for its classical image of the Lord, the great conviction that the grandeur of this conception of Lord Nataraja was a synthesis of science, religion and art grew intensely.

From pilgrimage back to pedagogy, I found the trek very tiring. I now realise that I had become a "*master*" without the registration that entitled me to a job in school. But in Jaffna, "*master*" meant many things then even as it does now. Though teachers are not generally an affluent class, they take up to many trades, and some of them belong to the richer class of society, though they do not appear to be so.

I am tempted to return to the concept that occupied my mind during this interlude in my entire career - concepts that have returned today in an entirely different context.

One is private tuition and the other is "*General English*". I am happy that I never broke the code of ethics of the teaching profession in giving private tuition and be paid for by pupils of my own class or my own school. In fact, when I got my first appointment as teacher, and was registered under the Government, I gave up my first and original engagement as private tutor. I had no need, no compulsion, nor the motivation to continue tuition which has become the most controversial to face in schools and among teachers today.

When students, or even adults, came rushing to me for lessons in English and Latin, there was no rivalry, no competition in this trade for there were very few competitors who had leisure enough to undertake this work. Those who could, were practising teachers and those were days when it was almost unimaginable for affluent teachers to hold private classes levying fees.

In fact respected English and Latin teachers in the town attached to prestigious schools were directing those in need of

tuition; and in my anxiety to be secure against sudden breakdown in income, I had to work hard and my students were the best advertisement to a business that looked steady for the time being.

There was another breed of clients often escorted by their educated parents - students entering the Ceylon University College and others who were already there working for hours in General English during their long vacation.

It was evident that with all their proven ability and aptitude, in their particular course - arts, science and even medicine - they found it difficult to cope with their metropolitan counterparts in the University.

Here is a misconception, which I would like to correct in interpreting my experience almost half-a-century ago, about this thing called General English which has surfaced again as a project - a six months' project of General English - for students admitted to the University of Sri Lanka.

But the education before entering University held in select secondary schools, General English was not, and is not, some kind of proficiency in spoken or written English; nor does it end with acquiring the capacity to comprehend the language. Rightly construed, especially in the new situation when the mother tongue is the medium of learning in secondary schools today, it means general culture which '*English*' can and does impart.

What is the curriculum in our schools today? This is an important question; more important is the question: What is your school? In America it is not quite so difficult to obtain a doctorate for an ambitious student, even if he is mediocre, but the question is: "*What's the University? Is it Harvard, Princeton or Yale or is it some comparatively unknown university?*"

Even so, the university students of today can have widely varying levels of "*minimum*" calibre when they leave school. Today, the need for scientists and technicians has become so great

that more time is given to scientific studies, and rightly so; but the point that I am trying to make, is that with all your expert knowledge of science and technology you cannot be an efficient leader of men if you have no general culture.

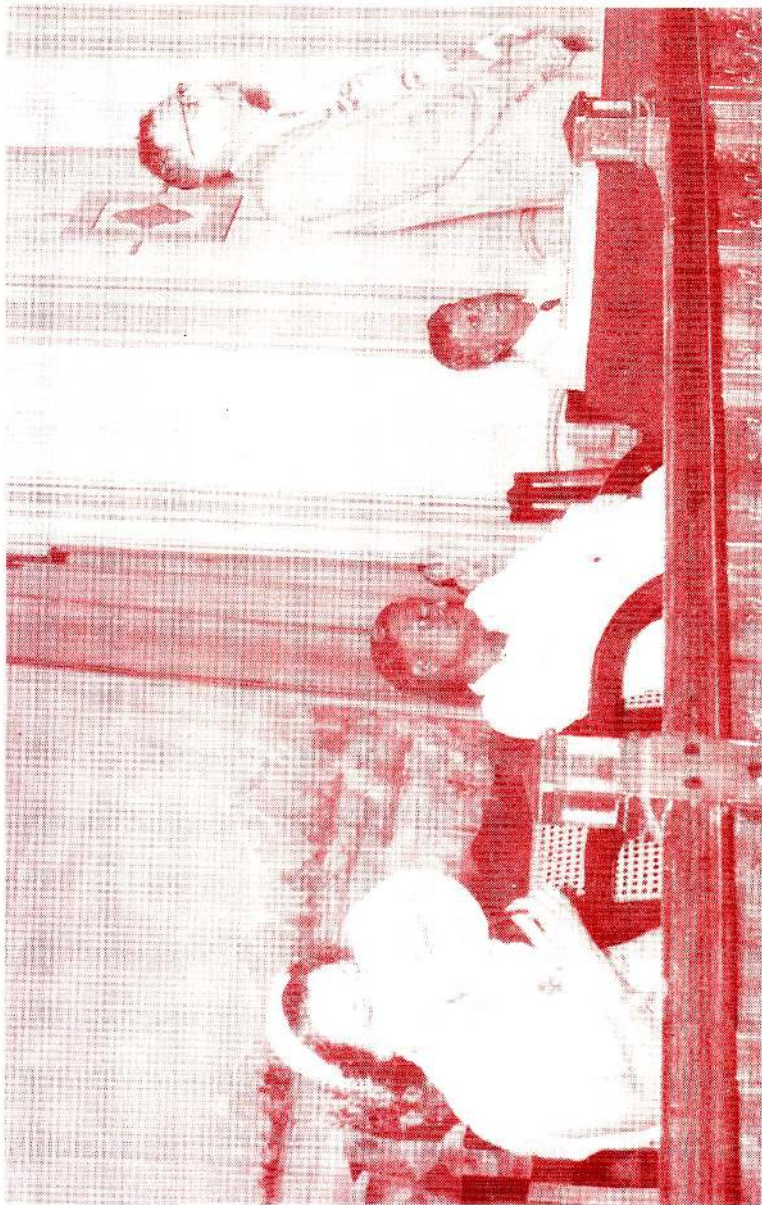
Then, as well as now, it is equally true that if a student knows how to think and how to work, has a go or a reasonable go, at acquiring a command of language and he grasps the foundation of mathematics, then he will easily learn any new technique.

Even illiterate parents of half-a-century ago realised the wisdom in this requirement and brought their bright sons for tuition in General English. By an irony of history, English has become more important for not merely the Arts student offering English but, more important, for the brighter lot that take up the science and medical courses.

I am persistent in my personal role that unless a student in school is motivated to learn the rudiments of classics - Shakespeare, Thiruvalluvar or Tolstoy, or Dickens, or even Plato - at least in translation, there is a good chance he will never read them at all. If he neglects history in favour of the shallow current affairs, he will never know history nor understand current affairs.

The British Professor Whitehead remarked: "*There can be no successful democratic society until general education conveys a philosophic outlook.*"

Thanks to some of our well-developed secondary schools, we of the earlier generation, felt more confident of meeting life's challenges than the contemporary run of University graduates and efficient technicians without the requisite philosophy of how to ally efficiency and wisdom.



The author presiding at the Jaffna Town Hall to felicitate Dr. & Mrs. William Carr of the WCOTP

27. A TEACHER BY CHANCE

On public platforms in later life whenever I spoke I used to be very often introduced as a self-made man. This could be both complimentary and otherwise. I thought of Shakespeare who was also so described but it has been shown by experts that even if Shakespeare did not have a University education in which some of his contemporaries took such pride, his schooling in Stratford had provided him with enough education on which he could build himself up. If it is useful to remember that Shakespeare was not an '*Unlearned and Untutored*' genius how incorrect it would be in my case that I was self-made when I had been educated in some of the best secondary schools without of course having had a chance of a university education. But the point that struck my friends who were fortunate to have it was the I was taught in between unemployment and the inability to complete my degree studies at the University College. Those were times when even London graduates were finding it difficult to find teaching jobs in Elementary English Schools. There was then a contraption called bilingual schools and quite a number of these graduates - even science graduates of London were accomodated in these schools for a pittance very much below the scale. It was a very unhappy time for those who could not proceed for higher studies or having completed it were idling on empty stomachs; and those with their London Matriculation were driven from pillar to post to keep their body and soul together. Someone said that unhappy was the land that needed heroes. Even at this distance of time, I think that these young men who could otherwise have struggled against any odds and were knocking their heads on impregnable walls for employment were heroes of their time. It needed not matter that they did not win a famous victory in the battle - field nor sail across the Atlantic nor set foot on the moon, nor did anything classically heroic at all except endure. Their fate prompted me to

recall Milton's Sonnet, '*On His Blindness*' which ends with "*They also serve who stand and wait.*"

By some stroke of luck, in those difficult times I got a teaching job. It came in search of me. I was tired of the insecurity of private teaching that kept me going for almost two years. It was then a period of intense rivalry when students didn't turn up and were found elsewhere. Work in the tutoring often got reduced for want of income. I had my own share of endurance when occasionally I could not make both ends meet. There was nobody else to go for help without embarrassment. To solicit the help of affluent kinsmen was not in keeping with our family tradition. In the competitive atmosphere there were many who helped themselves by doing somebody else down. I did not join this coterie who felt that they would grow if they could diminish others. I felt it in my bones that it was not the norm of our family life. I believed in work of any kind, work anywhere and I was literally running here and there to be able to stay in the self - same room at the Jaffna Y.M.C.A. In "*Alice In Wonderland*" Alice comes across the queen who is running hard and asks her. '*Why are you running so hard*'?

The queen replied '*Well I have to run hard*' to stay in the same place. That was my place. That was my plight. Then one evening came the dramatic change in the course of events. As usual, I was seated in the Jaffna Y.M.C.A. hall, talking to Dr. Isacc Thambayah who often dropped in on his walks for a chat with someone who was suitable; and in the course of many meetings with me he discoursed on the Hindu Saints in some depth. I was not surprised to see this cassocked prelate to be so liberal as to have learnt the essence of Hindu philosophy.

I have seen him chair the meetings at which Tagore spoke when he came to Jaffna. On that particular evening he brought for me a copy of the '*Foregleams of God*' his translation of Saint Thayumanavar's stirring hymns. I just thanked him and before he

could proceed old Toussaint of the Y.M.C.A. - a Dutch burgher who lived there for years, came running, called me out for a visitor who inquired for me, and that was the well-known 'M.A.' Muthukumaru Principal of Skandavarodaya College Chunnakam, with his long coat and 'kodukku'. He simply said I had been to see your sister on a courtesy call. Both of us travelled together from Malaysia back home in the same boat and I was so pleased with her during the time of our journey that I promised to call on her. I did so to-day and she spoke of a brother who had done his London Inter Arts and was keen on being employed as on proceeding with his studies. *'I told her at once'* said principal Muthukumaru *"Ask your brother to meet Candiah Upathiyayar at school where he spends most of the time. We want a man to do Latin in our school and if he says 'O.K.' everything is through."* I took an early morning bus the next day. Upathiyayar came limping from his room at College to meet me. I went, he saw and I conquered. This was the small beginning of the many good things that life had in store for me not of course un-mixed with the multitude of adversities that came in battalions.

Both Candiah Upathiyayar and 'M.A.' Muthukumaru were not mere individuals but institutions. They had done much more for Hindu education than men who were better known in the field. Education is one and indivisible, but in the constraint and context of Hindu children having to learn in Christian English Schools, there was the pressing need to provide Hindu Schools to Hindu children, many of whom had already been converted to Christianity. No other part of Ceylon, it was said, was subject to such missionary domination as Jaffna. Food, clothing, cash, service and English education were given to Hindu children in return for apostasy. It was when Saivism was at its lowest ebb in the first half of the 19th century that Sri La Sri Arumuga Navalar came on the scene. Both Principal Muthukumaru and Candiah Upathiyayar used to go into raptures when they talked about Navalar, who rejuvenated Saivism, brought out its latent powers, and fully armed it for defence and even offence. We are now living in days when

stalwarts like Navalar and Ramanathan are not only belittled but even vilified. Ramanathan like Navalar before him was a rebel against the spirit of his time: His bravest deeds were done when Ceylon was yet a Crown Colony. The high water mark of his service to Ceylon was the historic role he played in connection with the riots of 1915 regardless of all consequences for himself.

I was not a stranger to this knowledge when I set foot at Skandavarodaya. But whenever occasion rose these two great men - the Upathiyayar and the Principal - regaled stories of Navalar and Ramanathan in the relaxed atmosphere of Upathiyayar's room during school hours. A secret behind these talks was that they were not quite pleased with my stay at the Jaffna Y.M.C.A. and my daily travelling from there to school. In fairness to the international institution which I patronised not only in Jaffna but whenever I went abroad, I must say that the atmosphere that prevailed there broadened by outlook, provided rich contacts with the cultured and in no way diminished my faith. In the religion of my forefathers. I must also state that whenever I left home in Jaffna the central Y.M.C.A. in Colombo was my second home and my out-station membership went up to thirty five years. It did not take much time for these two Saiva Savants who ran that school to realise that the bedrock of all my English education was in the hands of '*Saiva Periyar*' Sivapathasundaram the only one who wrote a book in English in lucid and cogent style of his own about Navalar. Principal Muthukumar was a man of ideals, a pioneer farmer in Paranthan and was an active participant in the political affairs of the country. He was quick to dispel any misunderstanding about my connection with the Y.M.C.A. or with deans like Dr. Isac Thambyah. In fact he was all praise about the '*hairless and heirless dean*' - words used by that eminent lawyer Sam Champoe in one of his '*inspired*' moments to describe the prelate. It dawned on me some time after that both the '*Manager*' and the Principal were indirectly inducing me to stay at school instead of running about daily to Jaffna, in their plan to reorganise the boarding homes and the extra-mural activities of the school.

They said, "You have merely to supervise night studies. There will be somebody to run the menu but your presence as 'Resident Master' will enhance the status of the project we are planning." It took me almost a year to come into residence. For during the last term of my first year I fell seriously ill and was warded at the Green Hospital Manipay for three long months. It was a virulent attack of typhoid fever but what is unforgettable even today was the great concern that both these gentlemen had for me. They visited me more than once in the hospital and waited for the American doctor, the popular Dr. Jameson who was all smiles in his replies. When I returned to school almost after four months of illness and convalescence, I was fit not only to work but also to accept their extra assignments. To cut a long story very short I became a teacher by chance, but I taught at the same school for six long years, graduated, married as men do, and was even blessed with my first born. Principal Muthukumar in the meantime in his customary style had gone to another school. But the sole protagonist of my saga of six years at Kantharodai was that immortal soul 'Upathiyayar' who gave me all the help. Money as advance and leave for six months to stay in Colombo and prepare for my degree, and many other forms of help, which he had given to hundreds of persons like me before. Should anyone ask me where and how I was apprenticed to teach at the highest level, my answer is - Candiah Upathiyayar. During this period Principal A. Cumaraswamy of Jaffna Hindu College who taught me before he went to London returned with his M.A. and was appointed Principal for his old school. He was handpicking teachers to develop the school to greater heights. Though he was willing to take me in, he would often say, 'You know what someone said about our Colleges.' 'I know what you mean sir,' I said in reply.

The word 'neptoism' was in the air and this was the first time I heard the word and with all my knowledge of Latin, I could not understand the semantics till I turned over to the C.O.D. It was used by Prof C. Suntharalingam when he said that it was more difficult to join the staff of Jaffna Hindu College than enter

the Civil Service. *"That's an exaggeration, typical of the Professor but there is some germ of truth in it. In fact I tried to get in two Cambridge men into my staff but the Managing Board turned that down. It may be that they found them too good. But when the right time comes I will sound you, if you are in a position to join your school"* said Cumaraswamy. He renovated the school during the two decades of his distinguished stewardship. He rebuilt the school like P de S. Kularatne of Ananda¹ and when the right time came I made my second entry into Jaffna Hindu. This time as a graduate teacher doing English not only in the S.S.C. and H.S.C. classes but in Form I also. In the fullness of years I had undergone my Post-Graduate training course for a year in Colombo and on return had to serve two other schools under the same management before I was appointed back to Jaffna Hindu, as Vice-principal when it was Director-managed. It was easy for people to imagine that this grand leap would automatically lead me to the helm but it was not so. I could not have dreamt of leadership of this school in the days of the private management, many other things besides merit counted. Besides men of the highest calibre had been at the helm in the past. It was during the Take - over that this chance dawned on me. But when the school was vested in 1963 there were wheels within wheels of the hereditary elite to prevent me from succeeding my 'Boss' who retired in the middle of 1964. But the Ministry was determined to confirm me as Principal.

The story of how the acting Principal was officially confirmed as Principal could be the theme of a playlet - something like Sir John Kotelawela's *'Premier Stakes'* or nearer home to my revered teacher Sangarapillai's playlet. *'Special Post Stakes'* which revealed the literary genius of a man who taught English, Latin, Mathematics and Tamil for the Senior Cambridge and H.S.C. classes for more than two decades. When a promotion to the special post was his sole right he was let down and it was left to another school to set it right and give him the leisure and peace of mind to produce this marvellous exposure.

We are continuing in our loose talk even today against private schools and in favour of state schools and for equal opportunities and castless society. True even private schools must conform to the basic requirements laid down by the state but must be free to be run as models of independence, without state monopoly.

The point I wish to make is that some kind of aristocracy not based on wealth or heredity must prevail in promoting the education of children. This kind of aristocracy is not achieved by birth alone but by qualities of character and public zeal. The elegant and well-mannered to whom the crease of one's trousers is more important than the accurate nature of one's principles and who accept the cash standard - the criterion of present day aristocracy - cannot be models of learning and culture to the young; whereas the true aristocrat will ever prefer to pay court to the obligations most often upon character and true culture.

Such schools must be allowed to continue as models for others.

28. THE FIRST AFRO-ASIAN CONFERENCE IN COLOMBO

When I left Kantherodai - an ancient village, now renowned for a leading collegiate institution, I came back to my old school of student days - Jaffna Hindu College, on the invitation of principal A. Cumaraswamy who was waiting to take me in at the right hour. But my thoughts lingered long on the school, the haven that gave me succour when I was jobless. But that was not the thought that persisted long even after securing '*a safe bed*' in my home as it were.

I was reminded of the great Russian writer Dostoevsky who in his "*Crime And Punishment*" - a classic to read and enjoy, said, "*People are by law of nature divided into two categories. viz. on the lower as material serving only for the reproduction of its own kind; and into the higher - that is into people who have the gift or talent of thinking and doing something new in their sphere.*"

This does not in any way denigrate marriage which is a divine institution to which we are bound nor does it, as Gandhiji said, "*mean that everyone is born to marry or having married, should I have a family of children.*" The home that is happy with children is blessed, but to the childless individual as to the celibate there is a vast field of human beings in the form of families, called the community as pioneers or path finders breaking laws and incessantly engaged in knowledge and action for the sake of a better field.

But the story of Vannarponnai - is still the renowned seat of Hindu culture, but on this context refers to the founding of Jaffna Hindu College. It was the handwork of many such men who were inspired by one revered celibate and the "*The champion reformer*



ACUT delegation at New Delhi

of the Hindus" Sri La Sri Arumuga Navalar who swore by celibacy for the redemption of an ancient religion that along alien rule was engaged in undermining for centuries - one Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British. But the institution - a premier Hindu institution - imparting English education was founded by a band of patriots eleven years after his exit leaving an unprecedented record here and Tamil Nadu. It was a career out in mid course.

Skanthavarodaya was unique, in that a revered savant who started a school with a few boys who were in dire need of English education spent all his fortunes in building it up into a first rate Junior school which later had about a thousand boys from all the rural areas round about. He thought of free education long before Kannangara, and free board to deserving ones. He was assisted by his illustrious cousin Dr. S. Subramaniam popularly known as 'P.S.' who went to the rescue of Candiah Upathiyayar, the founder, when a fast growing school could not cope with the finances, as Government assistance was inadequate.

These two geniuses who never raised families of their own, though married, spent their energy and fortune on the education and health of children whom they regarded as their own. The names of a quite a number of beneficiaries of their philanthropy who rose to heights in public service, the professions and even politics would sound a fairy tale - like Aladdin's lamp - the lamp of love that glitters even in this darkest hour.

In a thoughtful monograph, "*There is Yet Time*", Dr. Richard Weiss says what may look ridiculous to us today caught in the crossfire of bombs, shells and high powered mortars. "*If catastrophe is to be averted war must cease completely; and if it is to cease completely we must see through the illusion of separatism - a very fashionable and 'dangerously comic' word here in the heartland of North Ceylon. It is out of separatism all conflicts are born in all spheres of life.*" Nor is conflict altogether evil if it paves for ultimate harmony.

In today's Summit (another flat and profitless word in current use) crucial decisions may be made. But what impels these decisions from behind and at bottom are the forces of separatism - the limited loyalty to one's family, to one's community, to one's profession and what not.

Looking into my diary I find that today is 7/12/87. It is a fateful day in the history of mankind; and we in little Jaffna now a prominent dot in the map are caught in the battle for survival (still a going concern almost four years later.) We cannot afford to be indifferent to the happenings elsewhere.

It is the prophet of Islam who said, "*All creation is a family of God, and he who digs a pit for his brother falls into it.*" In Oscar Wilde's "*Picture of Dorian Gray*" we find the dagger which Dorian Gray hurls at his portrait lodged in his own breast. The common belief that each man is a separate island which communicates on the basis of self - interest is proving very dangerous particularly in the decade that precedes the 21st century.

It is the ordering of these loyalties that has gone wrong, obsessed as we are by what is near and indecently insistant - the claims of caste or creed.

It is Education that must re-orient the correct approach. Even this stale statement looks platitudinous coming out of a pedagogue, though it bears incessant repetition. To make a sudden jump from this '*lofty*' philosophy to my own story is rather dramatic and almost incredible.

To a boy - Jaffna born and that too in an obscure hamlet in a sea-girt isle in West of Jaffna called '*Ithiady*' and now settled down in another nook of the capital city of Jaffna called '*Athiady*' after about sixty-two years of hectic life living in precarious but unflinching isolation in illness and senility, there is a thrill of life in the story. Ambalavanar Road at Athiady is on the border of the '*Peace Zone*' farcically so called on account of the General

Hospital in the city. We had to face daily shelling from the Jaffna Dutch Fort. The story therefore in spite of its autobiographical ups and downs is broad enough to tolerate, since education is the peg square enough to hold it.

In the very first term of my teaching at Jaffna Hindu College, I functioned as secretary of the Teachers' Guild unique for its multi-facted dimensions of discussions. This let me on to become President of the Jaffna Town Teachers Associations in the Silver Jubilee year of the parent body - A.C.U.T. held in Kandy the hill capital. On the heels of this momentous event, I was elected the President of the Northern Province Teachers' Association. Was it some kind of fate that it coincided with the visit of the twin personalities of the World Body (WCOTP) returning from Manila and chose Jaffna as the first item on their returned itinerary to their headquarters in Washington?

The Secretary-General - Dr. William G. Carr - still living in retirement and Vice-President Mrs. Sarah Caldwell no more in the land of the living, spent an entire day with us. It was an hour of crowded life worth an age without a name.

Our guests were received in a majestic manner ending up with a civic reception by the Mayor of Jaffna which according to the guests had never taken place anywhere in the world. The climax of the reception was the Mayor's welcome address carved on palmyrah leaves with a quotation from our ancient Poetess Avvaiyar, "*The Learned unlike kings who rule over their own land are revered whenever they go.*"

It is almost thirty years and more since Jaffna saw this stirring spectacle of world educationists honoured publicly on our soil in this manner. In spite of the fact that commercialism with its perverted values has extended its sway over the Jaffna man, Jaffna is still holding fast to the tradition of reverence to savants and sages and to men of learning and culture, that their genuine admiration is addressed to prophets like Buddha and Jesus, like

Mohamed and Gandhi whose personalities triumphed over the contemporary forces of their environment. It is true, more and more people here like those of the West bow before power and wealth and yet there is a continuity from the past in attaching great importance to individuals who have risen superior to the temptations of worldly possessions and not bartered their integrity or idealism for their sake.

If the American visitors who were highly impressed with Jaffna and their teachers on their one day visit, some of our Jaffna delegates to the first Afro-Asian Conference held at the G.O.H. - now called Hotel Tabrobane in Colombo - in 1958 under the auspices of the world body were able to make their mark at their maiden appearance at the international conference.

As Vice-President of the A.C.U.T., I had the privilege of leading the Ceylon delegation and as requested I had to read a paper on "*Public Support for Education*" at the plenary sessions opened by the then Prime Minister Bandaranayake and addressed by the Education Minister Dahanayake and other dignitaries from India, Pakistan and countries from Africa. The star attraction of the conference was the unscheduled visit of Sir Ronald Gould, President of the world body who on his visit to New Zealand called on us for a day and accepted our invitation for a public dinner over which I was proud to preside.

Sir Ronald Gould's address in the morning held the audience spell-bound. He said, "*It is becoming increasingly true that the problems of one country are the problems of all countries, that the problems of industrial and political and social relationships are really one, and the world needs to realise the oneness of its problems.*"

The values that most of us cherish in our western civilisation are values that have to a very great extent been derived from the East. It is from the East that most spiritual light has broken upon the world. We in the West have a great

deal to give on the intellectual plane. But in the moral plane most of us from the West should never fail to realize that we are always under a great sense of indebtedness to the East for the spiritual enlightenment that the East has brought us".
Who is this man called Sir Ronald Gould?

Sir Ronald Gould, President of the World Teachers' Assembly called the WCOTP since its inception in 1952 was the Secretary-General of the National Union of Teachers, England and was a great leader in the Teachers' World and for 21 years he was the unchallenged leader of education in his country. He was knighted by Her Majesty the Queen in 1955 and was awarded the honorary degree of LL.D. from British Columbia University.

Sir Ronald Gould in conclusion emphasised that it was the duty of all delegates as individuals, as members of their National Teachers' Associations and as members of the World body to encourage teachers to catch this vision of greatness and to convince Governments and people that teaching was the greatest possible force in the world.

In my address to the plenary session on "*Public Support for Education*", I said, "*The provision of a school system is expensive, the resources of which have to be furnished in one form or other by the community. According to the Declaration of Human Rights, "Education shall be free", and the emphasis therefore is on the individual pupil and charges for schooling should be removed or reduced to the minimum. Even so, the indirect costs of schooling continues to be borne by the parents maintaining the child.*"

"In our own country, in spite of free education from the kindergarten to the university, large numbers are still out of school - almost a quarter of the children of school going age.

"Could a conference like this provide an adequate analysis of the indirect cost of education? It is evidently a

difficult job. National communities differ from one another not only in wealth but also in their population structure and this latter fact has important bearing on the national cost of education. If one has to look at a graphic representation of the wave of young lives passing through the schools in the under-developed countries of Asia and Africa, one could see that the curve looks less like a bulge than the crest of a wave."

"It must not be forgotten by the countries represented at this conference that each of the factors determining the relative size of the school population viz. birth rate and life-expectancy - tends to change with the progressive development of education; so that the net result may be a combination of two material effects; increased educational development leading to a higher standard of life with a probable reduction in the proportion of children which in turn favours increased schooling and so forth."

"Persuasion to rouse the interest of the population in education and culture and to make governments fully alive to the responsibilities towards the citizen with regard to education is a must. Governments will always complain about lack of money, for they have many other items to spend on. In the matter of buildings, there will also be a tendency to postpone schemes drawn up and by the time money comes, changes would have occurred to scrap the plan. "Administration", an eminent authority said, "is the intelligent anticipation of agitation." The public must be made aware of what a good educational system is for their children - supply of teachers, buildings and allied services must be planned in advance."

"The larger question of poverty must be tackled, and the most important work is to create condition in every school district which will allow every child to gain a firm foundation for work in his adult life. As educators, we must propagate new ideas in the place of old and outworn beliefs. That a child is born with a certain amount of intelligence which you

cannot modify must be driven out of the public mind. This kind of deterministic, fatalistic 'hope - destroying' dogma is still rampant and must be banished.'

"Educational development is conditioned by environment as well as heredity. This is a new doctrine that has enough liberating force to supplant the doctrine of dullness on the child or destiny. Whenever a child comes from a poor neglected home background to poor neglected school buildings, to large classes, to inadequate books and equipment, the child remains under-developed not because of ancestry or god or destiny, but because of the neglect of the State and its local government. We must be able to focus this idea to the larger public which will get into committees for tapping public support as well as pressurising the minister and members of parliament and chairmen of finance committees and the like.'

"A strong teachers' organisation is imperative for any good educational system. If we delegates at this conference can carry the message that the Unions are still the mightiest lever of educational reform to our parent Unions and make them work on the potential influence, there is hope."

As Poet Browning said,

*'One who never turned back
But mached breast forward;
Never dreamed wrong would triumph
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better'*

In winding up a much longer speech, I said quoting Dr. Carr, the Secretary-General of W.C.O.T.P. who was not present at the conference, *"The time will come though you and I may not live to see it, when responsibilities for education of children, will be a world responsibility and when every child whether he is born in Colombo or in New Delhi or New York will be assured of an education by the world community."*

As I stepped out of the rostrum at the end of the speech, there was continued applause and I was not unduly modest to find that my labour in preparing this speech had won recognition from the distinguished delegates of the conference. It was not therefore much of a surprise that at the next executive meeting of the A.C.U.T. I was the only unanimously elected delegate to the Annual Conference in Rome in August that year, but also leader of the Ceylon delegation.

The complimentary dinner to Sir Ronald Gould, the President and Sri S. Natarajan, Vice-President, W.C.O.T.P. held that night at the G.O.H. was indeed grand. Among the speakers who felicitated the chief guests was the late A. M. A. Azeez, a past President of the Union who presented the picture of the A.C.U.T. in its full perspective. The wit and humour that ran through his entire speech kept the guests spell bound.

"Teachers were standard bearers of progress all over the world, and it was a proud achievement for the W.C.O.T.P. to have brought together under its aegis the teachers of the Afro - Asian region to discuss their common problems. This conference is therefore fraught with enormous possibilities" concluded the late Senator Azeez in the midst of thunderous applause.

In thanking the two chief guests and Sir Ronald in particular, I referred to a seemingly silly anecdote which stirred Sir Ronald to peals of laughter. "Sir" I said, pointing to Sir Ronald, *"I come from Jaffna, the capital of the North of this country and there was a brilliant, young lawyer by your name, unfortunately cut in the prime of life. The late Nicholas could though young, was so brilliant that he was invited to appear in a sensational case in Madurai High Court in South India. He won the case and the whole court was astounded by the subtlety of his cross examination and the eloquence of his advocacy. His clients who paid him a handsome fee also paid him the homage of*

accompanying him up to Dhanuskody. They were too nervous to ask him his special qualifications but when the barrister boarded the steamer, they threw modesty to the winds and asked him the question. The answer was "J.A.C.B." They were confused mistaking it for a research degree in law, but it really meant "Junior Advocate of the Ceylon bar."

But the point of my story is I said, *"that he was a young versatile genius though he had not much penny left in his pocket at the end of the day. In some of his inebriate moments he was supposed to have said to his wife, "If not for (U), you, I will be gold. The anecdote is silly no doubt but it can enliven everyone of us here. that you Sir Ronald are gold, whatever may be the position with (U) in the word".*

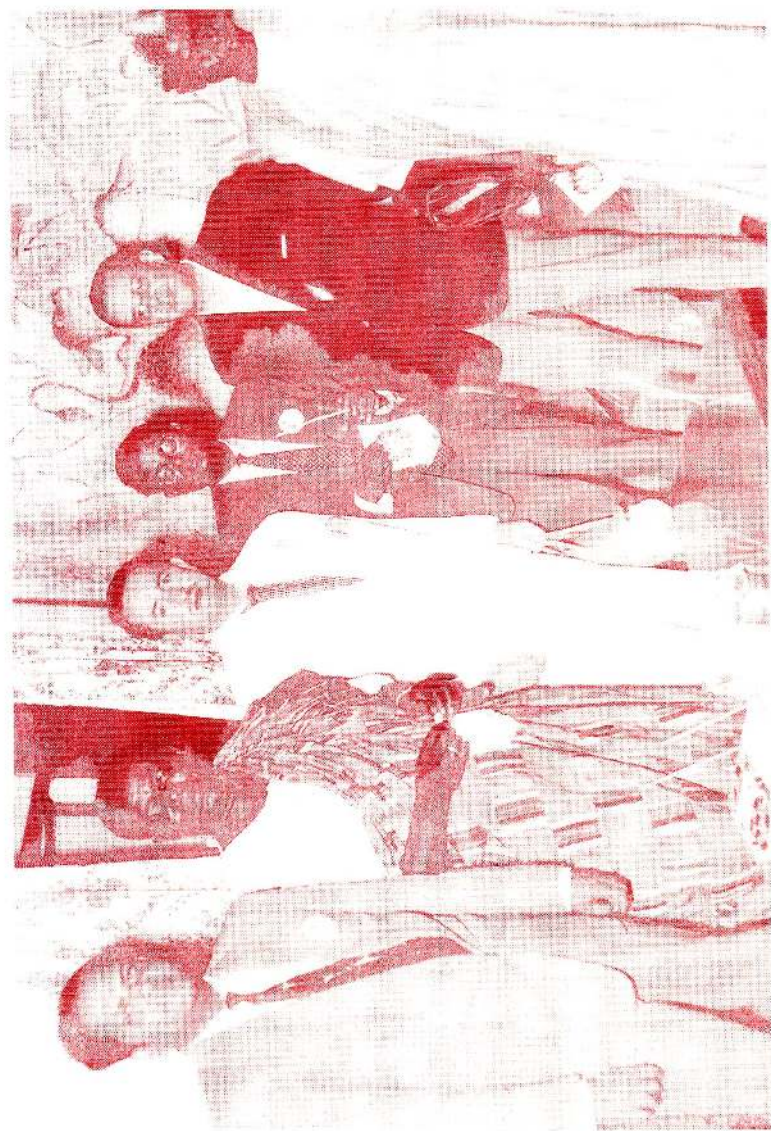
As I sat down, he tapped my back and said, *"Young man, you will go far, but remember, you had your last say, because you were in the chair; having heard you at the sessions and here I little doubt that you will be able to meet me in Rome. As the ghost in Julius Caesar, said "I shall meet you at Philippi" you will have my piece of mind there." Like Brutus I replied, "Why I will see there at Phillippi then." To me therefore, the Grand Oriental Hotel is an emblem of the grand leap that I was to make from Colombo to the various capitals of the world within four months.*

29. W.C.O.T.P. CONFERENCE IN ROME

My trip to Rome for the W.C.O.T.P. Conference in August 1958 was coupled with a visit to Britain for which I was given a grant by the British Council expressly to attend the "*Summer School of English*" at Cardiff for a fortnight ending in mid - September. So it was a European tour in which I was able to visit Paris and Zurich, Berne and Geneva and on my return, Athens.

When the Ceylon dailies published the news it was known to my friends and kinsmen in Colombo; some of whom came to Katunayake airport, to be sure of seeing me off. I left the Central Y.M.C.A. Colombo to join my friends, two of them bound on the same trip as delegates. As I was about to get into the jeep a senior resident of the Y.M.C.A. - a pious Hindu presented to me a small silk bag containing Holy ashes from Chidambaram. "*This is a precious gift Sir*" said, Saravanamuthu. "*You must return to me the bag when you come back*", half laughing he said "*I want to make sure that you enter St. Peter's the biggest church in the world with your forehead smeared with ashes sacred of the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Saivaites of the world.*" But the scene at the airport was a little more interesting though somewhat sentimental. One of the visitors was a cousin of mine - a very tall guy to whom I introduced my other two colleagues. The plane was delayed and so there was no end of irrelevant talk and gossip. When one of the two told my cousins that I was the leader of the four - man delegation - the fourth man had already gone - he was visibly surprised with joy and in '*Sotto Voce*' said, "If only my Periappa - meaning my father and also his father's elder brother - had lived to see this, he would been gratified that what little he had done to his son was enough to fulfill the immortal poet Thiruvalluvar's well known couplet.

"It is the duty of the father to see that his son is pre-



The author representing the ACUT
at an International Conference

eminent in every assembly" But I knew that it was an impossible dream that my father could have survived a quarter of a century for such a thing to happen. On the other hand, I felt a little sad about my mother who in a comparatively early widowhood had brought me up through all trials. She would have felt some what comforted for her profound losses in the death of my father and the sadder loss of my dear sister. How strange, how extra-ordinary, and joyful it would have been for her that her first born son - the little son whose tiny limbs had faintly stirred within her about three decades ago? The son she nursed for full three months in a hospital and rescued him from a dangerous illness in the bloom of his youth, should now be away to a foreign land in strange surroundings to talk Education with his counterparts from all parts of the world. She died on Friday 30th January 1953 at the self same hour when Mahatma fell a victim to an assassin five years before. I organized the mammoth meeting for Mahatma at College on the morning and in the evening on my way back to her home to look her up, I heard she had just then died. Like Sage Pattinathar I was mad, beyond words and the moving lyrics he sang on his mother's demise crowded my mind and Cowper's lament came to comfort me in the darkest hour.

*"Oh that those lips had language, Life has passed
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.
Those lips are thine - they own sweet smiles I see,
The same that oft in childhood solaced me;
Voice only fails, distinct they say,
"Grieve not my child, chase all thy fears away.*

*Incredible it would seem, but it is a mother that makes
heroes or men or paragons of sons."*

These were the thoughts that haunted my mind, and her face renewed my filial grief while my friends and kinsmen continued to chatter. I took my handkerchief and wiped the tears trickling quietly. Within minutes the delayed plane had come and

the TWA hostess, herself a Jaffna girl, sister of Bala Tampoe of Trade Union fame, who had never seen her birth place presented to me the travellers' bag of the TWA and wished me all luck.

In my flight I could only remember Karachchi half asleep past midnight - and of course during the next day we passed through stretches of Sahara, a mighty ocean of sand crossing Egypt as early as dawn and flying lower enough to see Acropolis in Athens and in a while once again the pilot announced "*You can see the Colosseum of Rome*". I recalled the ancient remark, "*As long as Colosseum stands Rome will remain.*" There is no one Rome but many - Pagan, Christian, Ancient, Modern, Medieval, Imperial, Basque, Aesthetic, Commercial, Republican, etc.

"*Its ruins*" someone said, "*appear like the face of an old guard.*" "*Bow down to God, you Romans and you will rule the whole world.*" All these appeared to be more real than when I learnt them in books. I was indeed more familiar with ancient Rome than my colleagues to the conference. I learnt Roman History with my Latin up to my degree and had become intimate with the story of the magnificent civilisation of Italy - of Cicero and Virgil, Livy, Horace and Ovid and Tacitus and Plautus, in their original works.

Italy has produced many great statesmen, brilliant artists, admirable musicians and super poets. Each of them had left something of his spirit in this ancient land which was reflected wherever we went in the capital. "*Scarcely has any other country preserved so much of a richly varied past*" as one writer pointed out. If it were not for the courage and vitality of the Italians, they would be dwarfed by their own history. The paintings of Botticelli, the sculptures of Michael Angelo, the architecture of Palledre, the amazing vividness and variety of the Greek and Roman sculptures in the Vatican Museum, which was filled, gallery after gallery with a pagan immortality with the Christian Rome sleeping underground in the catacombs. These were our daily sights and sounds during

our ten-day stay in this historic capital, yet the capital of the catholic world.

All roads led to Rome almost literally on the 31st of July 1958 when the Assembly of the W.C.O.T.P. was held in the historic setting provided by the magnificent buildings of the F.A.O. It was attended by the hundred and ninety delegates from sixty countries. From the eighth floor promenade of the streamlined edifice one could look across to the ruins of ancient Rome a few hundred yards away - to the Circus Maximus, the Colosseum and the Paladium and other sites of the homes of the Imperial Caesars. Something of the spirit of the ancient civilisation was present in the minds of the delegates throughout the conference which marked an important stage towards realistic co-operation among teachers in the sixty member states.

The conference was opened with an inspiring address by the Minister of Education of the Italian Republic who welcomed the delegates of that august gathering and messages were read out for the President of the Italian Republic by the Mayor of Rome. The conference started with the Presidential address by Sir Ronald Gould, which was received with great acclaim. He was not the 'ghost' of Julius Caesar who challanged me at the complimentary dinner in Colombo but a Caesar himself, both physically and intellectually. Commenting on the theme - Public Support of Education - Sir Ronald said, "*The Teachers owed the public not only devoted services in the classroom but also help in solving the many financial, administrative and other problems connected with education. He referred to the four allies on whose support teachers could count-*

1. Powers of children,
2. Social and political reformers,
3. The hard headed businessmen concerned about production.

4. *Parents and those who believe that education adapted to aptitude and ability is the need of every child.*

“The bad teacher, the weak teacher, the teacher who undertakes work for its publicity rather than its educational value, the teacher who is disloyal to the profession - all these destroy faith in teachers and education”, concluded Sir Ronald in a long and brilliant speech which was received with standing ovation that was astounding.

Mr. B. R. Sen, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, in another effective address outlined the efforts of his organisation to free the world from hunger and called upon the teachers of the world to assist him in attaining the goal. Besides the routine sessions, there were meetings for teachers on vocational, technical and moral education and educational journalism, special consideration was given to the interests of handicapped children at one of the many discussion groups during the conference.

At the plenary sessions, the Ceylon delegation though small in size tried to make its mark. As leader I had the responsibility and also the privilege to speak; It was not easy to catch the President's eye, and there was no set practice except to signal to him and try your luck. It was always a case of eyes meeting eyes like lovers and Sir Ronald gave me the signal not only to start off but even to finish within the required time; in a few minutes the red light gave its warning to seal my lips at the most unexpected part of the performance.

It was a terrific moment and an experience that I never had before - to catch the attention both of the platform and the assembly down below - when everyone listened to my voice in the language of his choice and I had the pleasure of listening to it in French and Italian versions alternatively.

What was the magic or mantram I had in mind at the time in

dealing with such a tricky situation? It was Rev. John Bicknell of Jaffna College of my *Alma Mater* who dinned it in me almost a quarter of a century earlier. It was the same technique that the socialist Sydney and Beatrice Webb employed - Sydney Webb in particular whenever he attempted to speak before colossal world audiences. It is this *"I am the cleverest member of the cleverest community of the cleverest country - that is the centre of the world and when I open my lips, let no dog bark."*

I had to condense quite succinctly what I came prepared with, in consultation with my colleagues in the delegation. I said quite crisply- *"Public support can be tapped most easily and cheaply through the two-way traffic between home and school. It is not merely in measles, mumps, chicken pox and lice, but in new knowledge, fresh values and changing attitudes that the home and school can get the infection from each other. An apathetic and indifferent public can and must be stimulated to vigorous interest in what goes on in the classrooms of the school as well as in the corridors of power."* *"It is children"* I stressed, on the testimony of personal experience, *"who spread the news of the good work of the school, comment the enthusiasm of their teachers to their parents that are the best media of public support."* When I finished I knew almost instinctively that I had done it. Speakers who followed me referred to Ceylon's views commending the stress on children. I switched off to the French version of their comments and felt as triumphant as if I were another Caesar, now in his own territory.

When the report of the Assembly was received several months later in the form of a handsome Volume I found a para of a few sentences under my name in full - Namasivayam Sabaratnam of Ceylon, etc. There are some occasions when words prove inadequate to express one's feelings. This was just one when only a few countries were chosen for particular reference in the report.

The value of conferences never had been and never will be confined just to the conference room. As I recollect all the events at some international conferences, it is the contacts that I made outside the conference rooms that proved invaluable in the days that lay ahead.

There were receptions for the delegates in the elegant settings of Castel, St. Angelo and the Campidoglio in the capital by the Minister of Education of Italy and the Mayor of Rome who provided every form of food and drink under the sun except their distinguished presence. These went on till late in the night. Although, we, Ceylon delegates, lived in the Vatican at a pension and visited St. Peters more than once everyday, the Pope was not in residence at his Palace. His Holiness was ill at his summer residence at Castel St. Gandal of some fifteen miles outside Rome in the Alban hills, but he was good enough to grant his weekly public audience there. I was able to see one of the cardinals restraining him from his normal address and taking him in while the vast crowd of international visitors cried out "*Long Live the Pope.*" We were also generously entertained by the Ceylon Ambassador in Rome (the late) H.A.J. Hulugalle, a great friend of Jaffna through his intimacy with the late A.R. Shanmugaratnam who was on the staff of Royal College with Hulugalle. His acting first Secretary, Mr. N. Balasubramaniam who received us at the Rome airport like his uncle Shanmugaratnam were both distinguished old boys of Jaffna Hindu College. The dinner at the Ceylon Embassy was unforgettable; more than that, his Secretary - Balasubramaniam took us around in his car to all the principal attractions of the city one Sunday afternoon. Another memorable event was the visit to Hadrians's Villa in Tivoli about twenty miles from the city. The entire delegation of the conference spent one full day up and down the trip. The cascading falls, the terraced gardens and the impressive fountains of the Emperor lingered in my mind for quite some time.

In bidding farewell to Rome, we were bidding farewell to the Alma Mater of all western civilisation according to an ancient tradition.

St. Peter's, most magnificent in moonlight, the Cistine Chapel noted for Michael Angelo's lasting achievements, the capital with the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelias the philosopher statesman of the second century, the Roman Forum, the Forum of Julius Caesar in particular and the Colosseum, the most imposing testimony of the grandeur that was Rome - were receding from my sight as I was taking my flight to Paris. I must confess that I lost my way often in my lonely wanderings in Rome before I returned to my residence in the Vatican. My Roman Catholic colleagues who knew the life of the land better, indulged in the stock mock heroic jokes of how I amused myself with Signoritas of the promenades to the delight of the "*three disciples of Virgin Mary*" who were our hostesses providing choices in the pension. They were charming as well as chaste true to their chosen mission. Macaroni and cheese, Spagetti served with several delicacies and fruits were remarkable. They could not understand English and often we had to use signs and symbols which sometimes could be misleading. "*Will you be here for dinner*" they once asked me in Italian of course. Instead of saying "*yes*", I nodded in the Jaffna way with the result that I had nothing to eat that night. On my flight to Paris and from there to London, I carried a message from Sir Ronald Gould to Mr. Nesbitt, his deputy at the (N.U.T.) National Union of Teachers in Russel Square in London, instructing him to brief me adequately about the working of the Union on a day fixed for my visit. I had met Gould's Deputy Mr. Nesbitt at the Rome conference and told him my mind even before I got his letter which was necessary because Sir Ronald had suddenly decided on some other assignment outside Britain. In Rome all of us from Ceylon renewed the brief friendship we had with Secretary-General Dr. W. Carr and Mrs. Sarah Caldwell, whom we met earlier in Jaffna.

While posing for a picture with Dr. Carr as the central figure, he said he had not forgotten Jaffna or its palmyrah which he knew, had another more powerful product than its leaves in which we presented the civic address that was unforgettable.

I also carried with me an overcoat given by the Secretary, Balasubramaniam to be handed over to his counterpart at the Ceylon Embassy in Paris, and this was a real encumbrance for there was no such Embassy and the Indian Embassy which accommodated the Ceylon office was not known to many - both to the taxi-men and the general public. It was on the 8th of August 1958 that I took the two hour flight to Paris with a brief stop-over at Milan, which I remember for the very beautiful picture. of "*Last Supper*" which I bought as a present to my friend (*the late*) A.E. Tamber who was very fond of it.

30. MEMORIES OF PARIS

My brief stay in Paris was the most costly in my entire journey. The British Council grant to the summer school of English at Cardiff from Rome to Britain and back was incredibly inadequate to get the feel of this Queen city. It used to haunt my mind when I heard of it and read its literature even in my teens. Besides, on my way back from Britain I planned for a brief tour of Switzerland and Greece which I skipped on my way to Rome as the conference date did not allow leisured survey of the seat of the most ancient western civilisation, but the grant of the Asia Foundation for the Rome conference and the traveller's cheques that I carried from home funded these extras which were vital to reveal glimpses of what is wrongly called European culture as I see it now; all that I read about such culture was a very vague dissertation on a variety of cultures oversimplified, if European History is read with discernment. In rainy weather on a moonlight night I dropped into Hotel Cecilia in the heart of Paris. The man on duty was prompt with proper tips that enabled me to begin my tour within half an hour of getting settled in a comfortable room that suited the night weather. At the outset the man warned me that eating out could be very expensive and unless one was very careful, one meal would cost even Rs.500/. The meals were much more varied and usually of better value than those in London. French cuisine is world famous. I was compelled to stick to the fixed price menu and choose the house wine normally inexpensive to avoid the excesses of expensive restaurants. Two days of eating out would soon make one a pauper.

It was said "*The man who does not know Paris is a barbarian. There is only one Paris in the world.*" It was also said "*You can tell a Parisian two leagues off*" I wanted to get the feel of the unique city. I wanted to find out how the French culture was reflected in its capital considered as the Queen of

Europe. I mention the great names of the philosophers like Voltaire, Rousseau and Victor Hugo. It was said of Victor Hugo that he wrote 100 lines of verse or 20 pages of prose each day. His social conscience is reflected in his epic novel '*Les Miserables*' which has been translated in Tamil and has appeared in the Tamil film *Earlai Padum Padu*. He was exiled under Napoleon III for 19 years. His funeral was attended by two million people and his body was taken to the Parthenon in a Pauper's hearse. All this was milk and honey to the man at the hotel counter - another listener whose English was halting but crisp.

Anatole France and Statesmen like Clemenceau and De Gaulle who was the President of post war France, did not appear to appreciate as he was not a student of history. Clemenceau, I told him, was one of the greatest diplomats of France. He was described as a man who had one illusion France and one disillusion, mankind including French men.

Paris - a lovely and gracious city sated up with the freedom struggle came to the civilized world's light free once again. Hitler and his nazi hordes could not be compared to Napoleon who ruled over Imperial France after the French Revolution which taught the world first lessons in Republican government. I had toured the places connected with the events of 1789 and every year France celebrated the storming of the Bastille on July 27th and it was only a few weeks before my visit that the hundred and sixty ninth anniversary was celebrated at the Bastille which still continues to inspire all those who visit Paris and gaze at this landmark in world history.

In school I learned the story of the Gallic War in the original Latin text which extolled the campaigns of the mighty Julius Caesars. The Romans ruled over Celtic Gaul for five hundred years. While ancient Rome was seen in its ruins Paris was up and doing in its praise and pride of Napoleon. The little corporal is the upstart Corsican who brought to heel most of Europe, first in the guise of a liberator, and then as forger of chains. In spite of

Napoleon's pride and arrogance and his military might that saw wonderful conquests and disgraceful defeats, he is still regarded with reverence by the average Frenchmen. I had occasion to know that Hitler who overran Europe within a few weeks had not been entitled to fame even in Berlin where in one of his chambers, he was believed to have killed himself at the first news of defeat, and it was God that made his mighty army to disobey his final command "*Burn Paris*" and the world heaved a sigh of relief that Paris survived.

Of all the places I visited in Paris, Versailles, which was a few miles away from the city, lingers most in my mind. The palace with its castle and myriad fountains and heavenly cascades is really famed for its lovely gardens, all over the world. It tells the story of how monarchy once on the ascendant gave way to Napoleon's domination in Europe. It is difficult to believe that some of Napoleon's educational reforms apart from his legal innovations and brilliant statemanship could be so relevant to schools and universities of to-day.

I started my account with the nights in Paris. It is not a matter for levity and laughter. To a hundred thousand people, night is day. They depend for their living on the nights in Paris. Waiters, dancers, singers, night club doorkeepers, musicians, photographers, police inspectors in plain clothes live in one way or another on its charms. It is they who make the enormous amusement machine go round. Their object is to earn a lot of money. It did not matter how. Everything was possible. Everyone could find what he wanted. All life's temptations were commercialised. All desires, all inclinations could be met. When the luminous letters of Pigalle were trying to drive away the darkness, then there was nothing that was any longer strange. Between the most artless pleasure and the most unintelligent perversity, there was now nothing but a difference in price.

All these and more were related to me as part of their first hand experience by '*Joy Brothers*' - a couple of handsome and

well-built gentlemen from Persian Gulf who were my companions in the hotel where I stayed during my stay in Paris. They were returning from Germany and found the German people very friendly to visitors while post-war Germany looked majestic with its new buildings and roads. Their experience of night life in Germany was more jubilant though less pompous than in Paris.

I had made up my mind to cut short my visit by a few days as I felt my purse becoming drier every day. I went to Paris at a mature age when I was able to appreciate the elegance of the Frenchman and the centuries-old culture that he represented. In the restaurants and the middle class hotels where I went, I could see the grace and the polished urbanity of the French people talking to strangers without much reserve.

They were as a people very helpful, and courteous. There is such a lot to see in Paris that one had to stop and ask the way and you feel highly pleased with the obliging ways of the ordinary Parisian.

The Arc de Triumph - a work of art with the Flame of Remembrance re-kindled each night - is a sight that holds you in amazement.

The Champs de Elysees opposite to the Arc is itself a worthy sight. It has become the boulevard of international Paris with cinemas, cafes and shops, all very expensive. I could trace this virtue to the great leaders, political and philosophic. Voltaire was called, "*The Conscience of an Age*". Romaine Roland who met Mahatma Gandhi when the latter returned from England was considered to be the cream of European culture and yet he was a great admirer and authority of Indian culture. He had written the story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and that of chief disciple - Swami Vivekananda. When I went to the Sorborne, I was reminded of Marie Curie who did her research there and met her future husband Pierre Curie, both of whom were awarded the Nobel prizes separately. The Curie Laboratory of the University of Paris

stands today as a monument to the great woman, who was the only woman scientist who received the Nobel Prize twice. I did not miss to join the crowd that daily visited the towering Paris Lady - "*the Eiffel Tower*" the best known landmark in Paris. The tower stands supreme like a soldier on guard. I climbed the tallest tower in the world (1000 ft.) iron structure with the lift; had tea at the restaurant at the very top. The view was ineffably panoramic unlike the city all round. In spite of certain companions who dissuaded me from having my photo taken there, I was the last to get the copy once I reached the terra firma; and to-day thirty years after, it is as fresh as it was on that day.

As I left Paris my thoughts were therefore less on the superficial attractions than in the deep and abiding values of French culture that are still intact. Two stories could summarise the qualities of the average Frenchman, the most developed individual of his race. The story is told of Victor Hugo who came to the city when the disasters of the Franco - Prussian war were thickly falling around Paris. He came by the last train - the last breath of free air. On the way he has seen the Germans, seen villagers burnt with petroleum and he came to imprison himself in Paris. A memorable ovation was given to him by the people, and they never forgot his voluntary share of their sufferings.

The other story was something more recent. In occupied France, a Frenchman walking down the street in Paris saw another Frenchman fighting back a storm-trooper. The Frenchman knocked the trooper down and, as he got up again, the second Frenchman rushed over and knocked him down a second time. The army suddenly came on the scene and the two Frenchman were overpowered and taken before a military Judge. The first culprit explained the nature of his quarrel - the reason for his blow. "*But why*" asked the Judge of the second man, "*did you get into his*"? It was no question of yours. "*I know*" he replied, "*but when I saw him knocking him down, for a moment I thought it was a beginning.*" I could see enough of this in my short stay.

It was by sheer accident that I peeped through the Champ de Elysee Palace and saw very handsome limousine sailing stately outside the Palace; and inside was the Grand French Leader - the President of the Fifth Republic who epitomised toughness both in victory and defeat. General Charles De Gaulle who spearheaded the free France Movement in the world war, was one whose appearance and presence, no words can fully describe. One cannot but be fascinated by the tall hooped (*nose*) 'Superman' whose courage and patriotism it was beleived retrieved the defeated France and put it back on the right track. My last day in Paris was a Sunday.

When a would be assasin shot him with a bullet, still in his lung, he was back at work within a fortnight. At the end of the first world war his part in promoting peace was great. What he said of President Wilson brings out his capacity for fearless and scathing comment. "*Wilson,*" he said, "*speaks like Jesus Christ but acts like Lloyd George. Even God was content with Ten Commandments, Wilson insists on Fourteen?*" Clemenceau like De Gaulle later spoke for France and his case was hard to answer. Anatole France whom my friend at the counter did not seem to know said, "*Burn all the books that teach hatred, burn them all.*" I told him how impressed I was with the philosophers and statesmen of France who paved the way for the revolution and who were the real harbingers of socialism that is still in the deep throes of controversy. He cut me short and said, "*Sir, I have to warn you about the high cost of your stay here and therefore that you must confine yourself to the sights and sounds of the city.*" He gave me some practical hints of economising on the tours which were best done by the organised excursions. My impression of the Parisians was that they were utterly unlike the English. Behind the gaiety that one could see everywhere in Paris day and night was a robust life of hard working people, quite friendly to every foreigner and equally suspicious of the British. None of them liked my speaking in English but I found it easy to master the elements of colloquial French almost in a day. The future of France

rested much on the youth - boys and girls who were put in the best schools. We were told by mothers some of whom had to take up to the well known trade - the oldest profession as it is called - so that their progeny might be saved and grow into wonderful citizens.

The night life of Paris has been the subject of much slanderous gossip by those who could not delve deep into the French culture of which it is an integral part. The tent bearing the notice "*For adult gentlemen only*", naturally draws in '*near adults*' who wanted to enjoy the exciting scenes uninhibited by the pruderies for which we are noted. It is our prudery that is in fact more harmful than the excesses that this permissive society promotes. "*For a hundred francs there is Venus within your grasp*" says another advertisement. One has only to remember "*Good wine needs no bush*", and there was plenty of it in the city apart from these shoddy shows.

Notre Dame - the most colossal church of its generation and the first to make use of a full Gothic vocabulary - flying buttresses and other arches and pointed arches like other great Gothic churches. In France, Notre Dame reflects the genius of a movement in time that aspired and aspires to the Eternal. Close to the cathedral of Notre Dame is the famous University of Paris - the Sorborne. The Louvre - the world famous museum is a mile long vast palace, perhaps the biggest in the world.

Paris that went to sleep at regular hours contains millions of people who had to get up early to go to their work. The nights of Paris were strange islands far removed from the mainland of the days for those who enjoy the city of light in the bright sunshine. Notre Dame was more beautiful in sunlight than in the light of search light and the light of Lumierie by day is an unforgettable delicate grey which becomes soft pink when the sun's ray shine through it on the homes of the river Siene on a square where children play on an old statue in the Luxemburg and all the people who tried to make the best of their daily existence.

Paris had not lost much of its treasures during the second

world war. It was on June 21st 1940 in the same railway carriage that Marshal Foch had used in 1916 to dictate terms to defeated Germans that the armistice was signed in Paris by 'cocksure' Germany which never dreamt that Paris would rise Phoenix-like to its old glory.

It came to my mind that I was leaving the city of all free mankind. Its liberation from Nazi aggression was one of the great events of all time. The news made the whole free world catch its breath. June 1944 is as much entitled to a prominent place in world history as July 17th 1789.

The report in a world famous journal states, "*I have seen the faces of young couple in love and the faces of old people at peace with their God. I have never seen in any face such joy as radiated from the people of Paris this morning, this is no day for restraint and I could not write with restraint even if I wanted to. We drove on to Paris with eyes that would not stay dry and we were no more ashamed of it than were the people who wept as they embraced us.*"

To me, indulging in these romantic recollections, stale as they really were, the other passengers bound to London munching the unique delicacy of the Parisian bread, the crescent shaped 'croissant' as they called it was too tempting and the one I bought in the only night shop opened in the early Sunday morning to be taken to my London kinsman could not last till Milan when it melted into my moist mouth. As an item of breakfast it was as unique as the Eiffel Tower, another landmark that is lasting till this day. The photo at Eiffel Tower is kindling my memory till today - 33 years after when Paris had already enjoyed the Indian Festival initiated by socialist President Mitterand and Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi. Socialism of France looks a misnomer, when France recovered from the atrocities of Hitler and rebuilt its economy to maintain the customary high standard of living among European nations, richer than Britain itself which once ruled over an empire where 'the sun never set'.

31. A VERY FAMILIAR COUNTRY

I started with a reference to the Gallic courtesy of the taxi man who took my lonely self to Hotel Cecilia on that misty night and I had a repeat performance of this by another man who took me to the airport bound for London. It was an hour's flight.

England was to me a very familiar country though this was my first visit. And what was more, having seen two imperial cities already, London was not much of a surprise. The welcome at the airport by the British Council Officer stands in contrast to the warning today given to overseas visitors by a public proclamation at the airport itself that they must not overstay their visa in the country. Since I was a guest of the British council, everything was arranged in advance and the programme included visits to all historical places besides the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, sight seeing and shopping. But all these were programmed outside the period assigned for the Summer School of English at Cardiff which lasted for a fortnight. I visited Stratford early on my arrival for I had to witness two plays at the Globe theatre for which tickets had been booked in advance. The British Council with its limited resources was making the visits it sponsored very useful to its guests in the various fields in which they were interested. I still remember how efficiently Mrs. Everill, a very experienced officer, handled my programme. On the very first night at the Imperial Hotel near Kingston, I phoned up to the Teachers' Training College at Wolverhampton, where my niece from Malaysia was in training. Mrs. Everill stoutly refused a day's visit to see this girl after a lapse of nearly eleven years. She advised me to try this at Cardiff, if the Course Directors could help me. They did agree with the greatest reluctance, because of the special circumstances and also because they found a session that I could skip without much loss. The point is that the British Council is very particular that teacher - scholars for the Cardiff courses should not fritter away their

time on extraneous affairs. It was at Paddington that I entrained to Stratford where I was met by another Council guide who looked after all my needs in a guest house that had long experience of entertaining Shakespeare lovers. I was able to tell the inmates what Bertrand Russell said of the immortal poet, "*Shakespeare did not write with a view to boring school children; he wrote mainly with a view to delighting his audiences. If he does not give you delight, you had better ignore him.*" After witnessing the two plays - Romeo and Juliet and Twelfth Night at the Globe theatre, I was able to answer the searching questions that my host and hostess put to me before I returned to London. They were confident that I could teach Shakespeare better, having become wiser after my experience at Stratford. London is a monstress city unlike Paris or Rome; so cosmopolitan that no two people look alike; everyone walking on the pavement looks like running on an escalator. People do not seem to indulge in any outburst of argument in coach or train sitting glued to their seats as safely as in their homes. Very few can fail to note the ordinary Englishman's regard for law and order nor his typical wry humour often couched in their under statements like "*You never can tell*" that clinches every controversial topic including the natural theme, the weather.

My Welsh experience was just the opposite. I felt often that I was homely surrounded whether it was the reception accorded to the course members by the Lord Mayor of Cardiff or the hospitality nights in private homes, it was the informal kindness and heartwarming conversation in clear simple English that won the hearts of guests to whom '*London English*' was as fast and unclear, as it could be to novices in that giant city.

Haunting my mind still is the exuberance of Mr. Onion's courtesy who took the entire party round Cardiff, dropping in high class restaurants, that dot the Welsh capital at every turn. Mr. Onion, a Chief of the Rotary Club and the Head of the Penarth police rounded the day's adventures with a film show of Shakespeare's Richard III at the British Council. I could recollect

even at this distant date how he enjoyed the anti-climax in the tragedy when the King delivered his last oration to the army before his fall. My friend had heard of the famous line, "*A horse: a horse: My kingdom for a horse*" but could not place it. When I was in sheer enjoyment of the irony in the King's oration to the army, explained the Shakespearean trait of tragedy in the King's warning to his men, he felt exalted.

"You having lands, and blessed with beauteous wives. They would restrain the one, disdain the other" he pulled my back saying it is a far cry from a Police Chief to a Shakespeare scholar, though from a far away land. He had heard of my "*Poetry Reading*" at the course from other members.

Getting back to London, I made up for lost time in hurried visits to the British Museum with many an anecdote of Karl Marx and kindred personalities who unearthed their pots of gold that turned the world topsy turvy - to the London University which made many of us the Empire graduates since universities of the residential type had their doors to our generation. My visit to the NUT (National Union of Teachers) headquarters was indeed that of a V.I.P. Moreover, luck, that ingredient you can never count on and only hope for was on my side. In the absence of Sir Ronald the General Secretary, the Head Quarters looked like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. But the unexpected presense of Mr. Griffiths, the Education Chief marvellously filled the breach. He discussed at leisure all intricate trade union disputes common to many countries, briefing me and intermittenly being briefed by me and at the last stage invited all important officials for a sumptuous lunch. British hospitality is an international word, but to a teacher leader, it seemed to be the acme of English culture.

Back to my hotel, I had yet a day to roam in England. My lady guide advised me to make up the rest of sights and sounds on the course of a shopping spree. She was up-to-date with all the necessary queries about my needs. I cannot forget the light proof

she dealt me when I fumbled over the number of children I had. "Gentleman you need not rack your brain over the one on the way just give the number that are up and doing." I laughed long and laughed in recollection when the last born - my younger daughter - was nowhere on the way till two years later in June 1960.

On my way back I travelled through Switzerland, making a two day visit to Berne and Geneva from Zurich where I emplaned straight to Athens. Swiss hospitality was only matched by the majestic scenery of mountains and lakes, the like of which could scarcely be found in other parts of Europe that I visited.

'*Zimmat House*' in Zurich where I spent a week was a hub of activities quite strange to me as I did not get on with the common run of tourists that made a beeline to this popular hotel. Most fascinating were the uninhibited gestures of comely lasses who at casual encounters would be spontaneous in helping out visitors from abroad, taking them home where their parents patently impress you that kindness was congenital. No wonder, that as a people they truly represent the virtues of a peace loving land renowned for unity, security and alpinic beauty.

At Athens, the plane scheduled to take us to Colombo was delayed. Acropolis that I missed on the previous visit on my way to Rome engaged my attention during this delay.

My European Odyssey would have been hopelessly incomplete if I had missed it this time too. As I climbed the steep winding path to the stupendous marble entrance, I felt I was stepping on the golden age of Periclean Athens. There were about a hundred people surveying the scene. The vast area of 100 acres was loosely spread out for the tourist crowd that never came on my way. Parthenon, the Queen of Acropolis was the grand testimony to the Greek genius, unmatched for about 24 centuries. With that sense of grandeur I ended my edifying journey with a brief stop in Bombay, landing in Ratmalana with the feeling, East or West, home is best.

This is a stale statement for tourists. Travel in a mature stage is different from transportation from place to place and country to country. In my case at my 45th year of teaching English that is the emblem of western culture and christian civilization that gained in printed page, it is a travel in a deep sense to see in the concrete what has so far captured my mind from books, through the authors of repute speak to us through them. The grandeur that was Rome and Greece and the Gallic courtesy learnt in original Latin did afford a glimpse, through its ruins which no doubt at present was somewhat disappointing.

The contrast between the Ratmalana customs which kept me for hours in their check-up to the fairness Paris taxi man, to the readiness of the Italian shopkeeper who left his shop to show me the way and above all to the bed makers in Cardiff noted for their honesty culminating in the Zurich porter's wonderful courtesy.

32. CARDIFF - SWISS CONNECTION

CARDIFF SUMMER SCHOOL OF 1958

As I said before the last lap of my European odyssey which the Rome Conference initiated was Cardiff, thanks to the Asia Foundation which met the funds for three delegates from the A.C.U.T. Happily I was the leader. The British Embassy in Ceylon had then the service of Education officer Mr. E. F. C. Gibbs, who knew my competence and experience of teaching English as a foreign language; and my labours on Shakespeare obtained the British Council scholarship for a Ceylon teacher to the summer school. It was economically favourable too, as the grant required was for Rome to Britain and back, with the required fees for the course.

Though I had cut three or four days from the fortnight course in landoff castle at Penath in Cardiff, I was elevated from a mere course member on scholarship to, "*the chair of Shakespearean Poetry*" a kind of nickname, not exactly to ridicule but in comparative praise for the performance I made on one night - two reserved for poetry Reading - and I chose Shakespeare's sonnet, rendering it as best as I could to analyse and discuss the language of poetry in general.

Here is the poem:

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; Love is not love
which alters when it alteration finds
or bends with the remover to remove
O No, it is an ever fixed mark
whose worth's unknown although his height be taken,
Love is not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
within his bending sickle's compass come,*

*Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error, and upon me proved
I never write nor man e'er loved.*

Having read out the poem, rendering it as effectively as I could, I said I learnt the poem at school taught it at the sixth form level to the best students of English in a leading collegiate school for years, but not till I heard it when Prof. E.F.C. Ludowyk of the Ceylon University who made a name for himself at Cambridge for his research in Shakespeare, rendered this poem at an extension course for teachers of English, did I realise the maturity needed to comprehend and appreciate in depth the language of poetry, glittering so markedly in this sonnet, perhaps one of the best of this master poet.

So many poets have written sonnets before and after Shakespeare, but they are not poems worth the name but this particular poem illustrates effectively what Wordsworth later said in one of his sonnets, "*We must be free or die who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spoke.*" Where do you find the secret of the poem? One of the noblest affirmations of the worth of human love English Literature affords, is found in the words of the poem. But taken out of it, they are lifeless statements. So what is the way out? Read the sonnet aloud - heard in the ear it becomes clear that the relation of words to each other are more complicated, more patterned, more regulated, much stricter than the relation of sounds of the words in prose.

The theme of the poem is marriage and love. The pattern made by the sequence of syllables opening and closing on themselves; the consonants with their Ms and Ls and Vs and Fs in honour of "*Marriage and Love*" the vowels with their subtle married echoes of each other.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments.
But reading it, the sound gives only half the answer, because it is

impossible to read the sound without reading the sense at the same time. Regarded as sounds, the pattern may be stricter but when the sense is read, the whole impression of order and discipline vanishes.

If you consider the sequence of images these words create, you will find that disregard of logic or common assumption, you have the balancing of opposites the remover and the ever fixed mark the calculated height and the incalculable worth; the rosy cheeks and the murdering sickles' edge; again you have the sea edge and the star image and the bold, magic figure at the edge of doom, against the figure of a counsel in courts, trying to challenge the impossible - *"But bears it out even to the edge of doom."*

If poetry enables the human mind to manage the discordant opposites of order and disorder, and if it is this management of opposites which characterises the knowledge of order and disorder; and if it is this management of opposites which it characterises the knowledge poetry expresses, this containment in balance of *"a more than usual state of emotion with a more than usual order"*; then the knowledge given by poetry is not what we have in mind when we use the term. It is not the knowledge communicated by science or mathematics; for these two convey not knowledge of disorder but knowledge of order.

In fact mathematics and science are meant precisely to destroy disorder by making order of it. *"I understand"* said a Professor of Physics, *"You are writing poetry as well as Physics. I don't see how you could do both. In science one tries to say something noone knew before in a way that everyone can understand, whereas in poetry....."* and the sentence was left to complete itself in the mere silence of the laboratory.

Quoting this anecdote, I made my own *obiter dicta*, that the world today looks to be on the edge of doom, since mad men who are not at all poetic are in the seats of power and the scientists in the laboratory devoid of poetic sense are carrying out their orders.

to invent engines of destruction.

Even in this age of advanced technology, poetry, as seen in the charm of Shakespeare's sonnet, can challenge the stupid statement that some subjects are liberal while others are illiberal which has bred the well known theory of the numeracy of the arts and the literacy of the sciences as a corrective; let us dismiss these catch-phrases and cultivate the conviction that in any age, poetry brings a wholeness to man, which does not deprive him of his talents for science; technology and advanced mathematics.

Imagination - the power by which poetry achieves this almost contradictory combination that was Coleridge's discovery. "*That momentary peace which is a poem*" - The essential recognition is the recognition that the discordant qualities do exist in the language of poetry itself and the successful use of the language in a particular poem is the use which Coleridge describes as "*reconcilement*".

The confusion came in for the Physics Professor's scorn of the language of poetry because he expected poetry to be a vehicle of knowledge to say something as physicists do.

Summarising my contention tersely to clinch the point I said that Shakespeare does not convey a message or a piece of discovery no one ever made before. It is not the literal assertion made in the words - that love is not love which alters when alteration finds. There is of course the ironically magic line, "*love alters not with his brief hours and weeks.*" Perhaps a prophetic anticipation when 'love' is a misnomer for what in today's world has made divorce easy for a married couple.

The organisation of the words of the poem, and how it is rendered - the sound echoing the sense in a way which no other vehicle can is the charm that great poetry generates.

When I finished, I apologised in advance for my absence on the next day morning sessions as I had to meet my niece after I

saw her as a young girl of eleven in my hometown. Having lost her mother during the Second World war in Malaysia, she was in Wolverhampton undergoing training as secondary school teacher on a Malaysian scholarship. I told them that I will join the evening excursion and expect to hear their post-mortem discussions on "*The Language of Poetry*" and expect no surprises.

Evidently they were all pleased with my performance and the course Director Dr. Candlin, in spite of his satisfaction did not very much like my cutting any part of the sessions and was very much upset when I had to return to London just three days before the end of the course.

What was amazing in London on my return was the sight of Westminster bridge seen before sunrise from the window of the upper story of the small hotel where I lodged. I walked up the distance, when I beheld a solitary milkman cycling over the bridge. But for that one exception, I recollected Wordsworth's sonnet, correct to the entire detail, and yet couched in language very personal, reminding us of his illustrious predecessor in an earlier era.

*"Dear God, the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still"*

He did more than "*speak the language that Shakespeare spoke*", though his sonnet was in a different setting.

When I met Mr. Gibbs on my return journey at the Ceylon High Commission, I said that providence works in a mysterious way creating giants of persons, places, and communities and if mountainless England was created of '*Earth's first blood*', I was able to return through Switzerland making brief halts at Zurich, Berne and Geneva unique as countries for peace, solidarity as communities, safety and splendid isolation from the turbulence other countries had undergone and are continuing to undergo till to-day.

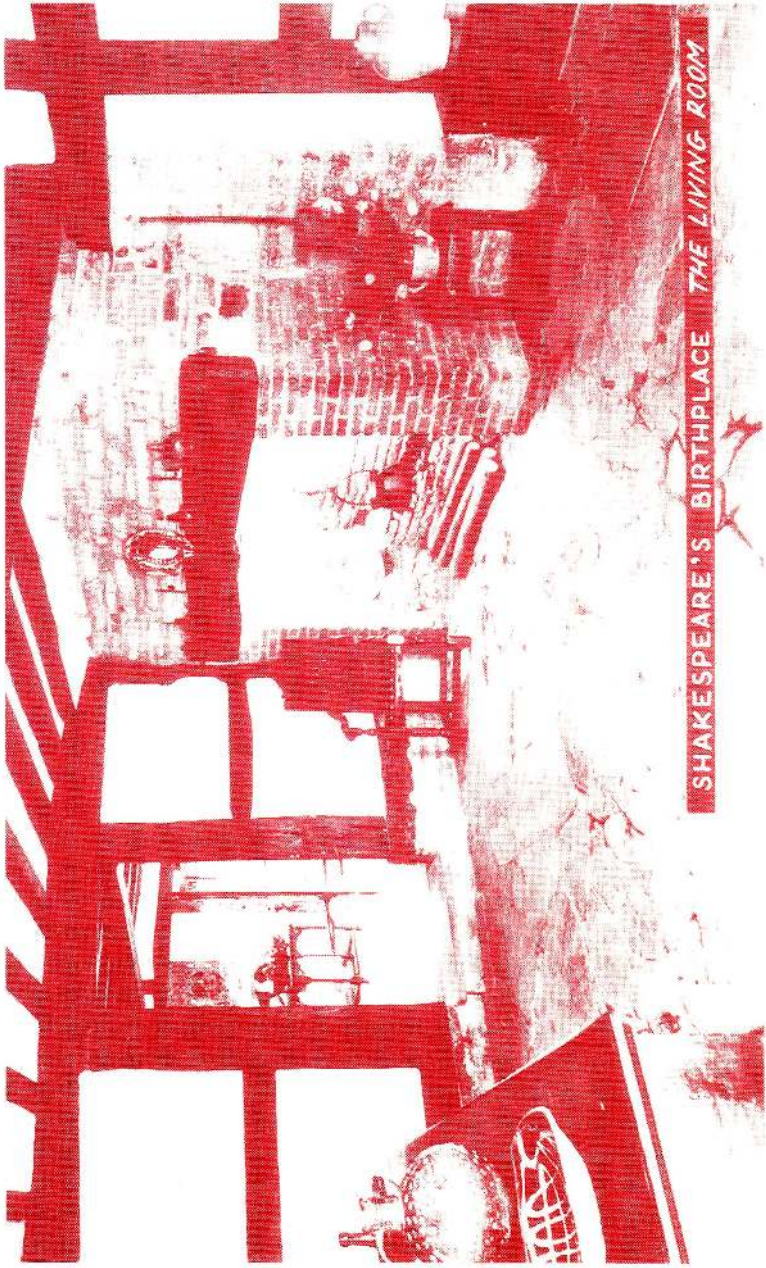
More than that, great Scientists, Educationists, Philosophers, like Einstein and Pestalozzi, the renowned Swiss Educational Philosopher and such other luminaries had lived in these small cities, learnt, lectured and enjoyed the peace that cultured minds alone could achieve. With reference to Einstein the greatest scientist the world had seen, I said to Mr. Gibbs, he was as unique a phenomenon as Shakespeare - two man mountains.

The Swiss connection supplemented and completed my trek from Colombo to Cardiff. It is my regret till today that I, whose ancestors belonged to the Himalayan clime, a very ancient sanctum associated with Ganges river and Lord Viswanathar - of Benares have not been able to enjoy this ever mighty and eternal phenomenon - the wonder of the world, as I did the snow-clad Alpine clime and see countries inside as well as outside that sublime heights of western culture. The Mediterranean did much to soothe my long cherished ambition, the Alpine heights left an indelible impression of majesty and sublimity. But England transcends them all mysterious splendour that Shakespeare is!

33. SHAKESPEARE - A REVIEW

What is western civilisation? What is the reason why many Asiatic leaders and savants decry it? It becomes clear to me now that it is our reaction to modernisation which generally includes thoughtless imitations of the west and the belief that Asiatics are fit only to copy everything that comes from the west. But we must not throw out the baby with the bath-water. There is all the difference between the England of Shakespeare and the England of Milton, of science and technology, of political revolution and constitutional liberty and the England of the savage penal code, of feudal wickedness and reaction and monarchical intrigues that the Tower of London tells. The real England - the right England and other countries of Europe that I visited have all made such contribution to human civilisation.

Western civilisation is essentially Christian civilisation, however much scholars and others try to de-link religion from culture. It was an experience too deep for words when I visited the chapel of King's College, Cambridge, in the company of the Professor of English at the University of Tokyo. Both of us stood almost dumbfounded with reverence when we saw the lofty pillars that spread that expanding roof self poised, and scooped into ten thousand shells where light and shade reposed. We recalled Wordsworth's Sonnet and western thought for you. We are bewitched not only by the sights but the sound of music that dwelt lingering almost at the same time. All that I saw and learnt in books about classical Rome and revolutionary France - the glory and grandeur of ancient Greece and even Elizabethian England were distilled. None of his plays is set in the England of his day. He is dealing with Rome, Paris, Athens, Venice and Illyria and so I found it proper to review my study of the poet in the hope that many others will be kindled to do so in order to understand human nature in its depth. I am not trying to tell travellers' tales to delight



Shakespeare's living room which the author visited

the reader and take him off the track from what impressed me as a profound experience.

*"Others abide our question
But thou art still."*

begins the sonnet that Mathew Arnold wrote about Shakespeare the most universal dramatist mankind has produced. It remains true to this day. In spite of many critics and commentators trying to break new ground, Shakespeare stands still, baffling them all with the versatility of his genius. In Julius Caesar, after the murder of Caesar, Cassius says how this episode will live on stages all over the world.

*"How many ages hence.
Shall this our lofty scene
be acted over
In states unborn and accents unknown".*

To digress a little, a recent news report from Nepal says that Nepalese authorities have banned a performance of Shakespeare's Hamlet apparently because the brooding drama of the Prince of Denmark offends Royalist sensibilities in the Himalayan Kingdom.

The report adds that several years ago officials rejected performances of Macbeth and Hamlet on the ground that both plays offended Nepal's Royal tradition.

We come across such extremes even among our students in the Advanced Level classes of our schools who despair of the difficulties of learning Shakespeare.

There was one such who quoted Macbeth in his own words *"O, for tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow! These days give me the creeps."* How a state or a student community that is capable of evaluating world literature at its own level could reject such plays like Hamlet and Macbeth is of the essence of contemporary

tragedy in state administration and education.

Shakespeare is neither mere poetry nor drama of the highest order. It is a kind of Himalayas that thrills both those at the foot and those who try to climb; very few have scaled the top. It is the quest that matters and not the end of the journey. In fact one critic has said while Othello is on our right and Macbeth is on our left, King Lear is the colossal peak of the Poet's plays.

If Mahatma Gandhi tried to learn Tamil rather late in life to understand *Kural* of Thiruvalluvar in the original and Dr. Albert Schweitzer another Mahatma tried to do the same, there is no reason why our young generation should give up the pleasure of mountain climbing though in a foreign idiom not unknown to their predecessors. It must be remembered that Jaffna had its own galaxy of teachers of Shakespeare, actors and admirers. This list needs addition today more than even before. Shakespeare was out and out a patriot but he never suffered the English to get away with their vanities with impunity. Sometimes we get exaggerated views of the British way of life - a subject of research by foreign professors. I wonder if any of them made a deep study of the poet's more mature plays that could in a word or a phrase, or a sentence of biting sarcasm explode the myths about British civic responsibility and their regard for law and order. To the poet whose appeal was to the Universal in man, this could have excited ridicule - a favourable pastime, an essential in drama that could keep the groundings roaring with laughter.

An American Professor asked to elaborate on the British passion for law and order is said to have added, "*Almost everytime a serious crime is committed in your country, the newspapers report that a man is helping the police with their inquiries.*" And we in Sri Lanka who are sworn allies of Britain are not slow in taking after our erstwhile masters.

Let us have a look at some of the tragedies that have earned universal fame for the poet. The "*Trinity*" I referred earlier, Othello

and Macbeth with Lear on top, represent the poetic imagination at its peak and yet lend themselves to the understanding of the ordinary mind in the setting and scenery of the events that elaborate the theme.

The theme of Othello is the victory of evil-being bred out of innocence. The issue is domestic but the result is the most irreligious and the saddest of tragedies. Iago is the realist who thinks that he knows how to get on in the world. He is more than an embodiment of motiveless malignity, as he is usually described. He is both the disgruntled professional soldier and a hard boiled cynic who feels personally outraced when a simple minded moor like Othello gets ahead in this world. He who knows the world so much better fails to get on. His malignity cannot therefore be wholly unmotivated.

But Othello, the romantic moor with his "*Antres vast and deserts idle*" can fight for Venice and save her from her enemies. But he knows that he does not really know the people and that knowledge makes him Iago's prey. He is a man of confidence, respect and self-assurance. He tells the Dukes and Senators sitting at table,

*"That I have taken away this old man's daughter
Is most true, true, I have married her.
The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent no more."*

It is this self-assurance that Iago sets about to destroy. He is the puppet master who enjoys life most when he can manipulate the lives of others from behind the scenes. (*'B.Sc.' Behind the Scenes*) who sets himself to manipulate this commanding moor.

What is most unbearable about the tragedy is that Othello turns on his chosen wife, Desdemona, who had defied her own father and chosen Othello and taken her happiness as a right. In spite of everything, her faith in Othello and in herself for choosing him remains. That prevents the tragedy from being altogether too painful.

Othello is not really a study in jealousy, a common fate of most people in love. It is not jealousy but against that this beautiful and innocent seeming creature could be so horribly guilty. It was this that tormented him really. This is forcefully reflected in the lines.

*"All reason and order and beauty are shattered,
Chaos is come again"*

He was a soldier meeting a situation with suitable action; but was confronted with a situation so monstrous, so destructive of reason, that nothing could be done. In Hamlet, the theme is Revenge, Retribution and Reconciliation. In Richard III and Macbeth it is depth of cold blood cruelty. Lady Macbeth shows the collapse of her mind after the evil deed.

The philosophy behind all the tragedies is that the sheer momentum of evil will in time create its own punishment, that the career of the wrong doer is a violation of some ultimately inexorable law and cannot in the nature of things triumph.

T.S. Eliot states, *"I do not believe that any writer has ever exposed the human will to see things as they are not, more clearly than Shakespeare, for we are not all of a piece."*

*"Lovers and madmen apprehend more
Than cool reason could comprehend"*

is typical of Shakespearean poetry.

His ethics could be summed up easily as the consensus of common sense which can sense the subtleties and ironies of life. Just when we are expecting something good, ill blows out of it all", good unexpectedly comes - one can never tell.

The bard however belongs not just to classrooms or to library shelves but to a living stage. A study of Shakespeare's world without a passion to see his plays acted is like a study of agriculture

by persons who have renounced food. I was obsessed with this thought.

On my visit to Stratford, I was able to gather, that Shakespeare's great tragedies had made the name of the Globe (*the memorial theatre of Shakespeare*) famous for all time. Julius Caesar, Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra Coriolanus.

These seven are his great tragedies. Nowhere can one find a fiercer invective and more withering scorn than that proved by these plays on the side of human baser nature. The picture of '*dress in a little brief authority*' playing his fantastic tricks before high heaven with an effrontery that makes the angels weep has never been drawn with more penetrating '*irony*' says Professor Peter Alexander in his introduction to the complete works of William Shakespeare. And as a background we have the cowardly or malignant wicked complacency in our nature that tolerates such shameless wickedness; passage after passage emphasises the degradation to which man can sink. It is summed up in the one terrible line from King Lear.

"A dog's obey'd in office" Is there a man on earth who could portray the rage of Lear more picturesquely in half a dozen words than the genius for all time? King Lear has been described as a tragedy of ingratitude that divides parent from child and splits the very core of human existence. And the elements seem to take part in the confusion as the old and cast off futher rages on the heath with a fury that excels the elements. But the heart of Shakespeare's drama is not reached till the storm and tempest are over and we see the stillness of Lear's reconciliation with Cordeilia. Here at least he recognises goodness for what it is in its own sight and so the play's real theme is the gratitude for the converted heart in such a revelation. It is however a great theatrical stroke when King Lear enters with dead Cordeilia in his arms giving a tremendous shock to the audience in the last minutes of the play,

when they expected the passing away of the tired old man. Many of us have often dwelt on the bitterness and sorrow that engulf the poet's tragedies but we are led to realise that man should be aware of tragedy to see their virtues struggling in a world where their very virtue is the cause of their undoing. But the important point is that this makes us love the virtues not less but more. Had Shakespeare not seen so dearly the hollowness of the world he could not have created with such passionate brooding, those spirits whom his art has made the dwellers for all time in the imagination of men. He is not confounded by his terrible visions, for he sees in midst of them what walks unscathed, and we read his plays because, however unconsciously, we share in that triumph and have at least a sense. However, our intelligence or conduct may later deny it, of what the soul hungers to attain to.

Shakespeare's humour and comedy - another aspect of his genius are only a partial realisation of his tragic vision. Though there have been great tragic artists and great comic artists nowhere are they united as in Shakespeare's works and in such a manner that each nut adds a new force to its apparent opposite.

I had at several stages of my mental journey toyed with many fantastic ideas on education but now in my 79th year I feel finally settled in the conviction that a course in Shakespeare is an indispensable item in the mental furniture of an educated individual. The refinement of the mind's eye that permits it to see the delicate distinctions among men, among their deeds and motives is impossible without literature in the grand style.

It was this discovery that weighed most in my luggage from Stratford to home - my home in Jaffna.

A Frenchman's conceit springs from his belief that mentally and physically he is irresistibly fascinating to both men and women. An Italian is conceited because he is excitable and easily forgets himself and other people. The Englishman's self-assurance comes

from being a citizen of the best organised kingdom in the world and because as an Englishman he always knows what is the correct thing to do, and that every thing he does as an Englishman is undoubtedly right. A Russian is conceited because he knows nothing and does not want to know anything, since he does not believe that it is possible to know anything completely. A conceited German is the worst of them all, the most stubborn and unattractive because he imagines that he possesses the truth in science - a thing of his own invention but which for him is absolute truth.

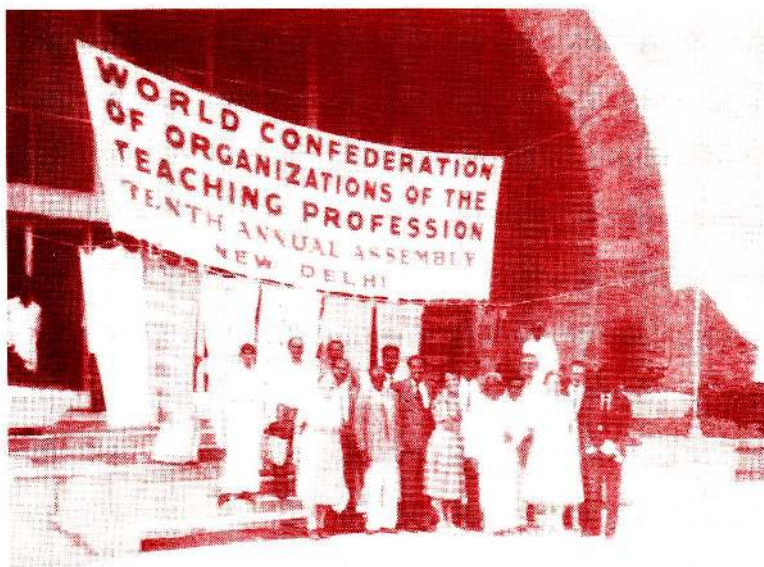
This is a passage from Tolstoy's "*War and Peace*" written in 1869 but translated into English by Rosemary Esmonds in 1957. With this fresh in my mind when the English translation was available I met E.F.C. Gibbs, Education Officer of the British Council in Colombo that sponsored my visit to Britain in 1958. Recollecting my impressions of my visit to some countries of Europe I quoted Tolstoy. He smiled with the usual self-assurance but was more keen to know the happenings at the Cardiff School of English. It was not easy to flatter Gibbs who was typical of the educated English class but I qualified my quotations of Tolstoy with a remark that Shakespeare transcends all nations and their character in his plays that reflect the unchanging qualities of human nature. He felt confident in the hope that I had acquired clear insights into the poet's mind, and from the conversation I was able to gather that the Council had ambitious programme of frontiers of English throughout the world.

In today's world it may appear absurd to glorify English which spread across a world where sun never set in the British Empire, and as one wit quipped because the Englishman cannot be trusted in the dark. But the emphasis on English as the most translated language; though correct is in the context of Shakespeare's genius must be considered misplaced.

It is important to realise that for those who cannot read English, about 10,000 English books covering a wide field of writing

are translated every year into other languages, and Shakespeare's genius evident in his dramatic poetry is too precious to be ignored by the very talented to be rendered into the languages like *Thirukkural* or *Thiruvacakam*. But as pure literature which of course does not divorce religion, it is a unique classic that requires very cultured mind to be enjoyed in the original; and those with a literary flair for English must delve deep in to this ocean of unsurpassed depths that could challenge that efforts of the human mind in all ages and climes.

This extra-ordinary claim does not exclude the possibility that other languages or cultures may produce a greater genius. It only means that is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future.



WCOTP conference in New Delhi

34. DELHI CONFERENCE - NEF

If the A.C.U.T. had sent me to the world conference of Teachers in Rome, it was not the turn of providence to send me to Delhi almost within a year to the Tenth World Conference of the N.E.F. - The New Education Fellowship, a non political, non-sectarian international movement seeking to unite those who believe that the problem which face human society are basically problems demanding a type of education responsive to the requirements of a changing world.

The Conference was held in old Delhi in December 1959. The delegates were lodged at Delhi University. No visitor to the Institute of Education could fail to be struck with the words of Tagore written on the walls at the entrance to the Insitute. "*A lamp cannot light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame.*" The theme of the conference was: **Teacher and His Work - East and West.**

On our way to Delhi from Madras, some of us broke journey first at Hyderabad for a day and then at Wardha to spend two or three days at Sevagram. We went as delegates of the National Education Society of Ceylon, a unit of the N. E. F. which had its headquarters in England. The late K. A. Selliah, then Principal of Jaffna college, Vaddukoddai and I were keen to see Sevagram in Wardha where Mahatma Gandhi carried on his novel experiment on Education called the Wardha Scheme. Sevagram means village of service. From a distance, the Ashram looked like a stockade in the middle of nowhere. Only a dirty road connected it to Wardha the nearest town, and so to the outside world. The land was one baked dry much of the year by the burning. The village was just a few miles from the railway station and there were pony carts to take the visitors to the Ashram. It consisted of a few mud and bamboo huts. There were no shops worthy of the name and no

amenities of civilised life. Most of the villagers were untouchables, victims of chronic malaria, dysentery and malnutrition. Not even the children had enough energy to brush away the flies that settled on them. Gandhiji called them Harijans - '*Children of God*'.

Gandhi chose this village deliberately for his Ashram which was really a lesson on what a village should be. In his life time it became the "*political capital*" of India where the statesmen of the world sought to interview the Mahatma in his humble hut. There were new wells built, communal latrins from which all the excrement was first carried to trenches outside the Ashram to make a compost and then to the fields as fertiliser.

More than anything else the Ashram was a community of men and women dedicated to Gandhi's ideals of Truth and Non-violence, Industry and Humility. "*Many people thought we were mental cases*" said Gandhi when he spoke of its inception. British leaders like Sir Stafford Cripps, the vegetarian envoy of the British cabinet once tipped to be the British Premier had to pull out his shoes and sit beside the Mahatma on handwoven mat to discuss their mission. But when we visited this the Mahatma was no more and it looked like Ayodhya with Rama in exile. It looked so during the night prayer when all assembled at the quadrangle facing the chair with a cushion on which the Mahatma used to sit and lead the congregation in prayer. It did therefore remind us of Barathan who with the sandals of Rama carried on the affairs of state till Rama's return. In fact the Ashramites expected Gandhi's return which was foiled by the assassination.

With Gandhi's exit from Sevagram, we could sense a lapse in the standards of the experiments he made of an ideal village. According to him, it was to be a "*complete*" republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants and yet interdependent for those wants in which dependence was a necessity. It would feed itself and grow useful crops - not opium - for sale and have schools, a theatre, a clean water supply, public halls and electricity in every

hut. But Sevagram at that time had no electricity nor any articles of furniture in its schools or anywhere else. It was Gandhiji's wish that it would take the last turn to have electricity and other amenities in the whole of India.

The inmates of the Ashram were very cordial to visitors. We were happy to see that they called "*The Ariyanayagams*"- Now the late E. W. Ariyanayagam and his late wife Asha Devi '*pa*' and '*ma*' in place of Gandhi and Kasturibai to whom these titles originally belonged. Principal Selliah was particularly proud that Ariyanayagam, the son of a Christian priest who hailed from Vaddukodai in Jaffna and was an old boy of Jaffna College. Asha Devi belonged to a distinguished Bengali family connected to poet Tagore. They were a dedicated pair like the Webbs of Socialist fame and were in charge of the Wardha project named the "*Tamil Sangh*". Unfortunately, we could not meet them because they had gone abroad. The first day of our stay was disturbed by diarrhoea caused by the novel diet - since most items were uncooked to be nutritionally rich, but it was a mere stomach upset that passed off. On the eve of the prayer meeting that night, it was a unique sight when all communities resident in the far flung Ashram with its extensive landscape gathered together to participate, each with a hurricane lamp, half lit. During prayer, the wick was lowered so that one may not see the other's face. Verses from all religions were recited and when the chorus reached its crescendo, it was a wonderful experience in prayer. Like many other projects pioneered by Gandhi, the Wardha Scheme at Sevagram where pupils learnt by doing languished after his death.

In Delhi our visit to Rajghat was on the Friday evening - January 1st 1960 at about the same hour that Gandhi was assassinated on Friday January 30th 1948 - there was a special programme and after prayers at the Samadhi, the speaker was just beginning to address the seated gathering that sat round the marble platform. He appeared to belong to the inner circle of the Mahatma, in his hale young days. My diary of that date has this

note, "*And what was Gandhi's religion*", he asked and after a pause himself replied, "*of course, Hinduism but, his Hinduism was not the historical or traditional Hinduism, much less that which passes for religion at the time of communal frenzy.*" He recalled an incident in Paris when Gandhi returned from the Round Table Conference in London. At a public meeting in Geneva an old man asked Gandhi if he was not discouraged repeating the same non-violent advice given by Christ 2000 years ago, and that much success was not achieved if we judged by history. "*How long did you say*", asked Gandhi with his usual good humour, "*I said these things have been preached for 20 centuries in vain, - in vain*" insisted the old workman who was a communist. "*Well*" answered the Mahatma, "*do you think that 2000 years is such a long time to learn something as difficult as to return good for evil*"?

The speaker at the Samadhi said, that he once asked Gandhi why during all those years in South Africa he did not actively champion the cause of the liberation of the Africans themselves. But Gandhi replied, "*that shows my self-restraint. I would never take up a cause unless I felt myself equal to it.*" At the end of the meeting the Gandhi-capped speaker greeted both of us in the Hindu style clasping both his palms saying '*Namasthe*'. He was no other than Gandhi's most trusted lieutenant - the well known Kakasahib Kalalkar.

And now to the Conference Hall.

The Conference was opened by Prime Minister Nehru himself. Dr. K.G. Saiyidain, Educational Adviser to the Government of India presided. We had met Saiyidain when he met teachers of Jaffna on his visit here a few years ago. Introducing Mr. Nehru, he said, "*The Architect of India's Freedom is most interested in New Education and we who are in the schools and universities will find the ideas of a practical statesman very rewarding.*" Among the delegates were men of international fame in education.

Seated on the rostrum were Prof. J.A. Lauwerys of the University of London, Dr. Harold Rugg an eminent exponent of child-oriented education of the U.S.A., Mr. S.C. Mason D.E. of Leicestershire, Dr. H. Armion of Israel, Prof. Ben Morris of the Bristol University, Prof. Abdul Kauwsi of Egypt, Dr. Steins of Australia, V. Krishna Menon, Defence Minister of India, and last but not least Mr. G. Ramachandran (*not M.G.R.*) an effective exponent of Gandhian contribution to education who attracted the largest number of European delegates during the Seminar on the subject.

Nehru in his Presidential address called for the right type of approach both individual and environmental to tackle the problem of education of the community and help people to get rid of narrowing walls such as "*one track mind*". "*Millions and millions of people*", he said, "*could not be changed into better individuals in a mass way. These had to be on the one hand*" he stressed, "*an individual or group approach. On the other hand changes in the social and economic structure were necessary to help in removing many of the strains from which the people suffered and to see that the hard conditions of life did not make them hardened and develop the wrong urges.*" Mr. Nehru warned the educationists of the world against the subversive forces and actions of the modern state and modern life that frustrated their efforts in producing the right type of individuals. He referred to organised national communities in the world today developing a one-track mind which makes one think that what one's own system says or does is obviously right and those who disagree with it are obviously wrong. Commenting on the teacher-pupil relationship he said that a good teacher must be able to learn from his pupils and must react to them in the right way. He deplored the prevalent craze for putting up imposing school buildings even in rural areas and commended the excellence of our ancestors who held classes under trees and developed an intimate pupil-teacher relationship.

When he finished, there was a thundering applause - a

standing ovation lasting for some minutes. Smilingly he said, as he walked out, *"As Prime Minister of India, I am not very rich nor do I live in a palatial mansion but I make bold to invite you for a party on the day after tomorrow which I hope you are free to accept. This invitation has to exclude all my Indian friends whom I meet in this country often. The lawn at my house can possibly accommodate all the overseas delegates including some of my intimate friends present here. I look forward to meeting you in a more intimate atmosphere."*

At the plenary sessions, Mr. G. Ramachandran explained the basic concept of Gandhi's Wardha system and summed it up tersely: *"Don't teach, let the children learn, knock out the prevailing policeman's system, break-down the written prejudices of class and caste. Change the world, not by merely changing the world without but the world of man's mind and emotion and that was the educationists domain."* As he finished the wonder grew among the audience, how this Kadar clad 'darkie' from Kerala came to the top post of Chief Executive of the Gandhi Trust Fund. The wonder grew greater when they learnt that he was not England-educated as the eloquence of his English and its clear intonation seemed to indicate, but was hand picked by Gandhi even as a boy and sent to Tagore for University course in Shantiniketan. There were many other speakers who touched on the various aspects of education in the East and the West which made the delegates feel that it was an in-service training at the highest level. The new trends in thinking, whatever the differences, emphasised, the common conclusion that teaching was not just a job but a vocation.

I belonged to the group that discussed, *"Arts in modern education."* Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, a prodigious writer of novels and poetry was the spokesman for the topic. In summarising our discussion at the group level, he said, *"All arts mirror man."* Drawing, painting, music and dance develop the third eye of men - imagination - without which men were scorpion and vipers

destructive of human nature. The child must develop organically and be sensitized to nature. It was the belief of the group that unless teachers helped to release the rhythmic potentialities of the child in the teaching of all subjects, they would be damaging its development. If one were asked to sum up the proceedings of the main conference, one would be compelled to confine himself to an arbitrary selection of gems that sparkled as at an exhibition - gems of mature educational wisdom.

Professor J.A. Lauwerys of England said, *"Teaching science vastly differed from talking about science. In countries like India and Ceylon which have not felt the impact of scientific techniques, learning science is like memorising sacred texts. Plenty of pre-scientific knowledge is available for children in the West which a child in the East lacks. Asia needs more science, but it is not easy to organise science education overnight."* Ceylon's attempt to produce science teachers quickly is an attempt at puerile hoarding. Pseudo science is more harmful than no science.

Dr. Harold Rugg of America supported the Eastern belief in the way of knowing the truth, and decried that logic reigned supreme in western universities. He emphasised the need for the two freedoms, as a pre-condition of education: (I) Freedom for the child. The child should be free from too much of imposition, rules and regulations. What do you think? Let one child answer it. The child grows and our civilisation grows (II) Freedom for the teacher. The teacher like the true artist should not be a mere pedagogue but an artist - teacher with a true creative, quiet, relaxed responsive mind.

Mr. S. C. Mason of England speaking on Aesthetic Education remarked that it was not expensive to keep a school clean. It was not a question of money or cost but attitude. Schools must be temples of Arts and the authorities its patrons. Children growing among objects of art acquire good taste. Their behaviour is quiet and dignified.

Dr. R. Armion of Israel: Teaching unlike other vocations demands the whole human personality. Good salary is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition.

Dr. Steins of Australia: A teacher needs, he said, a personal philosophy - not necessarily a social or political philosophy.

Mr. V. Krishna Menon of India: Speaking almost in a contemptuous tone dismissed psychology as a study of the mental process seemingly and nothing else - the whole mind is not easily subject to scientific analysis. The assembly was taken aback not only by his Kadar clothes and his over-confident walking stick, but also by the fact that an intellectual so close to Nehru and so much respected in the West could appear to be so conceited. This is the man often described as agile, whose intellectual flair pour forth ideas stated in brilliant and often passionate flow of words. That he lived on tea and the slightly more substantial diet of grilled tomatoes indicates an austere way of living akin to his extra ordinary mental powers.

To summarise the Brains-Trust that followed the Seminar

I. *"Is it the duty of the teacher to induce solid change?"*

Prof. Ban Morris of Bristol University: *"The teacher's duty is to help human beings become themselves"*
Lauwerys said, *"In England teachers are conservative. They act as brakes. They are the mainstay of tradition."*

Dr. Mulk Raj Anand of India - *"The teacher is more a philosopher than a politician"*.

II *"Is any education better than no education?"*

Prof. Lauwerys said that quality is important in education. He also explored the myth that scientific studies were illiberal as some of the scientists were the most saintly men in the world. He maintained that the so called humanities could be taught in illiberal

way. There were no liberal or illiberal subjects, there were only liberal or illiberal ways of teaching.

Mr. G. Ramachandran: *England has outgrown the dilemma of quantity and quality. India, an underdeveloped country needs quantitative extension. Any school is better than no school.*

III "Should the Headmaster select his staff?"

Professor Abdul Kausy of Egypt: *"Give me a Good Headmaster and I will give you a good school"*

Professor Lauwerys: *"According to the English tradition, the Headmaster is a very powerful person, but there are no doubt some Headmasters who are petty tyrants who rule the roost in their own backyards."*

IV "Do we need examinations?"

Professor Lauwerys: *"Exams are either catastrophic or long term. We cannot escape them."*

V "Why or what is a Teacher?"

Professor Ben Morris: *"A mature human being".*

The conference that lasted for ten days ended with valedictory address by President Prasad who called for a revolutionary change in human outlook. The President said, *"The emphasis has to be shifted from competition to co-operation from acquisition of material prosperity to acquisition of a sense of contentment and happiness."*

And now Nehru's reception to the overseas delegates at his residence.

"I am sorry to have kept the teachers of the world waiting" said Nehru as he greeted us smilingly with the inevitable

red rose in the button hole of his sherwani. The reception he as held in the lawn of the sprawling ground in which his home was set - a modest mansion where he dwelt as Prime Minister from 1948 until his death in 1964. It is now called Teenmoorthi House - a memorial to the man, who was perhaps the most radiant and beloved leader after Mahatma Gandhi.

We were asked to wait for about ten minutes in the porch because he was held up by an unscheduled meeting with Bernard Montgomery who dropped in to chat with Nehru. "Monty" to whom he jokingly referred in his apology to us, was G.O.C. of the 8th Army in the second world war.

"And I don't want a soldier who killed men to stand in the way of my meeting with the world's chosen teachers", quipped Nehru as he took up the conversation with our group. I was lucky to be seated behind the American Professor Harold Rugg to whom Nehru seemed to pay special attention whenever he threw an off-hand remark.

The Prime Minister was in good spirits and at the height of his humour, elegance and humility all mixed into one. *"I must be in the best of my behaviour when I meet the world's elite. But I must also confess I was rebellious at school and did not very much like my teachers who tried to keep me in my place. You will therefore excuse me if I feel shy, of course I do not regret my rebellious nature for I believe it has done India some good."*

He joked as he moved about very freely among our group and serving us biscuits, and other short eats with one or two adjutants without leaving it to the servants who stood by. He continued these remarks quite casually and lighting the cigarettes for his friends in the group like Professor Lauwerys and Professor Rugg and a few others, he said, *"Gentlemen, I realise I have something to learn from you in the big task of liberating a big country like India with its many millions from ignorance and want."*

"It is the child that counts in the entire process of education" was the first statement made by Professor Rugg in the mildest tone possible and Nehru listened patiently to what other guests had to say. One of them told the story of a German who asked the poet Goethe, *"How did you begin to write such a beautiful style?"* The poet replied, *"I let things work upon me"*.

"What was true of Goethe, was true of every child." Professor Rugg's statement made in a whispering note broke the ice and captured the imagination of the whole group. And when a few made meaningful statements, the Professor amplified, *"The urge to create is one with the urges of self expression. It is the impelling desire to translate an experience to convey a feeling or relive a feeling that has been lived before only in one's imagination."*

Nehru astounded the guests with his humility before a learned audience as is were with the question, *"What is the meaning of Upanishads? Perhaps if my Indian friends had been here they might have answered."* There was stark silence for a while. *"The word 'Upanishad' Nehru said, 'men as sitting together! It refers to the close, loving relationship between the teacher and pupil, that was how the sages of ancient India interpreted the educational process, and how could I provide for any kind of Upanishad for the millions of children who are hungering for learning and are not fed?"* he asked. *"India to-day"* he said, *"was facing a double challenge referring to the riotous behaviour of students in recent times. It was an under-developed country caught under tempo of fast developing changes and a country affected by rapid world changes and those unable to adjust find themselves uprooted."*

It was at this stage that I felt confident of quoting Ceylon with its Free Education from the kindergarten to the University though it looked too ambitious. Learning had spread to the rural areas considerably under the free education scheme and a full fledged state system was in the offing.

Nehru stole the show in the entire conference programme and when we arose to depart, he smiled in gratitude, a smile as fresh as the rose in his shervani, as historic as the ancient spirit of India enshrined in this man whom the millions of India adored as their uncrowned King. Some of us who took with us books to be autographed found him very obliging and somewhat partial to his own works. It was natural because Nehru was ambitious enough to be regarded as a writer of repute. Although the world famous scientist Einstein and writer Bernard Shaw had severe cracks at autograph hunting calling it a kind of 'cannibalism' manifesting itself as a modern variety, Nehru loved to get and give autographs. In fact in his own residence, he had a room in which he had collection of signed photographs of his contemporaries on the world scene-people like Nasser of Egypt and Soekarno of Indonesia.

As we entered the coach to return to our lodging, and our English friends in particular felt that we had seen a man of lofty thoughts and achievements, who led an astonishingly simple life - A writer, visionary, architect of modern India and world statesman, and above all, a man who loved all people and all things. "*They call me the Prime Minister of India*" he once said, "*but it would be more appropriate if I were called the first servant of India.*" The uncluttered simplicity of the house, bore witness to that remarkable humility of his. Several European ladies and gentlemen who presented him with biscuits and other delicacies were so delighted with the host that they sang, "*He is a jolly good fellow*" and said, "*We know that Nehru was great but we did not know till now that he was that great.*"

The European delegates seemed to enjoy their stay better because Delhi in December was as cold as England, and we of Sri Lanka who stayed in the men's hostel at Delhi University had to be fluent in colloquial Hindi, as otherwise the servants at our service would ignore us.

We had excursions by special deluxe express to the Taj at Agra and many other relics, in and around Delhi, where "every

stone had a tale to tell." On my way back home, I broke journey first at Madras visiting the veteran statesman Rajaji and then at Chidhambaram where I witnessed the "*Arudhra Darshanam*" of Lord Natarajah and the car festival on the previous day where thousands of pilgrims thronged from all parts of the Hindu world.

Proceeding to Trichy from Madras by train, I flew to Jaffna by Air Ceylon with a feeling of something attempted and something done.

It is incomplete if I do not make a brief reference to what Rajaji said when I called on him at his residence in Madras. His daughter Laxmi, handsome widow of Devadas Gandhi helped me to have access to her sick father recovering from pneumonia. "*Mr. Sabaratnam,*" Rajaji said from his sick bed, "*Please remember what Gandhi said about teachers. India does not need leaders so much as teachers for building a new nation. Avoid the agitational approach, and take up to the ways of peace. Go back to our ancient epics, you will find that a teacher needs the vast knowledge of encyclopaedia, the courage of a persecuted saint, the subtlety of a serpent, the eyes of a hawk, the gentleness of a dove, the strength of a lion, the hide of rhinoceros and the perseverance of the devil.*" When I left I felt completely bowled over.

35. NEW DELHI CONFERENCE W.C.O.T.P

On my return from Delhi, I found that there was talk in the air about the *take-over* of schools by the Government. The Srimavo Bandaranayake Government at the election of 1960 - the one that followed the General election of the same year - was strong enough to take far reaching changes. In spite of opposition by the various religious groups and Managers of assisted schools, the debate in Parliament was generally in favour of the *take-over*. The Government was contemplating a National System of Education for some time. Free education was the first step. It meant the control of and responsibility for education was the nation's concern. The denominational bodies that had taken a firm grip over education during the celestial era did not favour free education - a popular measure with the people. The Swabasha medium was another change. That was opposed by those interested in continuing the status quo and the take over was felt to be a sword of Damocles and the assisted school system with all its merits was destined to go. I thought it very opportune to pool all my experience of national and international seminars and conferences in the form of a booklet which came out in the middle of the year. It was entitled. "*National education - Its concept and content.*"

I was inspired in the naming process by Sir Percy Nunn whose "*Education - Its Data and First Principles*" was regarded as the Bible for all educators. My booklet was in no way similar to this well known book, except for the imitation of its name, nor was it remarkable for anything new though relevant to what was being thought and said in the country on the subject. The contents were typical of the professional teacher who kept notes of what he liked to remember of things learnt, heard and discussed. The book earned sober reviews in the daily press and looked popular with the Ministry of Education that was organising several seminars on the subject. Among those who wrote to me commending the book



The author at Taj Mahal

I could remember two - Sir Ronald Gould, General Secretary of the N.U.T. (England) who, in spite of his incessant activity, had time enough to cough out a few phrases of congratulations, and Rev. Sydney Bunker, President of Jaffna College wrote to me his views on my views and was in positive agreement with the *state take-over* in spite of the fact that Jaffna College was still a leading private school. He expressed intimate sentiments of pride and esteem that an Alumnus had come out with such a book. The Madras '*Hindu*' of August 26, 1960 in its brief review said, "*This book deals with the educational system in Ceylon before and after independence. The author is of opinion though primary education in the mother tongue during the colonial era was hopelessly inadequate both in quality and quantity, Ceylon had a good secondary school system which was in the English medium and fee levying. This was Britain's most distinctive contribution to modern education in that country. The secondary schools turned out an influential educated middle class which from the first decades of this century dominated the political life of the country. Since Independence, education had spread among the people. The author rightly stressed the importance of a change in the content of education to suit national aspirations and the present social conditions. He points out the place of private schools in the new set up while admitting the need for a central control against undue interference and rigid regimenatation. The last chapter on 'Teachers' pleads eloquently for better conditions of service for teachers while laying stress on the importance of quality.*"

Then the A.C.U.T. met in the next year - 1961 after the publication of this book, the general secretary holding up the book in his hand said, "*The author of this book is here, so why go elsewhere.*" He replied to questions on the appointment of an Editor for the '*Ceylon Teacher*' - the journal of the Union. It was an appointment made in the middle of the year as the previous editor had resigned to go abroad. Hardly had I begun to edit one or two issues came the news of the annual conference and Editor's

workshop of the W.C.O.T.P. - this time in New Delhi by the end of July - A.C.U.T. decided to send a larger body of delegates since New Delhi was not so costly as trips to foreign capitals. I was unanimously elected the sole delegate to the Editors' Workshop and one of the delegates for the general conference. I was packed off early with a handsome allowance for a longer stay since the Editors' workshop preceded the conference by a week.

Both the workshop and the conference were held at Vignayan Bhawan, the prestigious conference hall complex built according to international standards. The Editors' Workshop was inaugurated by Prof. G. C. Chatterji, Chairman of the National Book Trust of India whom I had met in Sri Lanka when he came here as a member of the University Commission. The workshop was attended by those experienced in Educational Journalism from many countries and representatives of well known printers and publishers of books and newspapers. My impression was that the workshop like many other conferences talked shop for most part of the time.

Prof. Chatterji impressed me with some of his startling ideas, *"Re-write history by all means but be sure that you are writing history and not taking it as the colonial power had done in its days. By all means let all our children dream of all the glories of an ancient past, but do not delude them with the fiction that we had discovered all about nuclear fission - and cosmic flights thousands of years ago. In other words, do not mix history with mythology, and science with magic."* In a very elaborate address Prof. Chatterji thundered some home-spun truths to the editors who nodded assent as his statements could not be easily be refuted. I was reminded of what Prof. Toynbee said when he came to Jaffna that the only treatment of history is the objective one that we can offer to present to our children in a rapidly shrinking world.

Speaking of University Education, he said, *"I personally*

consider that the policy of too much regionalisation is fatal to the university standards as well as the intellectual and cultural unity of the country. So far as university education is concerned, I believe we should have stuck to English till we could substitute it by a national language.

The production aspect of educational journals was discussed at length after the presidential address and the "Bible" of the publishers was quoted from Sir Stanley Unwin's book - "Truth about publishing" which says it is easy to become a publisher but difficult to remain one, the infant mortality is higher here than in any other trade or profession.

"What is educational publishing?" asked Prof. Chatterji, "There is a valid distinction to be made between books that instruct and those that entertain in spite of considerable overlapping. The educationist is more concerned with the first though he cannot afford to ignore the second. Text books are imported at all stages of the educational process. It provides him with the materials which the student must absorb at every stage."

Monopolies in the production of text books - this aspect was carefully discussed by the participants. As the only delegate from Ceylon, I raised the question of medium of instruction in the universities and supported the minority view that the mother tongue must continue from secondary stage to the University without waiting indefinitely till the national languages came into their own. I testified to the joy and brightness that gleamed in the eyes of our students in Sri Lanka who were taught science and mathematics in Tamil, their mother tongue. Quite often the brightest boys were deficient in English though it was a compulsory subject of study in the schools of Sri Lanka. When such students gain admission to the science, engineering and medical faculties, the switch over to English posed severe problems to both the students and teachers. Teachers could often keep themselves at a dignified distance with

the walls of English note books between them and their students. What could students do with a little English learnt indifferently at the Ordinary Level which was not a compulsory subject for a pass and neglected thereafter. The ready retort was "*Where are the text books*". I said, "*Text books in the mother tongue cannot be produced unless the higher education is imparted in the students' own language. We cannot expect a mint to go working if the coins are refused circulation.*" I quoted the instance of some universities in South India, which were making steady progress in teaching science subjects in Tamil. It was not a question of merely translating books from English. These facilities must ripen in the human environment which means the use of mother tongue in all activities. Of course, we must not be too regional but must attempt to attain international standards which require English for a long time as a language for reference, like the students of European universities. Teachers and students in our countries must get together in their daily contact and make their languages a living one capable of using in the contemporary advance of knowledge. These contacts to-day do not produce much light. In fact, they produce more sound in English. In conclusion, I admitted that for a limited period, education in the university had to be bilingual. Prof. Chatterji took the firm view that we now had hastily prepared text books and in the matter of text books in regional languages, they appeared to be often the result of pilfering from other authors without acknowledgement and without the ability to organise the material thus gathered into a consistent whole. What is worse for both teachers as well as pupils is that they find even such text books beyond their capacity and come to rely more and more on what are called "*Bazaar Notes*". "*Rewrite our text books especially in history, civics, politics and other social sciences from a new angle.*" This was the consensus on educational publication reached by the assembly.

Educational publication is not a lucrative field. The private publisher may take care of himself but the poor author of educational books often needs state help and it is only then that we really have

a good educational press in the country.

Commenting on editorial responsibility of educational journals, I pointed out that it must be exemplary whatever the cost and not be market oriented like the newspapers.

As Benjamin Disraeli, a famous British Prime Minister of the 19th century said "*newspapers are popular because the trend of the reading public is definitely towards fiction.*"

The workshop was attended by nearly one hundred people. His Excellency the Union Minister of Education, Dr. K. Shrumali, delivered the inaugural address and about forty to fifty editors including me were called upon to introduce themselves, their problems and their own views.

There were discussions on readership assessment, analysis of coverage of items, and the relationship of the policy of the organization to the contents of their journals.

There was general agreement on the fundamental task of an educational editor to be responsible first to his readers who were members of the organisation, second to the advancement of education in general, third to the community and fourth to the employees of his readers.

The editors at the workshop also made special reference to the booklet prepared by the International Committee on Educational Journalism - hand book for editors of educational journals.

Prof. Humayun Kabir, Union Minister of Science and Technology made a notable contribution in his lecture on the importance of scientific, technological training in the vast field of school text books and magazines.

Among the participants was Dr. Mulraj Anand, so well known writer who made the point that the native language could

best develop on the scientific side if talented writers wrote science fiction.

He quoted H.G. Wells who wrote many such novels in English anticipating by half a century man's exploits in space including his landing on the moon.

The five day - 27th to 31st - workshop concluded with visits to leading printers and publishers and some editors of the daily press in and around Delhi.

"Education for Responsibility" was the theme of the tenth general assembly held at the Vignayan Bhawan. The conference lasted for about a week commencing on August 1st and was presided over by Mr. S. Natarajan Vice President of the confederation in the absence of Sir Ronald Gould, the President who was held up in England because of important negotiations between the N.U.T. and the Government. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the sessions with a stirring address that swept the delegates off their feet.

"It is true that education is meant to promote responsibility - responsibility to run some business, to run some big concern, to run your village or whatever it may be. It is true that ultimately it has to produce a person who can run himself properly, not others so much." Nearly seven hundred delegates sat spell bound at this dramatic pronouncement by one who was running 700 million people, who, it is said, listened to Nehru, who in turn listened to Gandhi, who in turn listened to God.

"In spite of all our scientific training, plus training in the Humanities" continued Nehru, *"we have arrived at a stage, taking the world as a whole, when we are bitterly hostile to each other."*

"Is this some kind of fate, which we cannot get rid of? What is wrong? How can we deal with this situation? It is

obviously not enough merely to blame somebody for it. This is not a matter for competition in casting blame. But the first necessary thing for solution is an atmosphere which is helpful in considering them or in solving them. That very atmosphere is absent” lamented Nehru publicly with a pause.

“How far can education create that atmosphere? We claim rights but no right is ever divorced from a duty or an obligation and it is but right that we should be trained in that.”

“In spite of all our growth a certain tribalism clings to us. In India it is the caste which is the kind of a continuation of tribalism and to-day we are trying to get rid of it. Even the highly civilised nations consider themselves exclusive and when the world does not function in their way, they are dissatisfied and angry, why it does not.”

“The world is a very varied place, a very delightful place, but a place that fortunately is not uniform. Therefore the concept of introducing a measure of uniformity everywhere regimenting people’s thinking is neither easy nor I think desirable. Therefore, one must conclude that there are many ways of thinking, that there are many ways of living although there may be common bonds in them, and from the most ancient days, the philosophers and great men have told us that the basis of real education is to know one’s self, whatever that might mean. In our quest for knowledge, we acquire a mountain of learning without much wisdom and so we do not know either ourselves or others although we may collect an enormous amount of statistical data about how much people eat and what they eat and what they do. We have big books about statistics, economics and others and yet that quality of human wisdom may be lacking and if that is lacking then difficulties occur.

How are we to produce this quality - a touch of wisdom in our educational atmosphere? Well it is a problem which is worthy of your study.”

These are only extracts from a brilliant speech typical of Nehru's oratorical mind with which, some of us in the assembly had already become familiar. No wonder when Nehru finished, there was a repeat performance of a standing ovation that deafened our ears for a while as the delegates and observers started staring at one another in awe and admiration.

The presidential address of Sir Ronald Gould was read out by an N.U.T. delegate "*What are schools for*" asked Ronald in his written address, "*Schools at their best are literalising agents. They give freedom of opinion, subject to keeping the peace - not licence to play with ideas and concede the right to think, to discriminate, to question, to support or to contradict. They assume as Socrates did that a life devoid of discussion, without examination, without curiosity about others' ideas is a life not worth living. They assume as did Ashoka the Indian Buddhist King that you ought to allow others the same opportunity of converting you to their ideas that you wish to have in trying to convert them to yours.*"

"*Does this mean I concede the right of the child to do as he likes? No, I don't. Law is needed nationally and internationally and rules and discipline are needed for schools. But does this mean I would allow children to question or contradict the teacher. Yes, indeed if courtesy is observed. Does this mean, I would encourage government of children by the children? Yes, certainly so far as their development allows. But some may ask, can't we teach responsibility without all this freedom? No, you can't. For freedom and responsibility like love and marriage, (so the song says) beer and skitter, fish and chips, Sodam and Gommorra, are inseparables. Man is only free if he has responsibility and conversely he can be held responsible only if he is free. Civilisation is but the impulse towards ordering our lives on the basis of discussion, understanding and co-existence and this involved a personal choice, responsibility and effort*", discussing the theme further

as effectively as is seen in this summary. Sir Ronald concluded with this challenge to teachers everywhere.

"Do you believe as Kant did, that we should be human beings and treat everyone else as human beings? Well, this depends on the quality of human beings, on their willingness to act responsibly. To achieve this, parents, workmates, churches, temples, newspapers, cinema, radio, television and above all Teachers should all play their part, but whoever else evades this duty and responsibility, it must not be the teachers. I have no belief in the inevitability of a better world. It will emerge only if we learn to act responsibly. I hope teachers in this respect will set a great example every where."

Sir Ronald is the kind of speaker who is very rare in this world - like Churchill and a few others whose speech is as oratorically effective when spoken as well as in print. My old friends in the confederation - Dr. Carr. Secretary General and Mrs. Sarah Caldwell came along during tea time to share their joy with me on hearing Sir Ronald in print if not in person.

One of the main speakers at the plenary sessions was Dr. K. L. Shrumali, Union Minister of Education, India, who said, *"Educational profession will become an effective instrument only to the degree the teachers are courageous, purposeful and united."*

Mr. Krishna Menon, India's Defence Minister, in an unscheduled address said, that teachers should educate themselves even apart from the children, in his apparently arrogant manner. He spoke as he did at N.E.F. Conference the previous year, telling the teachers that the world that is to be, will not be isolated from the teachers and therefore they had to find a *"universal sense of values"* in the world of to-day.

Summarising the entire experience, the main attraction was once again Sri Nehru and next the officiating President of India,

Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, "*the philosopher statesman*" of Plato's concept who was the chief guest at the grand reception given by the Minister of Education at Rastrapathi Bhawan. I must here apologise to the grave omission in the last chapter of the tumultuous welcome that the first President of India Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad gave to the N.E.F. delegates in the previous year and the sumptuous high tea he threw to all the delegates. This year he was lying ill and we saw huge loads of king coconuts flown from California at the entrance to the President's Palace. What was interesting this year was Sir Radhakrishnan's invitation to the delegates from Jaffna for an intimate chat in Tamil with his sarcasm that there was so much of dispute in Sri Lanka about this world famed language. As the previous year, there were the visits to the Taj and Agra and to other historical places by deluxe express kindly provided by the Indian Government. On the eve of our return to Sri Lanka, our delegates were hosted by Sir Richard Aluwihare, the Sri Lankan High Commissioner in Delhi at an evening party. Embassies were the only places in India where wine and whisky had a free flow and some of the delegates were in a quandry of what to do in a mixed crew of TT's and non TT's, the latter being in a majority to keep pace with Mother India continuing to be officially dry.

To me the most important event on the last day was a solitary pilgrimage to Rajghat - the second visit during this conference. To me Mahathma had become more important than his deeds or words. His life, as he said, had become the message, but the grim irony dawned into me that his message - his life - was gradually receding into the back-ground after four decades of his demise.

From the sublime to the ludicrous, it is said, there is only one step. From Rajghat to the Ceylon Buddhist Pilgrim's centre near the New Delhi Railway Station where we boarded was that one step. It was now time for the Sri Lankan delegates at the centre who had free lodging for the duration of the conference to invest their savings on sarees at Canjeevaram in the South. More than

gold, it is sarees that make the woman, and if we are preparing to meet our better halves at home in the most receptive mood - Canjeevaram was the key.

We embraced the occasion to visit historic shrines - Hindu and Buddhist - and returned with the booty for our aged and ageing wives at home often remarking that these teacher husbands are wasting their hours in international conferences, though keeping the minutes carefully.

Our Air Ceylon office in the metropolis was as usual quick to arrange to have this forbidden 'gold' taken by ladies, who were themselves returning to Colombo by the same plane. They had come to India on a similar mission. The officials at the Air Ceylon office had made it a settled convention that this favour of fixing up ladies to carry our merchandise was in return to the voluntary surrender of our liquor permits - a privilege extended only to tourists from abroad.

We were all tourists from head to foot but what mental luggage we brought back in our heads was hard to say. It sounds cynical but teachers like other mortals, especially politicians join a union or a party and see the world without doing much to make it a better one.

36. A NEW ERA

In quiet untroubled times every boss feels that it is only by his efforts that his institution is kept going. So long as the calm lasts, the administrative pilot naturally imagines that his efforts move the ship he is clinging to.

But let a storm spring up, let the sea begin to heave and its vessel toss about, that is the crucial hour to test whether he could act wisely or even dangerously.

The situation in which the A.C.U.T. (*All Ceylon Union of Teachers*) found itself at the 42nd Annual General Meeting held at St. Joseph's College, Colombo in 1961 was such that a split among its ranks was imminent. It was consequent to the almost complete vesting of schools under Government. If the majority of the membership were teachers in vested schools, teachers in independent and private schools, who were comparatively small in number, were a powerful block. After much wrangling a via media was found by which all teachers could continue as before in the Union till those whom the God had joined could be sauntered by man.

A new set of office-bearers was elected whose statesmanship and integrity could keep the scales even in all disputes that could crop up in the period of transition. There was no difficulty in my election as President even though there was a formal contest. But for General Secretary, the Chief Executive Officer there was intensive lobbying. It was generally agreed that he should preferably be a Buddhist resident in Colombo to represent the genuine interests of the majority of teachers who were from the Buddhist schools of the country. So Mr. R.M. Abeywardene, Principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya, Pannipitiya, was elected after a stiff contest.

Teachers in denominational schools, which remained private by and large expressed the general confidence that the new set up in the A.C.U.T. would not fail them. The Ministry of Education was watching the election with keen interest. When we started going to the officials, the then Director-General, Dr. Ananda Guruge and the Permanent Secretary, Mr. Jinadasa Samarakody ceremonially welcomed us and with jubilant looks sought our co-operation in solving the many intricate problems that might arise and thus make the *take-over* a success. According to them, the *take-over* was a boon not only to the teachers but also for lakhs of students who were languishing in ill-housed and ill-equipped schools, and taught by ill-paid teachers who were at the mercy of the managers.

The two chiefs were as good as their word and we reaped an initial harvest of many successes in disputes over arbitrary transfers, discontinuance and other forms of victimisation mostly in the private schools.

The political climate was far from congenial in the aftermath of the 1958 communal riots. But then it was a Sinhala majority of the membership of the A.C.U.T. executive that elected me unanimously as a leader to the Rome conference delegation in 1958. There were no night trains from Jaffna to Colombo and I remember travelling by the train with friends who were quite sceptical about the continued kindness for Tamil members in the executive body. To their surprise and mine in one voice they said that I was competent enough to handle the conference affairs in Rome though this was my first trip to a European Capital. Evidently, I was not the President of the Union then.

I am telling this to show that though I had won the confidence of a large section of educated men, yet in the eyes of the new government, three years later as Tamil President of the Union (A.C.U.T.) appeared to be a doubtful quantity. Mr. N.Q. Dias, the then private secretary to the Prime Minister who knew the bona

fides of Secretary Abeyewardhene, a staunch Buddhist had doubts about the President in matters relating to the implementation of vesting schools. The Secretary had gone to him to find out his views on a high level conference under the aegis of the A.C.U.T. on "*Education and National Integration.*" He explained the proposal in all its details. On the verge of the conference, the President was to give a radio broadcast introducing the subject effectively enough to motivate the public. Mr. Dias finally agreed with the express condition that the script of the talk should be okayed by him before it was put on the air. He had blue pencilled a few lines of my talk to demonstrate his authority and wished our project all success. I knew then as I do now that such officials in highly placed posts could breed communal rivalry even on comparatively harmless projects.

The Conference was the major event during our tenure and was held at Royal College under the presidentship of the late Wilmot Perera, a true patriot, a trusted friend of the Tamils and of Jaffna in particular. It was well attended by representatives of various bodies, religious, political and social and also by General Managers of school bodies like the Vicar General of Colombo, the Chairman B.T.S. and other leading citizens.

Dr. N. M. Perera, one of the chief speakers said, "*With Ceylon going down the slippery slope of racial and communal separation, it had now come to pass that only a Kandyan Sinhalese could obtain a government job. From this it was only a Goigama Kandyan Sinhalese Buddhist could get employment. It was not possible to have national integration and economic development on these lines. People were told they did not reserve jobs because they were Roman Catholics, Tamils or Burghers.*" Ceylon, Dr. Perera said was, a small country with a population of nearly twelve million, under-developed and industrially backward with a very low standard of living. The urgent need therefore was rapid economic development. The basic necessity for this was a plan in which every person could actively

participate which meant communal and religious harmony in the country. It was important to give equal opportunity to all particularly to those in the rural areas. *"There was", he said, "free education in the country for sometime. However, the number of children that stopped schooling after the fifth standard was as high as seventy five percent."*

In a country with a population of eleven million, the University students should be at least thirty to forty thousand. Cuba with a population of six million five hundred thousand had 25 thousand students in the Havana University alone. Peradeniya University was already refusing admission to students on the ground that there was no room. People were surprised at the trouble at the Vidyodaya University. The initial fault had been in giving the Privenas, university status. That was unfair by the Privenas. University status was something alien to them. They were meant for a different purpose.

Mr. S. A. Wijetilleke, the retired Principal of Ananda College was another speaker. A man of independent views, quite like the true teacher that he was, he could swim against the tide. On accepting the invitation, he invited me home and had a heart to heart chat, condemning all forms of fanaticism about language, race and religion and felt disappointed with teachers who on one hand supported chauvinism of the south end on the other hand the wild-cat schemes of the idealists in the North and South who were trying to throw overboard all that was good in the prevailing system, especially the good turnover of the good secondary schools in the country. What a well rounded gentleman he was I could see in his wife and children who sat round me and contributing their mite to a sober discussion.

In his speech at the conference, Mr. Wijetilleke said that it was due to lack of set principles that there were strikes and so much indiscipline even in religious universities. It was the duty of every teacher to see that children were taught these principles

and to prevent them from being like drift-wood in the sea.

Unfortunately, he said, a large number of teachers had mistaken their vocation. They were primarily politicians. "*That was a curse*" Wijie exclaimed. Referring to the theme of the seminar, he said education was really meant to promote national integration. If it was not conducive to national integration then it was not education. Ananda built up a tradition on these lines and he wondered how far it could stem the tide of what appeared to him, national fanaticism. Referring to language he said one would have to accept the language of the child as the medium of instruction.

And every child should be made to learn Tamil or Sinhalese and English. In attempting to throw English out, we would lose for the present generation a vast amount of knowledge that was built up through the world language. It is the tragedy of Sri Lanka that such wisdom stopped with men like Wilmot and Wijetilleke.

Mr. Wilmot Perera, the President said that after the introduction of the Language Bill, serious differences had arisen between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, but these difficulties he felt were not insurmountable.

Religious intolerance also appeared to be developing. As a Buddhist, he was dismayed to read in the newspapers that an organisation spoken of as Buddhist had recommended to the government that certain key posts in the services should be given to the Buddhists. The Education Commission, he said, had recommended that religion ought to be taught in schools but personally he felt that religion was a matter that was best left to temples, churches and mosques although secularism never meant irreverence to religion.

Mr. K. Nesiah, Senior Lecturer in Education of the University of Ceylon and former President of the A.C.U.T. said, Ceylon was united geographically, but divided mentally. In the

schools today it was unfortunate that the child was subject to all the prejudices that may be projected by a frustrated teacher. Secular activities should be encouraged by all schools as this would be a step to promote national harmony and safeguard the young men from these evil influences.

English was also a vital link, Mr. Nesiiah said, in this direction for unity. For this and other reasons too English was necessary because those who did not read English would not have much to write even as those who learnt in the mother tongue only would not have much to read.

Mr. D.H. Panditha Gunewardene, former Manager of the B.T.S. schools said that it was not possible for anyone to work against the march of time and socialist ideas. There was no talk of national integration in the colonial days. There were class differences and differences in education available to the people according to their purse. The age when one believed that English was necessary to be considered an intellectual was gone. He said that the difficulty in achieving national integration lay in the politicians playing on the fears of the people.

Rev. Havenapola Ratnasara of the Vidyalandara University and Prof. A. Sinnathamby, the eminent Gynaecologist of the General Hospital, Colombo and Mr. L. Mettananda, President of the Lanka Jatika Guru Sangamaya were among the participants of the seminar who addressed the gathering. Professor Sinnathamby stressed the point that national unity was impossible till the Sinhalese the Tamils and the Muslims were true to their cultures, and retained their identity which was the pre-requisite to national culture.

The full day conference saw the active participants of the elite of all communities and ended in a note of optimism although the clouds of separatism were still threatening the political horizon of the country.

As convenor, I had to thank all concerned for the hearty response for a project which attempted to retrieve the damage

done to the entire nation by the Sinhala only act. Loyalty to the nation, I said, did not mean the denial of feeling for one's group or indifference to the welfare of another unless economic or political interests mixed up with language or religion. There was no reason for a clash between one's religion or language and his national loyalty.

The daily press reported the conference prominently and wrote forceful editorials. But the country from south to north was in the welter of conflicting fanaticisms; even the educated lot could not consider such questions as impersonal and as detached from local and temperamental bias expected of a cultured mind.

A very sensible resolution on "*Sinhala Only*" was passed by the N.P.T.A. and accepted in toto by the A.C.U.T. It reads thus: "*This Union views with alarm the disruptive tendencies leading to national disunity due to the present language policy and urges that the question of state language should be solved in consonance with the self-respect and fundamental rights of all races that formed the people of the country.*"

There were several deputations to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education, but they were of no avail. As one in one of the deputations, I still remember how Prime Minister Bandaranayake treated laughingly the resolution as an attempt to solve a problem that he had not yet started studying. History will record the tragic irony of that laughter which is causing the country untold harm even after three decades of his exit from the scene.

Apart from '*Sinhala Only*' there were other changes which in the long run were essential to national education. Direct payment of teachers by the State led to the *take over* of schools, and this led to education in Swabasha from the kindergarten to the University. All these measures flowed naturally from free education which was itself the result of adult franchise. It is very ironic that even today a very influential section of the public opposed these measures when they see the stark reality, benefitting the

majority of the poor people of this country. The champions of English in particular are still fighting against history in two senses, history made and history in the making, no doubt in the faculties of Science, Medicine and Engineering. Swabasha cannot cope at a leap but the major policy decision of the Government reflected a profound concept in education and until the national languages come into their own, a kind of bilingualism will prevail. It is futile to dream of putting the clock back.

I regard this period (1961 - 1970) as a new professional era both in my professional and personal life. I remember I started a chapter with "*A Teacher by Chance*". I now feel that the phrase is too catchy. It would mean that I took the ladder by chance and climbed up some ethereal height. In fact it is not so. What is chance? The word does not denote anything that actually exists. I do not know why any event occurs and I call it 'chance'. It was Tolstoy who said, "*Only once say that human life can be controlled by reasons and all possibility of life will be annihilated*" and Shakespeare said "*There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.*"

I was promoted to what was considered the highest grade in the teaching service in January 1949 - a post which was on par in salary with the Principal of a Grade I school at that time. Almost thirteen years after in 1962, I was suddenly called back to Jaffna Hindu College as Vice-Principal. Although this did cause some dismay to some of my colleagues who were already in the staff there and equally competent for the office, the Director - General of Education in his capacity as Manager stood his ground against all protests since he considered me senior in the grade and that my service was continuous as I served the same management.

On the personal side between my leaving Jaffna Hindu College for Post Graduate diploma and my rejoining the college as Deputy, I had to face blow after blow on the domestic scene. A number of deaths in quick succession - my beloved mother and

my parents-in-law, and a few others - near and dear to our family, and above all my own loss of health with a chronic illness drove me from pillar to post and it was finally settled by the Gastric Surgeon in the Vellore hospital, who confirmed the original diagnosis - chronic amoebiasis coupled with gastritis. All these storms did shake me but I bowed to them all but none of these personal calamities could demoralise me very much on my professional duties. I learnt the strength of endurance - essential for public activity. Quite strange, it was therefore that while the public and the teachers world thought that I had at long last regained my lost recognition in the security of government service, the battle for Principalship was bitter and long though justice prevailed in the end. It took a prolonged struggle to prove that a state school was not the monopoly of the State but a property of the people. No wonder the people's voice prevailed in the end. Here is an extract from the press on the controversy which was raised in Parliament, in the press and by other public organisations. *"Promotions and transfers of school Principals are causing quite a lot of heart-burning and confusion these days nor are they doing much good to the cause of Education. But it is political, not educational factors which influence most of these"*.

"A case in point is that of Mr. N. Sabaratnam who was acting Principal of Jaffna Hindu College for four years. During this period the school did extremely well in the O'L and A'L examinations and the number of pupils seeking admission to the universities was rising steadily, once creating an all Ceylon record. But Mr. Sabaratnam is a leading Trade Unionist among teachers, known for fighting for better conditions for teachers and better educational standards."

"Shortly after the U.N.P. government took office in 1965 he led a deputation of teachers on various educational and professional questions to the Minister of Education."

"Mr. Iriyagolle does not seem to have been very sympathetic. At any rate, at one stage of the argument, he

threw a file which made a near landing on Mr. Sabaratnam's lap."

"So although parents and others interested in the progress of the school were very disappointed, those "in the know" were not very surprised when Mr. Sabaratnam's name was not in the recent list of promotions".

In the spate of these outcries and public convulsions I sat unmoved saying to myself "*Devious are the ways of Destiny*". I was not a prophet or a philosopher, nor could I pretend to be, but once again Shakespeare came to my rescue, "*There is divinity that shapes our ends rough-hew them how we will*" In quoting the immortal lines, I am aware of a cynic who reversed the line and said, "*There is a divinity that ends our shapes*" as the more correct proposition.

If it was an act of indiscretion that I stood up for two teacher leaders who were interdicted by the new Minister who grew furious at the brief I held for then served me well as Hamlet said in a similar context.

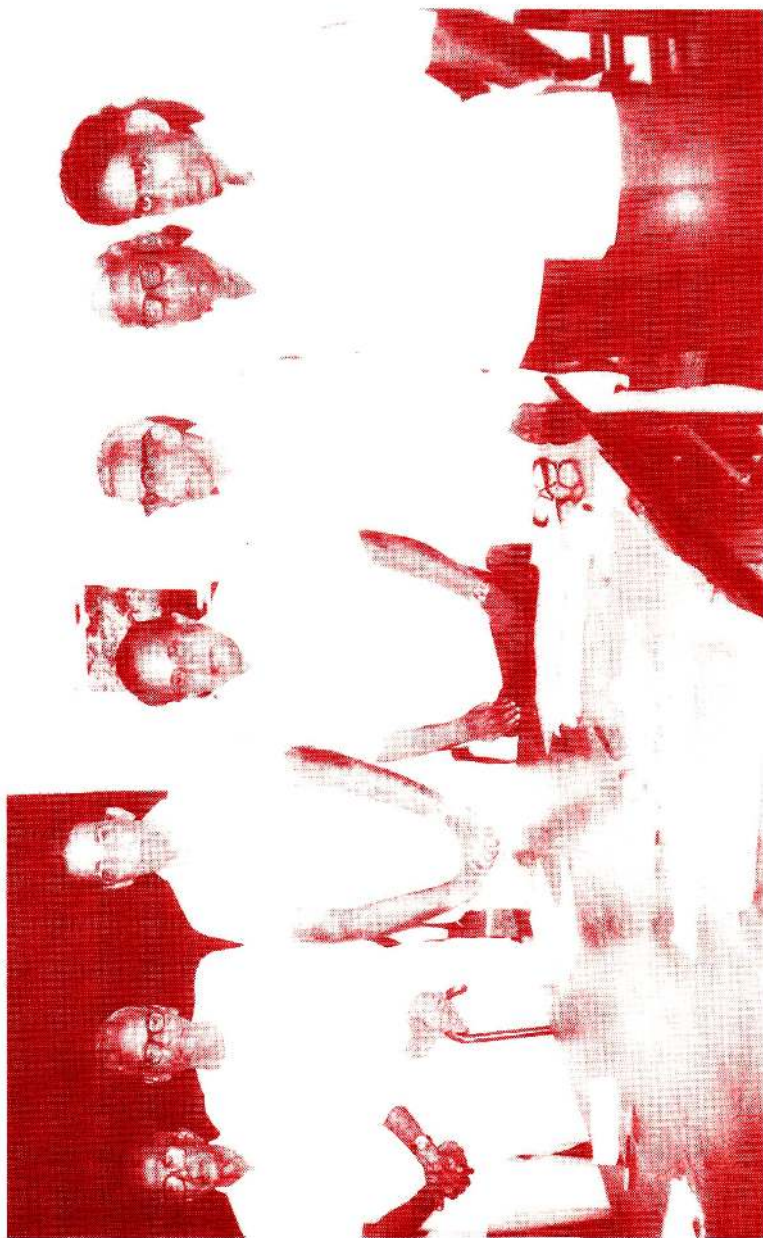
37. AT THE HELM

The day I returned to Jaffna Hindu (1.6.1962) was indeed memorable. It was something intimate than mere re-union. It was a Friday and I attended the morning Pooja at Nallur. I was invited to lunch on that day, by the Regional Director of Education - a former teacher of mine to be in the company of two distinguished guests Sri Arianayagam and his wife Asha Devi. As referred to earlier they were in full charge of Basic Education at Wardha - a stupendous task assigned to them by Mahatma Gandhi who pioneered the scheme. They also served on the Peace Brigade that went to various countries on foot known as "*Pada Yatirai*", pilgrimage on foot.

They had come to Sri Lanka on a friendship visit and were to address a public meeting in Jaffna that evening on "*Education and National Integration.*"

I had known them earlier as they were the guest speakers at the A.C.U.T. Silver Jubilee celebrations held at Trinity College, Kandy in 1946. They were a great attraction to the public of Kandy who came in large numbers to listen to them. The wife more than the husband was able to hold the audience in tight grip by her convincing exposition of the basic scheme, and doctors who were in the audience were amazed at the facts, figures and formula she provided for balanced diet to the poor children who under their charge in Sevagram. It was a fruit of long and laborious research at the instance of Mahatma Gandhi.

What Bernard Shaw said about the famous Webbs (*Sydney and Beatrice*) could apply to this pair who had achieved a merger of personalities through a marriage of minds. In the words of Shaw, the partnership was utterly devoid of those scandalous adventures which make private lives, readable, but they were incurable romantics and indefatigable workers in the pursuit of Truth.



Inauguration of the Handy Perinpanayagam Memorial Fund
at the Jaffna University.

After lunch the Arianayagams discussed the politics of Sri Lanka with Director Somasegaram stressing the unity of races which could never be achieved through the so called "*English educated system*" which continued so long after independence. "*Let every child learn in its mother tongue and develop its basic culture and that is the bed rock of real independence - political and economic*" said, Asha Devi. How can this task be done except through the Herculean efforts they were themselves making in the direction Mahatma had laid down. Learning must be centred round a craft which would enable the pupils to 'learn even as they earn' was Asha Devi's answer to her own question.

Is it by some kind of fate or destiny that everytime I entered Jaffna Hindu, the circumstances were very significant? As a student, in 1927, I joined school immediately after Darshan of Mahatma Gandhi in the prayer hall where he spoke in whispering tone for not more than four minutes. In 1944, I went to teach just when victory was in sight for the Allies in the Second World War, and now in 1962 I was called back after serving successfully two other schools under the same management. The talk of the town was that at Jaffna Hindu under the Director's management, I was appointed Deputy to be groomed as successor to the Principal who was due to retire within two years. As Vice - Principal, of a well developed school, I had enough to learn in the administrative affairs and to share with the Principal the complicated duties that were on the increase after its vesting in the Government. Apart from this highly exacting normal routine there were other extra activities all the year round that were a test to my organisational ability. Within a year came the grand project - the Birth Centenary Celebrations of Swami Vivekananda. It was a one day programme which was organised by the leading public of Jaffna and the role assigned to our school was to re-enact the drama of the Swamiji's visit on 29th January 1897. The event as it turned out was an exact replica of the arrival of the Swamiji in a carriage drawn by a pair of handsome horses, the rousing reception given to him at the College gate and the stirring address he delivered under a special pandal in the only school which he visited, only seven years

old. It was a very costly pandal that we erected in the quadrangle and thousands of people listened to the Guest Speaker on the occasion - Swami Renganandaji, an eminent exponent of Vedantha of the Ramakrishna Mission and a speaker of international fame. He spoke on the "*Relevance of the Upanishads To-day*".

He re-emphasised Swamiji's doctrine. "*If a religion is destroyed by investigation it is nothing but useless and unworthy. The sooner it disappears the better.*" He also repeated what Swami Vivekananda thundered from Cape Comorin to Himalayas, "*Be fearless, Be strong, Man is part of Divinity; Weakness is sin*". The college community and the Hindu public in general became more attached to the school by such celebrations. This particular event they felt was a refreshing shower in a comparatively secular environment of the state system of education, they feared was projecting. I had no fears that Hinduism, the universal religion, would suffer any set back just because the school was brought under government control. I now recall that at a public dinner later, I spoke of one of our former Principals who defended vegetarianism in the hostel in an argument with the Sri Lankan Army Commander who got the college closed during the 1958 riots, and was planning to occupy the hostel and cook meat for the regiment housed there. The commander was very much impressed with the Principal's uncompromising stand, couched in arguments with cutting edge so characteristic of the late V.M.A. as he was called, - Vijayam Muthiah Asaipillai. His impeccable English and polished manners were the more remarkable for a man of few words; all this in spite of the Department's consent to set up quarters. And so the soldiers '*en-masse*' -packed off to more congenial surroundings.

I am happy that in spite of the general fear of changes that would affect the vital traditions of a Hindu institution, we have been able to maintain to this day, the ideals of the founders, adapting to the changes acceptable both educationally and spiritually, a record worthy of the centenary in the years ahead.

When my predecessor Principal Sabaratnam popular as

"*Maths Saban*" retired in the fullness of time, I was appointed acting Principal and I continued to function in my own office converting the Principal's office into a committee room where sectional heads appointed under the new administrative set up could meet more frequently and conveniently to discuss problems that come on to them. This device ensured constant contact and kept us all on our toes in regard to pressing problems of the school. Some of them were and are continuing even now to baffle school heads, e.g. new admissions to national schools, which are wrongly labelled as prestigious schools, the division of students into arts and science streams at grade 9, the need to readjust the prescribed curriculum to ensure a minimum of general culture to school leavers at the 'O' Level and many such ones.

The internal working of the school was in no way affected by government control immediately. The Principal was allowed to function without restraint and recognised as the man on the spot responsible for the entire working of the school. This was perhaps the best feature that Ceylon secondary schools copied from the British model.

In tune with the general tradition of the premier Hindu institution, I was obliged to seek the co-operation of the staff and the students to organise major events. The first was the celebration of the seventy fifth anniversary of the college and the Diamond Jubilee of the O.B.A. in 1965. The time was inopportune for grand projects-like an all Ceylon Industrial Rally and Carnival, which the school had organised marvellously more than once and collected huge funds for building projects. We had a very elaborate and instructive Science Exhibition and Industrial Fair for a few days and this was well attended by the school population of the North. The Prize function that followed had Professor A. W. Mylvaganam as Chief Guest. It was no accident or coincidence that we switched on to Tamil in all our functions from that day when the learned Professor well known for his advocacy of Tamil even for science studies was to elaborate on his pet theme. In introducing the Chief

Guest, I said, "*Without your contribution which is rather colossal, the University of Ceylon would not be the lofty tower of light and learning that it is. In fact you have been rightly hailed as the 'Father of Physics' in Sri Lanka. But what gratifies us even more is the fact that your research on cosmic rays should be reflected in international scientific journals. As Research Assistant to the late IMS Blackett of Atomic Science fame, you might have been the first Ceylonese to share the Nobel Prize with your Professor for your research in the Cavendish Laboratory if fate had not taken you away during a crucial period to a holiday in Europe. Your attitude to the role of science in the world outside the university is even more remarkable as you have shown rare enthusiasm as a practical farmer in the Vanni and far from insisting on the indispensability of English for science studies, you have shown by your reading and writing that Tamil can be as good a medium for the modern sciences as it has been for the ancient Shastras.*" All this I said in chaste Tamil as part of the report which was in both languages - Tamil and English. I strongly favour the practice of English translation of the proceedings of such functions because as an all-island or National School we cannot ignore the unique role of English for the contact it provides with the outside world.

The Professor's speech in classical Tamil thrilled the audience which knew that he was a late developer in the subject of both language and literature.

He said, "*Jaffna Hindu College has built up the tradition of fostering Hindu ideals through Tamil learning, without mixing a single word of English.*" In an inspired speech he said, "*Saivism, the chief entity of Hinduism is soaked to its very marrow the Tamil Language, and if you grow up as good Hindus you develop the Tamil language almost automatically.*"

"Almost as a loner I stood up for the teaching of science in Tamil and Sinhala and have won the battle against much

opposition. *I appeal to the students to be true to the religion of their forefathers and beware of politicians who in their lust for power belittle religion under the cloak of religious unity*", concluded the Professor.

The Christian M.P. for Nallur who was seated by my side seemed to take it as a covert reference to him and was rather restless but I was able to whisper into his ear not to play into the hands of our Chief guest who was not less bellicose on such occasions.

The Parents' day that was held on the next day was a special gathering for the occasion as no such day was celebrated before. (Senator) A.M.A. Azeez was the Chief guest. He was happy to be invited to the function as he had not been able to attend any for almost two decades. He recalled how in his own absence a complimentary function was held in the College to celebrate his success in the Civil Service as the first old boy and the first Muslim to achieve that distinction. He grew deminiscent of his days at school and thought it important to rehabilitate the Principal of his days the late Sabaratnasinghe with a portrait similar to that of others. The late Singhe was for a long period Vice - Principal and acted as Principal for short periods more than once. It was at Jaffna Hindu College, said the Senator where he had his entire secondary education, that he learnt the affinity between *Koran* and *Kural*. Quoting the particular *Kural* couplet, which was the College motto, he said Hinduism like Islam stands for the unity of all religions. The students of this school therefore like their predecessors will have no problems of adjusting themselves in a country of more than one language and one religion.

Hot on the heels of this grand event was the Diamond Jubilee Dinner of the O.B.A. on 18th September 1965. Sir Albert Peries, Speaker of the House of Representatives was the guest of honour. Proposing the toast of the College, he said, "*Ours is a very small island, we have all to get together forgetting our differences and work for the welfare of the country.*" He recalled a number

of distinguished old boys in all walks of life many of whom were his personal friends. Mr. V. T. Pasupati, President of the O.B.A. reminded the audience of the lofty ideals of the founders which were kept alive, thanks to the great galaxy of Principals who had built up the College to its present position of pre-eminence.

In reply to the toast of Sir Albert, I said "*Our chief guest is a great Ceylonese who represents the confluence of three cultures - Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. We have to blend them properly if we are to develop a truly national culture. Our College since its inception has stood to the tenets that diversity or creed is no bar for all our people to live in harmony and work for the common good. As Sir Albert Peries recalled our Alumni who were the acid test that our ideal has been genuinely upheld for the last seventy five years.*"

Taking the cue from Senator Azeez whom we had to honour so belatedly we decided to make amends inviting thereafter as many of our old boys as possible, for our functions. We had quite a number of such men in the academic, professional and industrial fields. We had previously honoured permanent secretaries like Somasundaram, Sri Kantha and Balasingham. Of the many Alumni we continued to honour the greatest of course was Senator Nadesan, who was the last to appear on our platform during my period. Professor Sivapragasapillai of the Engineering Faculty of Peradeniya and Professor Kanagasabapathy who later became the first Deam of the University of Jaffna and K.C. Thangarajah, a well known industrialist and benefactor were among those whose contact we renewed after a long period of time.

This practice continued after my time and I remember attending functions which were graced by Justice Sharvananda, Retired Chief Engineer of Railways Mr. N. A. Vythilingam, and Professor R. Kanagasundaram the then Dean of Medicine of the Jaffna University.

It is a matter of great sorrow and loss to the country that

Professor P. Kanagasabapathy of the Jaffna University, who showed great promise of developing university education for the Tamils of this country was taken away from us in mid-career.

In introducing him to the audience, I said, "*It is somewhat strange that on an age of student unrest and independence, affection for the old school has urged an old boy of ours to overcome his natural modesty and be present in our midst today. He had often claimed that his first division in the London Matriculation when our school was on top in the list of passes in the island was very much due to the teachers of his Alma Mater. This*" I said, "*was a grand opening for a series of scholarships all along and his first class at the Maths Tripos, Wranglership at Cambridge and his continued research in mathematics secured for him the Chair at Peradeniya.*"

"*What was even more assuring to this remarkable personality,*" I added, "*was the religious dimension that he had given to the College-Varsity continuation. He had enshrined Sri Murugan in the hills of the Academy. It was an achievement somewhat exceptional for an academician - and that too for one absorbed in the abstraction of pure numbers to give the spiritual world a material representation.*"

Mathematics could not and did not take away the Saiva Siddhantha culture which he imbibed from the great scholar and sage - his uncle Ponniah."

K.C. Thangarajah who was invited was a guest of a different calibre. Not only did he accept our invitation but went out of the way to persuade Mrs. A. Cumaraswamy who had not seen the magnificent hall named after her husband the late A. Cumaraswamy, Principal, to accept the invitation to give away the prizes. It was a gesture in keeping with high mindedness of a practical idealist like K.C. Thangarajah who kept himself close to the building of Hindu Institutions in Jaffna and Colombo.

In welcoming him I said, *"You broke with tradition in the belief that one had to seek higher education if one was to attain a still higher place in the esteem of his fellow men. While ignoring the glamour of a Bachelor's Degree you have also persisted in the bachelorhood of life denying to others lineage of liberality. Though this is a matter of general regret, such regret transforms itself into its opposite - joy. The moment one remembers that the concept of family for Thangarajah has always been broad enough to take in Corporation, Company, Community and College. His self confidence combined with modesty, imaginativeness in planning set off against simplicity in living, mastery not of the arts, but the art of human relations - these virtues have taken him from journalism to foreign trade and to the Chairmanship of a Public Corporation, which, but for his timely intervention might have curled up and died like any other "Paper Tiger".*

His speech was short and crisp and touched the root of the matter that concerned the immediate future of the young.

"Unfortunately, the profit motive is depriving our children here their share of mangoes, plantains and vegetables. Eat all the mangoes, plantains and vegetables and become a healthy nation. Produce all the consumer goods through your skill and enterprise and meet all your day to day needs. Do not sell all your mangoes and buy your cigarettes. Smoke your tobacco if you have to" he said in homely Tamil.

In winding-up he said *"Those men of vision who founded this great institution prompted by the needs of the times also had their personal problems, but that did not make them live selfishly without a thought for the future generation. It is therefore not beyond the capacity of a community which founded many such institutions to direct its attention to help in solving the problem for the educated youth."*

The greatest of our - prize day - guest, as I said before,

was, of course, Senator S. Nadesan, Q.C. a jurist of international fame, I wish to recall the words I used in introducing our distinguished guest.

"We of Jaffna Hindu have many an alumnus who would be only too pleased to plead the cause of his Alma Mater. And who could be better pleased in this situation than our chief Guest today, Senator Nadesan, Q.C. who only yesterday rendered a timely legal advice to those assigned the lofty task of giving our country its constitution for tomorrow. We feel fortified indeed to have such a legal lion in our den to-day.

"The college is indebted to his father, the late V. Somasundaram who served it so long and so efficiently in the days when it was itself on the lower rungs of the ladder that has taken it to its present pre-eminence, and it is but fitting this illustrious son should grace the function of the school to which the Hindus of this country rally as their own."

Mr. Nadesan's address was very opposite to the troubled times in which the function took place and still more relevant today so many years after when he is no more in the land of the living.

He spoke in simple colloquial Tamil starting humorously with the anecdote that he never received any prizes at school. His father was so sad that he bought some books as prizes for him and gave them away to him in the privacy of their home. The gist of what he said in his speech looks a bitter irony today, but as a great writer said, *"Facts do not cease to be true merely because we do not accept them."*

He said, *"All sections of the people in this country should work unitedly for the eradication of poverty without any racial or religious difference. It is only goodwill and friendship that will erase hatred and help develop our economy to live happily.*

"There cannot be any sort of unity if we are to treat

history which states where and how and when the Sinhalese and Tamils fought in ancient times. We should instil into the minds of the young how the Sinhalese and Tamils lived side by side in peace and prosperity. If necessary, we should change the lessons in the present history books and write a fresh history of the nation. All the socialist countries have done this for the sake of national unity and peace”.

Without deviating too much from my purpose, I should add that the legal world was shocked to hear that this hero of a hundred fights was himself put in the dock of the Supreme Court of the country for breach of law arising from an article he wrote to the daily press, on the liberty of the press. I waited patiently till the trial was over. International community of Jurists was happy when he was acquitted. It was then that I invited him to release the Handy Perinpanayagam Memorial Volume when he made his triumphant trip to Jaffna in June 1988. “*Miss Thambiah Memorial Hall*” of Vembadi Girls was packed to its capacity to see and hear this doughty champion of fundamental rights who in the last days of his life fought valiantly and with success for very deserving cases victimised under the P.T.A. (Prevention of Terrorism Act) His generosity as well as that of his late wife was well known to the entire country. And when we went for funds for this memorial volume he started writing the cheque asking us to suggest the figure. I remember he bought more than ten books at the Hall itself and carried the entire heap in two bundles under both his armpits to the car down below. The last time I saw this great man was when he came to the *Eelanadu* Press in the company of his friend K.C. Thangarajah, the Chairman of the Company and called for me, jokingly to find out where I could get a few copies of the book - “*Life under curfew*” - A collection of the editorials written by me, published by Dr. P. Ragupathy in Madras. He bought all the copies available without sparing a single book which was needed for the press.

I have been rather long in my reference to the distinguished

old boys with whom we tried to be in living contact. This is just a cross section of so many luminaries that the school has turned out in its glorious annals leading to its century years. I do not regret the length because it unwittingly serves as vivid obituaries now that the College is planning to celebrate Gandhi's birthday centenary celebration in about two years - 1968-69. Once again the College was fortunate that the National Committee of Sri Lanka that organised the celebration throughout the country chose our school as the venue for the North. The Honourable Mr. A. Ratnayake, President of the Senate and his Holiness Kundrakkudi Adikalar from South India were the Chief Speakers at a well attended function in the Cumaraswamy Hall. What now lingers in my memory is Mr. Ratnayake's kindly inquiry for his friend of the late Sabaratnasinghe and S.P. Rasiah, both of Jaffra Hindu. They were his chief assistants who organised scouting in the schools of the North. He was sad to hear that they were no more. At the end of the function, Mr. Ratnayake called Mr. E. Mahadeva of our staff who interpreted his speech and embraced him in public with a kiss of joy for having translated his speech so very accurately - he himself knew Tamil well - and sometimes improving on the original to the delight of the audience.

In times like the present, it does help to recall that there had been more adverse and agonising moments in my active life.

There was public criticism that in spite of the laurels that the school had won during my period, I was still acting in the post for quite sometime. I was not happy myself but my sense of humour always came to my rescue. I had before my mind's eye worse situations here and elsewhere where men in authority freely bartered their power which certainly corrupts. Subsequent events proved that in the new dispensation that I was not alone nor was my belated confirmation a victory for the power behind the throne.

I took my work seriously but myself lightly as I always did much to the chagrin on the home front.

38. SOME LANDMARKS

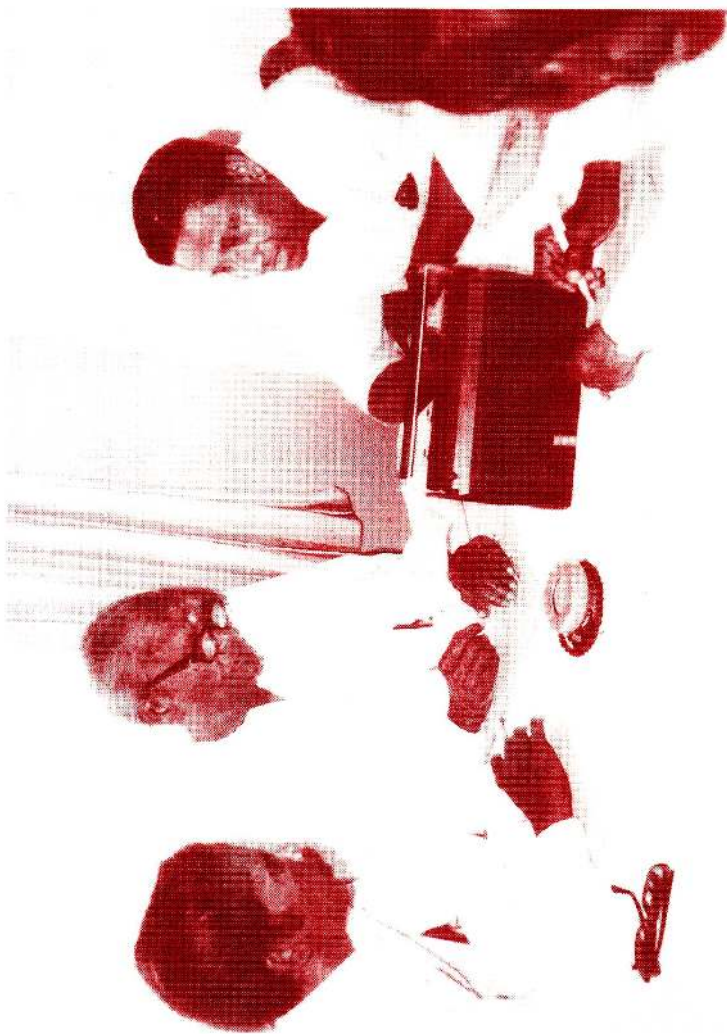
A more historic highlight of the Gandhi centenary celebrations was the visit of the Sarvodaya leader Sri Jayaprakash Narayan who visited our College on January 10th 1969, as a Guest of the Government of Sri Lanka. He was at one time tipped to be the successor to Nehru as Prime Minister of India. But later he had given up his commitments to the Indian National Congress and had joined the Sarvodaya movement as co-worker with Acharya Vinoba Bhave and had made great strides in the Boodan movement and its allies.

There was an unprecedented gathering in the Cumaraswamy hall to see and hear the stalwart who at the time of his visit was launching mass struggle against Indira Gandhi's autocratic rule in his one day visit to Jaffna.

The audience was visibly stirred at the sight of this sturdy six footer in national dress, who like Swami Vivekananda of old and Mahatma Gandhi later had made such visit a pilgrimage and sanctified the soil on which the college stood.

Seated in front of the hall was a student crowd and I had to introduce Jayaprakash suitably to them, calling him the stormy petrel of Indian politics, in his youth who climbed the prison wall using his shawl as a rope - something that our hostellers did even today when they scale the school walls at night to see a popular film in the city.

Our Chief Guest was indeed a Titan who has been struggling hard against the dark forces which have condemned the Indian masses to poverty, ignorance and superstition. Jayaprakash was the acknowledged voice and conscience of India and internationally recognised as the founding father of Indian democratic socialism. He was also a source of inspiration for the



The author representing 'Eelanadu'
with President Premadasa in Jaffna

youth of India for four decades - 1940-1980.

He was a true follower of Gandhi in that he held that strength springs from morality and lasting change comes from a peaceful revolution.

To me then it was no small privilege to chair the meeting in the same venue where I heard the Mahatma in the Prayer Hall, 42 years ago.

Jayaprakash stood up straight and without wasting words on any kind of preamble went straight to his topic. He explained to the audience what the Bihar movement meant. It was the first genuinely popular movement India has witnessed since independence. He was getting ready to launch on a Delhi march on the lines of Gandhi's Dandi march of 1930 to force the government to come down from their seats in Delhi and tackle the problem of poverty, in the state - an utter disgrace for a country that was supposed to be independent for twenty two years.

Said Narayanan, *"Every country and region of the world to which the country belonged must shape its own form of government to suit the needs of the people, starting from the very base - the village where ordinary people live, whose power lends meaning to make democracy a living force."*

The founding father of Indian democratic socialism as J.P. was hailed internationally, told the audience that a revolution was no revolution unless it was also a moral revolution. Sarvodaya did not mean twenty men sitting in Delhi and ruling the entire country. It was peoples' power and people lived in India's millions of villages. He said he was mobilising the peasants and students who alone could build an enduring society through a form of Government in which people took an active part - that being the peoples' own struggle based on their conviction and their adherence to truth and non-violence.

We had thus witnessed another living version of the life that Mahatma Gandhi lived and we felt very privileged to have Darshan of this great leader. The story of the Delhi march and its outcome is contemporary history. After a crowded programme of an entire day, he came back to our College with his wife for a farewell dinner organised by the local branch of the National Reception Committee.

He looked very tired and Srimathi Narayan sat by his side choosing the dishes for him from an elaborate menu which was strictly vegetarian and as the last one came up the sweet delicacy called '*Payasam*' - the most popular one of our College, he grabbed it but his wife snatched it away screaming "*It is no good for you*". He was very diabetic.

As I sat near watching the scene, she added to my benefit as it were. "*This cannot be part of a diabetic's diet.*" That was a warning that I took as seriously as the many warnings that J.P.'s instructive speech contained.

The entire Gandhi centenary year was started with many other activities - seminars, elocution and essay competitions reaching its peak on October 2nd, the centenary birthday of the Mahatma. That was another historic day for the College and for me. I felt the bliss to have been alive in the dawn when Gandhi visited the college forty two years ago. Standing in that hallowed spot in the very hall where Gandhi sat I said, "I am privileged to tell you what Gandhi told us on that day November 27th 1927. It is as relevant as or even more relevant than it was forty years ago. "*You Ceylonese should not be torn from your moorings and those from the West should not consciously lay violent hands upon the manners, customs, and habits of the Ceylonese in so far as they are not repugnant to the fundamental ethics and morality.*"

"Do not be dazzled by what comes from the West. Do not be thrown off your feet by this passing show; Do not be

drawn from the simplicity of your ancestors. A time will come when those who are in the mad rush today of multiplying their wants and vainly thinking that they add to the real substance, real knowledge of the world, will retrace their steps and say 'What have we done!'"

I must here add as I said on that day that our students could be easily distinguished from the others by the stamp of simplicity imprinted on them as the trade in the training that a Hindu school provides. Hundreds of our boys and many hundreds of adults from Sri Lanka and India have now become expatriates living in various countries of the West and making a living from learned professions down to skilled manual labour. They have greater reason now to find Gandhi's message fitting more than we who are still rooted to our own soil. It must be pointed out clearly that Gandhi was quite balanced on the stand he took. In many countries of the West, in America, Britain, France and Russia there were many prophets who were guiding lights to Gandhi himself - men like - Emerson, Thoreau, Ruskin, Tolstoy and above all Romaine Roland whom he had personally met. Besides, Gandhi was a great admirer of many things that were exemplary in the West. To the fanatic Hindus who blamed him for having a mad dog shot and calling him '*an imitator of Western violence*', he retorted, "*The ideal of humanity in the West is perhaps lower but their practice of it very much more thorough than that of others. We rest content with a lofty ideal and are slow or lazy in its practice.*"

To mark this momentous occasion, the college released a special Souvenir.

I feel I have missed the wood for the trees in my attempt to portray some events typical of the life of the College as a community. I have obviously refrained from the inner life of the school - life in the class rooms in the staff rooms, in the College restaurant and out in the College playground which will make romantic reading. I must stop now without creating the illusion

that all was well on the front of a national school founded by those kindly spirits to provide spiritual atmosphere free from alien control, now that the College was coming in full grip of state control, we had reason to fear the increasing impact of the creeping paralysis of direct State Management.

Without any immediate comments on the *take over* of schools, it is pertinent to quote from "*A Century of British Education*" by Sir John Maud, the Permanent Secretary of Education in 1951.

"Can administrators remain uncorrupted by increasing power? Every pound of the huge sum contributed by all the citizens either in sorrow as taxes or in anger as rates will be handled by public administrators of education."

Hitherto under the aided system teachers generally left insecure - in regard to salaries, transfers and unfair dismissals. A.C.U.T. therefore in general welcomed the State management. But it did not take much time, that some of the best schools in the island, very well managed under the denominational system, generally by a Board of Governors or Directors, had to face a new kind of insecurity. All boards of management went into liquidation; and the tradition that was built up by national schools in the genuine sense was gradually scuttled by administrators. During the change over; Principals and teachers had to face ugly musical chairs. It takes time to build a strong public opinion that the schools are the property of the community. To this day a corrective for this colossal anomaly has not been found.

39. RETIREMENT SANS REST

"Give me an adequate army with power to provide it with more pay and better food than falls to the lot of average man, and I will undertake within thirty years to make the majority of the population believe that two and two are three, that water freezes when it gets hot and boils when it gets cold or any other nonsense that might seem to serve the interest of the government. Of course even these beliefs had been generated, people would not put their kettle in the refrigerator when they wanted to make tea. No person who did not enthusiastically accept the official doctrine would be allowed to teach or to have power. Only the very highest officials in their cups could whisper to each other, "What mockery it is". Then they would laugh and drink again." I don't always agree with philosopher Russell but here in this passage, he eloquently described what happened exactly to me when three men interviewed me and found me wanting to be confirmed in my post, as Principal. And this was long after I had established all Ceylon records in studies and maintained the reputation of a leading school in the finest of its traditions. The Chairman of *"The Trinity"* who happened to be a retired Principal of a leading College in the metropolis was perhaps upset by my records. And putting all that aside he said to me, *"In your visit to Britain you have been visiting schools?"*, I said, *"Yes it was vacation time, still I visited Harrow and one or two public schools"*. *"Oh! you have been to Harrow, how do you like its Court?"* *"Wonderful"* I said, *"I had also the privilege of looking at the portrait of Winston Churchill and Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Ministers of two countries, but they struck me as strange bed fellows."* *"Never mind"* said he, *"What do you think is the size of the court. I have myself been there a few months ago"*. *"I cannot possibly guess"* said I, *"Never mind try"*, he said. *"I don't want to guess and look foolish"*,

was my reply.

Perhaps to put me at ease, the other gentleman on the board said, *"You have been President of the A.C.U.T. like Mr. A.E. Tamber and Mr. Handy Perinpanayagam before you"*. I said, *"Yes"*. Within the twinkling of an eye, the Chairman sprang upon me a question, *"What is the latest circular in regard to the medium of instruction in our schools?"* *"We get many circulars in quick succession and I have delegated my authority to my deputy for all informations about circulars with the request to bring to my notice anything urgent and important."* *"That will not do Mr. Sabaratnam. As head of a school, you should be in the know of all circulars which are sent to you. The circular I referred to allows Muslim students to be taught in English"*, said the Chairman with chagrin. *"I am sorry that I did not know this, obviously, my deputy did not consider it important because there were no Muslim students in our school"*, I said, in trying to mollify him.

I have elaborated on this silly incident to show that this so called interview board had enough authority to strike me down low in the list. When a hue and cry was raised in Parliament and the then Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake openly admitted that the complaint might be genuine but he had no right to override the decision of the P.S.C. The infallibility of the P.S.C. is as much a mockery as the integrity of the P.W.D. often termed as Public Waste Department. Unofficial attempts were made, I know, rather belatedly to accommodate me in the list of promotions somehow, but it was found that I was nowhere near about. This is the type of school administration where appointments, promotions, transfers, are made under direct Government and this was my first taste of bitterness. I have met many men - proud men during this period, *"drest"* as Shakespeare said, *"in a little brief authority, most ignorant of what is most assured playing such fantastic tricks before high heavens as make the angels weep."* I wonder if

this attitude has seen any sea change to this day.

Direct state management of schools breeds crowds of sycophants who are ready to flatter power and ascribe to it qualities of genius it does not possess. The behaviour of the Government since it took over the schools tends to create the belief that school heads and teachers are like parts of a machine which can be replaced by the machine minders. It is seldom realised that every school that has arrived has an ethos of its own, that a headmaster takes time to insinuate himself into the texture of the school and win the confidence and goodwill of the community, served by the school and that teachers too should grow into the school ethos; hence appointments, promotions and transfers are done as the schools were the private property of the bureaucrats in the metropolfs. What decentralisation did we know?

The abuses were greater, what devolution will do, is yet to be seen. "*For forms of government let fools argue, he governs best who governs least.*" No worthwhile teaching can be done by a teacher whose zeal and spontaneity have been smothered. No leadership can be provided by a headmaster whose self-respect has been undermined.

I must recall the interesting experience we had when one school was visited by a flying squad of inspectors not excise or police - but inspectors of schools. In England the school inspector is called the '*cuckoo*'. Gone are the days both in Britain and Sri Lanka when the inspector's visit raises your blood pressure, but as late as 1970 a team came to our school, to conduct a raid. I was polite enough to let them in. But lo' and behold! they spent the morning and part of the afternoon session getting in and out of classes, meeting teachers some of whom were miles ahead of almost everyone on that squad. It used to be teasingly said, if you can't teach, become an inspector and one day you may end up as a Director. But once again times are different. The State has delegated its authority to these men in the new set up. Still our

teachers stood their ground during the visitation, and in the same afternoon at a special staff meeting, when they aired the shortcomings they found. I was able to make the entire show ridiculous by introducing some of our men whose statute was too great to look into minor items like record of work, writing schemes of work and notes of lessons that could easily be set right. I am not sure what the reaction was for the little storm that we created; I did not continue long but it was said by another petty one that we should be taught a lesson. I did not however wait long to find whether the threat turned true.

Now this phrase, "*Teach a lesson*" if rightly used is the teacher's prime need. What right have we us teachers to expect the world to believe in a better system of education, if we do not in words and deeds prove that we believe in it ourselves? We say often that education can improve our economic status; that it can raise the standards of living; that it enables our independence to be a reality and leave democracy strengthened. But this is something that teachers must not only say with their lips but live with their lives. Can anybody and every body teach? Anybody over 18 with or without vaccination marks and are able to move about fit to become teachers? The teacher must know what he has to teach and he must be at least one page ahead of his students. I recall how nervous I used to feel when I went unprepared though I know how to wriggle out of a difficult situation; and I confess I learnt enough from my students to realise the two way traffic teaching is; and when the right students tackle you in an argument and you are sufficiently turned to meet, it is a lovers' melting reminding us of the metaphysical poet who said,

*"Our eye beams twisted and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string."*

We who belong to the profession should be somewhat gifted, but gifted or not we must be trained in the techniques of teaching, so that we develop the ability to put it across.

And the third quality that we must have a wide range of interests. We cannot be mere parachuters, covering a particular sort of routine day in and day out. We must have a personality of our own. Will a Doctor, Lawyer, Engineer or Surveyor for that matter admit anyone without the necessary qualification and training into their profession? But as things still are anyone of those mentioned above can drift into teaching.

Above all we must be accredited members of an organisation that can speak for us and if necessary fight with the employers. That is what is called Trade Union. In 1952 at Sri Rahula College, Matara, many of us were thrilled to hear the late lamented A. Vaidialingam 'of Cambridge and Communist fame' explaining as clearly as if he worked out a sum, what trade union meant. I began to be active ever since. From 1958 when some of us organised a protest march of about 1,000 teachers on the streets of the city of Jaffna against the arbitrary discontinuance of a teacher of Yarlton College, Karainagar in Jaffna or as late as the end of 1970 when the case of another teacher of St. John's College, Jaffna, was still on trial first at the Industrial Court and then in the Supreme Court, I had assiduously lent strength to the Union to secure redress. Mr. Ponnambalam, the former victim was reinstated because the Manager was good enough to be persuaded by the public procession. In the case of the latter, Mr. R. Panuthevan, the Supreme Court endorsed the verdict of the Tribunal which pronounced the verdict, "*There is no material plans before the tribunal from which any inference can be drawn that the reinstatement of this teacher is detrimental to the discipline of the school. His professional competence and conduct was never challenged.*"

But Panuthevan was not taken back, and the management offered the alternative of paying the compensation fixed by the tribunal.

It took about six years for the prolonged litigation to end.

This as a private school, and so the *'hire and fire'* method prevailed even when the teacher was a respected and efficient teacher.

The state system has not only not provided security for teachers in private schools who are paid from grants by the government, if they opt for such a grant. It has been able to launch far reaching schemes to level down schools. The story of standardization that originated at first from some of the leading schools like Jaffna Hindu which repeatedly reaped excellent results at the university entrance examinations finally developed into the tragic story of a war that the youth organised so effectively that the world watched with pity for the lives lost for what they considered just.

It has come back in the form of selection on District Quota system.

I must stop my rambling now and finish with this quotation.

"It is often said that good education consists on teaching the right things to the right pupils by the right teachers in the right schools. The problem of deciding what is taught, and how and when and by whom and to whom is one which depends upon a great number of variables - the location of the school, the background and social class of the pupil, the qualifications and skill of the teachers, the demands of the community as well as of the administration, the equipment available and so on. All these differ from school to school, from country to country."

These are the wise words of Prof. J. A. Lauwerys of the University of London who is no more. However, conservative, the underlying idea might appear, it asserts the unassailable truth that every levelling down or ironing up on a regional or national basis into a mass is a violation of social nature.

Be it remembered that the culture of a nation progresses

with the prosperity of the culture of its constituents, both geographical and social. We cannot think of a national culture or dream of national unity without this basic requirement; and teachers are mostly responsible for this.

40. SUMMING UP

I started my story in the midst of tragic events. They have not yet come to an end. And yet tragic events sometimes means for a people an opportunity for a fresh start, not exactly from scratch. And so we must not miss the bus.

Personally with a chronic illness and increasing old age, I do not feel dark or dismal as many people seem to feel today. "*Once a teacher, always a teacher*" is one homely truth that I am made to realise in my retirement.

The editorial chair that greeted me almost on the day after my retirement gave me the opportunity what a teacher yearns even when he is no more in the classroom.

When the particular paper celebrated its Silver Jubilee as the first regional Tamil daily in 1984, it had come to occupy the position of popular eminence that made the reader feel a newspaper editor like a true teacher needs authority. The paper was particularly welcome to a large mass of parents who were baffled about school admissions, about the disparity between the prestigious schools and others and about the arbitrary method of dividing student into sheep and goats at grade nine. Above all about refugee children from the better schools in Colombo to gain on the spot admission in the Jaffna schools on account of periodical riots. In fact, my chief task was to write and get others to write about the evils of standardisation which added momentum to the rebel youths who heard the story of 1958 from their parents who had to ship to Jaffna from Colombo. These boys had grown into mighty young men when standardisation and employment on racial quota drove them into the streets in 1970. The rest of the story to this very day is history that will darken the pages of any authentic and well balanced research.

Continuing my activities as a recognised teacher leader from the editorial chair I had contact with learned men who were willing to contribute authentic articles to picture the golden age that was during the time of the Nallur Kingdom and even more recently the achievements of the missionary and native enterprise in building mighty schools that turned out some of the best men who are still in the learned professions but unfortunately serving other masters in lands that are foreign to them.

It is said that a man who has renounced his fatherland has renounced his God. Ask our expatriates in full enjoyment of the material goods they enjoy in the countries of their adoption. If they speak from their hearts, their answer will be 'yes' that clicks with this profound statement.

Jaffna has been in the forefront of learning because its schools not merely in the city but in rural and remote villages have been tended by dedicated men. I can rattle out scores of men who gave their all to teaching the youth and in this century it was English education that was in dire demand. Some of these giants have been able to inspire students and not merely to teach. Amongst these inspired students there arose a galaxy of teachers who created the golden age of education in Jaffna. I was fortunate, I drank it to the full. I have already referred to the role of nation builders like Sri La Sri Arumuga Navalar, Ponnambalam brothers and later the foreign missionaries who became the bone of our bane and blood.

Men like Rev. John Bicknell, Percy, T. Cash, Rev. Charles Mathews, Rev. T.M.F. Long and Rev. Peto who built institutions that will last for ages are still remembered with reverence. Miss. Bookwalter of Uduvil and the erudite Dr. Miss. E.M. Thillaiampalam of Chundikili were legends in their lifetime. It might look ridiculous just now that education can do much to bring peace in a country that is being washed by rivers of blood. We have glorified wars and young heroes in the field of battle too much.

We have failed to inculcate the simple truth that loyalty to mankind is higher and superior to all the other loyalties. Is it any wonder that our young men grew up to regard murder as laudable provided that its on a large scale and to feel enthusiastic that such mass murder will give them the opportunities not exactly to put their house in order but to exploit others politically and economically? Just now the lines are fairly visible when we the local community which has been sitting on the fence must speak for peace and fight for it.

As teachers we cannot accept that a war which is fought on grounds of race and religion and other communal creeds can ever bring peace. A child is not by nature a fanatic, if anything he is a humanist. My companions for more than four decades have been children not because I am a child myself but simply because I was attracted by children. I often asked the question how could our teachers have made us men unless they were as much interested in us when we were children. I have dwelt at length how the great Sivapathasundaram a great lover of children reclaimed me and several others like me and made them men. There were Nevins Selvadurai and V. Veerasingham, the renowned Co-operator who were elected to the State Legislature on retirement. I have referred to Principal Bicknell whose love for children was the theme of that moving speech that Handy Perinpanayagam made at his funeral. And even in our days when we were teachers where many others to whom Handy was an inspiration, There were men like A.E. Tamber and K. Nesiah, still active in his ninetieth year who loved teaching because they loved children. There were many such in the South which the ACUT brought together in their golden era who would fail to be struck by the loud laughter of innocense or even their tears (for they often fight, cry and make up and begin playing again). I can understand how elderly people can become sad or gloomy often. This is evident because they do not understand children and so the old even among teachers cannot teach us anything but we often learn from children. The soul is heated by being with children whatever is said mockery

about idealism of children and youth.

In my long experience, I have often been struck how little, grown up people how little, even parents understand their own children. Many things are concealed from them on the pretext that they are too early for them to understand things. What a miserable and unfortunate idea! My impressions that children understand everything and that they can give exceedingly good advice in the most difficult situations.

It is true that these little pretty birds - what else we call them for their innocence - when they grow into adolescence often succumb to the phobias of their environment, to the tensions and prejudices that flourish there. It is then that the shades of the ugly prison house begin to close on them. And when they become adults - many of them become the exact replicas of their parents. National education no doubt seems to have devalued some of the cherished ideals of the missionary enterprise. But the swing of the pendulum has now turned vice versa and national schools of to-day are burdened with the duty of re-casting education to suit the native genius of children. It is in this changing situation that a revolution that threatens to be violent has upset the status quo and torn our schools to tatters.

In mentioning the revered names of Missionary Principals of the later era may be mistaken to over-rate the head of the school very much above the assistant teacher. Fortunately, everyone of the names I mentioned openly admitted that efficient classroom teaching is the staple diet of educational nutrition. There were always a band of dedicated teachers who loved children and were competent in the subjects they taught.

I have met with learned men quoting - a doubtful authority and ridiculing the profession. One such person seriously argues enjoying his own sarcasm that even the teacher who can send his children to sleep will have no problem with students who will not curse such men who give them a nap during school hours.

On the other hand, in Jaffna and elsewhere, there is special reverence for Principals whose duties are considered exacting. He is supposed to see every boy well behaved in the campus, arbitrate between students, parents, and often among teachers. He must obey the Malay Street circulars of the Education Department and even accept them and carry out its wishes. One must enjoy the wry humour in the up to date delineation of duties of the school boss.

My experience cannot construct any antithesis or conflict between teacher and Principal who complement in the fulfilment of their duties. There were and still are some eminent individuals called Rectors, Wardens, and Presidents who descend from academic heights upon schools and maintain a respectable or even remote distance from their assistants. In my country there will be some at least from the latter ranks whom posterity will remember for ages to come.

I believe, here as elsewhere, that era when some of the so called Heads perched in their Olympian heights - petty tyrants in their backyard has gone, or going away. In Britain which can boast of very well known Heads like Arnold of Rugby, 'Headmaster' is the term in classical use. A teacher well qualified, competent and experienced will make a well knit team of his staff, entitling him to be "*Primus inter Pares*" the first among equals. In a large majority of cases they are mature normal human beings - these prototypes of the present day parents.

Under ideal conditions, learning starts at home with their parents, with minimum outside help. It sounds stange just now when we think of its extensive meaning. A school should function as an ideal family where the first place should be given to the culture of the heart. It is also called the building of character. It is a very old fashioned outlook. Is it! Yes. I agree but I must add at this stage in our history, we have to look back if we are to go forward. Young boys and young men should not be told to do what

parents and teachers did not do. The importance of mental and moral training rests on the life of the teacher as well as on the parent. Children take in much more and with less labour through their ears and through their eyes. It is laborious for boys to remember what they learn from books but what the teacher imparts by word of mouth they can repeat with the greatest care. Do we not know what Thiruvalluvar said, "*The greatest of blessings is what we hear through our ears.*"

The spiritual training of the children is a much more difficult matter. As I said before, both at home and at school, we have the raw material of little angels. And what we teachers and parents do with them is crucial to their development.

What we can say about the average parent in this regard? He is the type of omniscient gentleman who knows everything. Do we not see too many of them with their restless curiosity and faculties of their mind bent in one direction - indulging in idle gossip from lack of more important ideas and interests in life? They know everything, everybody - where to and so lives/works, who his friends are, what is his income, lawful and otherwise is, what dowry his wife got for him, who are his first cousins and even the second. Many of our countrymen get positive consolation in this kind of knowledge which amounts to be a complete science. And it is a fascinating science and so school for the scandal in our homes which is a poor start for the children who even before they are born are booked for places in prestigious schools and for learned professions as a matter of course. It is not for love of service for the sick and suffering nor to indicate justice on behalf of those victimised by the rigour of the law but to secure fat dowries and climb the ladder of life into the rarefied realm of the idiotic elite that rule our lives.

Naturally good teachers feel somehow oppressed with this kind of material environment. Must our schools and colleges watch helplessly this process of perverse human nature? Can they do

nothing to arrest it and give every boy and girl a more balanced and humane role of his function and destiny in what now looks a vale of tears?

They can do a great deal. True we cannot boast at any time a good supply of great teachers who inspire. We have too many in our ranks who can only instruct. It is good teachers who can inspire and instill into the student a zest for life.

It was a wise mother who once asked her child soon after school - not "*what did you learn to-day*" but "*what questions did you ask.*"

Any teacher will do well to keep in mind the Chinese saying, "*I hear and I forget*", "*I see and I remember*", "*I do and I understand.*" The method of investigation in which pupil and teacher are engaged like a pair of lovers is incomparably the best one.

Many failings are laid at the doors of teachers. We forget that politics is the villain of the peace and to blame the teachers for extraneous reason is to shoot the messenger who brings ill news.

In a materialist society many people have their attitudes shaped by a commercial pre-packaged youth culture which encourages precocity and contrariety towards authority. No wonder then that materialist-parental affection pre-dominates.

Specialised competence is no doubt in great demand now. But at no time can a spiritual vacuum be allowed to exist, so teachers are obliged not to abdicate their responsibility within so many homes.

The highest appreciation for children is for them to be wise as priests, prophets and philosophers.

We ought to have faith in education as the hope of the human race though it now looks impossible to see peace at the end of the

tunnel. We must give support to teachers in the vital task facing them. We need teachers, heroes and heroines in every class room.

I have found constant inspiration in the definition of education by T.H. Huxley - grandfather of Julian and Aldous. It is typically scientific as well as culturally satisfying like the glorious trinity that the family typified.

"The educator" according to T.H. Huxley "is one who is no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience, who has learned to love all beauty like that of nature or of art, to hate all vileness and respect others as himself."

It was a great teacher and for that matter one of the greatest scientist the world has so far seen who said in this death bed *"There has never been a bad peace nor a good war."* Albert Einstein said so, so many years ago. A profound truth with simple words which is challenging our lives to-day. This magic formula which great physicist preached is left in the hands of teachers more than others to work out.

Can such men be or seem to be diffident of their occupation? Let me finish reminding my colleagues everywhere of what my learned friend, the great teacher-leader - Dr. William G. Carr, whom Jaffna had the privilege of honouring in its own soil, said, *"I beg of you"* he told a teacher delegates in one of the world assemblies of the WCOTP. *"I beg of you to stop apologising for being a member of the most important profession in the world."*

We are knee deep in our feeling of despair and helplessness and passive acceptance of power that *"erupts from the barrel of a gun."* Men and women of good will - the peace loving groups give up the fight without striking a blow in defence of their ideals, Afraid of defeat, they accept this wrong and humiliating position.

To whom can we turn to make public opinion so strong and vocal in favour of peace with honour? It is obviously to the larger army of teachers. *"No man is truly whole,"* it is said, *"unless he has been part of a whole larger than himself."* Every teacher in this country is truly whole in that he is engaged in influencing young minds. If that influence is strong enough and crucial enough in this crisis, no government, however, chauvinistic and aggressive would dare to break down the barriers of peace and precipitate the horrors of war.

This can be done, and what is more important, this must be done; there is no alternative. This however cannot be mistaken for a peroration which like funeral speeches are not dependable mainly because of the conceitable rhetoric that is often misleading.

And so I have second thoughts about the tone of optimism on behalf of the schools and teachers. What is the record that schools have created? What has education achieved within the last forty years of the so called independence. Has it seriously attempted to co-ordinate the so called '*vernacular schools*' and integrated them with the secondary schools, - some of them the best in Asia - which have seriously attempted to teach science and maths even in the A/L classes?

On the larger perspective has education promoted a tradition of tolerance - a maligned word - parliamentary democracy, generally accepted by progressive countries? Has it made this shrinking world, or our small country chronic with '*big*' problems less barbaric?

There cannot be much dispute that education has failed to put the right people in the right time. It is no comfort that a small island comparatively prosperous in an early era is now on a par in sharing this defect with its past imperial rulers who have recently seen much of the collapse in various spheres of industrial and technical development.

We have to sit up and think, how we, a tiny island that prompted Warden Stone to sing of 'The Glory of Lanka' that no native poet attempted in spite of splendid charm uniquely described as a pearl in the Indian Ocean, have been caught in the horns of a dilemma that political independence seems to have offered as the only bonanza up to-date.

I do not in my long experience that ended up with headmastering a leading national school in the country, belittle the achievements - the spread of education through the state system, mother - tongue medium, free mid-day meals, text books and now free school uniform is talked about, to the credit of the new status of a free country. But now, can all these stand up to the ridiculous situation of obtaining a passport from one section of a province to another? It is not mere civil strife lasting for years but thousands of lives lost in a country of a few millions.

Therefore it is that I am tempted to quote what I consider a brilliant analysis of 'Sarcasm' at its very depth, entitled "*A nation saved by Philistinism*" - an obvious reference to Britain as it is - here are some soul stimulating extracts.

"This country teaches less to more than any comparable nation in Europe. In a complex sense it also teaches less to less. In 1988, 62,000 childrens left school in England with no qualification." The very success of the Grammer Schools in Britain after 1902 further diminished the chances of that great majority of children and young people who were not academically inclined. Throughout the spectrum, through the entire gamut of management skills, down to the factory floor education has failed to put the right people in the right place at the right time.

And yet a radical uncertainty obtrudes. The island (Britain) has been spared the dark ever cry on English ground since Monmouth's rebellion. There is tradition of tolerance, of parliamentary safeguards, of legal scruples which despite current serious worries remains unique and the naked envy of other nations.

It is the only society known in which deep political disagreements co-exist within a consensus of mutual acceptance in which the supreme human art in agreeing to disagree has largely prevailed.

Perhaps it is related to the profound philistinism of English culture, its distrust of abstract thought, its murky pragmatism, intellectual absolutists like Karl Marx, Freud, and even philosophers and politicians like Russell, Shaw, Mosley, and Gaitskell are listened to, respected, but they have no lasting influence. Britain's ambience is ironic of convictions, distrust of ideologies.

Professor George Staines who authored these extracts was speaking recently to the Headmasters' Conference. These words are neither highly overdrawn nor skillfully manipulated to any particular conclusion. The Headmasters - we glorify them as principals - and other masters must analyse and unravel the deeper strands couched in these words. It's dangerous to take them at face value, or praise the speaker, without realising the profundity of the speaker's words that come from a Don to his colleagues in the school level. The crux of the text quoted is that education is the ultimate crux of the rise and decline of a nation and the crucial base that supports peace over the entire world.

41. FORWARD TO THE LAND

Summing up, it seemed to me to end what I attempted in the foregoing pages. In fact the scripts were with the typist who had to spend a year and a half. I was really surprised that the work was done at long last, knowing as the world knows what has been going on in this country up to date. But it is not my intention nor is it desirable to bring the trend of events to anything like finality.

I started with the dangerous development of 1987; and the constraint of keeping myself to my study - cum - sickbed spent the enforced exile in this kind of writing. But it is strange again that events have taken unexpected turns and twists so much that I wonder whether even a postscript would make this readable or relevant, much less final.

Some years ago I brought out a booklet to air my views on the *State take over* of schools entitled, "*National Education - Its Concept and Content*". In December 1960, today after about thirty years of teaching and almost twenty years in retirement have I anything worthwhile to record to justify my "*Summing up?*" In my attempt there seems to be no urge even to imitate the reputed author Somerset Maugham's "*Summing Up*" a piece of first - rate literature.

I feel tempted to hark back to my own booklet which itself smacks of Sir Percy Nunn's *Education - Its Data and First Principles*. Much flood had passed between the educational bridges in Sri Lanka in the focus of what has happened in the world outside. "*National*" has become a dirty reality.

The ferment of populism that '*Sinhala Only*' created persists to this very day in some form or other. It has certainly had its destructive effects on the Tamils who are now forced to realise that they constitute a nation and are driven to the wall to demand

a separate state - the only way to eliminate all kinds of political and social fraud in the name of Provincial Autonomy or Regional Councils. No one today denies that Muslims are an entity by themselves but the "*Sinhala Only*" has, as it perhaps was intended, almost succeeded in dividing that community to clamour for recognition which the ruling power enjoys exploiting. To have called them Tamil-speaking people from time immemorial is not to deny their identity as a race; but to exploit the present situation in order to prolong the agony of the Tamil problem is to play "*football*" with another team while the original '*game*' with the Tamils has not been played to a finish and talked about as unwinnable.

The world as a whole is too full of "*isms*" Nationalism, Regionalism, Internationalism, Capitalism, Communism and many others that derive their names from the religions and culture that people belong to. All these have begun to suffer a sea change and no one can predict what the world will be like in the near future. There is a case for regionalism which is a *via media* and perhaps a viable form of world government that the atomic bomb summarily calls for. In spite of it there are plenty of wars small and big going on between nations and within nations.

To us in Sri Lanka it has now reached a stage where in one country one could spot out two nations and, surprisingly the Tamil youth of today like Columbus of old who in discovering the New World attempted the almost impossible, are engaged in a struggle "*To Do or Die*". What can Education, national or otherwise do to arrest this unending series of slaughter on either side - Tamils in the North and the Sinhalese in the South? Surely the schools, the universities and the teachers do not seem even to pretend that their voice will be effective even when that is considered very crucial. The powers that be are not yet driven to realise that the people's language is a definition of its identity and a determinant of its culture. "*National Education*" like many other catch - words cannot today deceive even the ordinary man. Too much blood has been shed to ignore this basic creed. Not a single Tamil will consent

to be governed in Sinhala - a measure that makes a mockery of democracy to the ordinary man, which means more than anything else. "*Government with the consent of the governed.*" As Shakespeare put it in another context "*All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand*" - the hand soaked in rivers of blood.

Without further digression let me attempt to be terse on the features of National Education that can still save us, and our progeny from further degradation. It is often said that truth evolves even as the world evolves - from the primitive to the civilized, from the civilized to the genuinely cultured level which helps every individual soul to realise the true goal in this difficult journey of life. Science, they say, has done wonders to make this journey more comfortable - primarily to feed the starving millions from hunger, by discovering methods that will make this planet self-sufficient to satisfy the basic needs of man, animals and other living creatures. Of course as we have seen there are not enough resources anywhere on earth to satisfy human greed.

Education properly conceived can and must through its institutions re-orient itself to suit the young and through them to the elders. The truth that to neglect religious and moral education altogether is to corrupt the race or races that inhabit a country - a community of people who are expected to share common beliefs. "*I say through the young to the elders*" deliberately to show that the youth of today in an independent country looked for a land flowing with milk and honey and feel completely disillusioned. Therefore it is their turn now to make up for where their parents and elders however educated or prosperous they may be, have failed. By common beliefs I mean those which is the bedrock of our inherited culture as well as those that could be justified as innovations in a changing society.

The first principle of teaching or learning generally true to all times and climes in a National System is that nothing can be

taught. The teachers at school can only show the student how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call for knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it is and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. Child or man, boy or girl, there is only one sound principle of good teaching.

Secondly the idea of hammering to the child into the shape desired by the parent or the teacher is an ignorant superstition. How many parents compel an unwilling child into unsuitable careers - medicine or engineering which it can never consummate. This is the main crux of the crisis that has afflicted this country ever since the National Universities began to increase in different parts of the country. Thirdly comes the unique feature of the system that has long been ignored at our own peril and is now compelling our positive acceptance.

In Education we have to work from the near to the far, not from far away Britain nor America to our communal environment. We must start from our immediate surroundings - city or town or village. Man's heredity, his country, the soil from which he draws his sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed - these mould him not the less powerfully, because insensibly, and from that one must begin. I remember "*Highroads of Literature Book III*", an English text for grade six in those distant days, before I knew the by-roads of our language which has a literature in no way inferior to anything else that the world can offer to the Tamil boy in his early teens.

We must not take up nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. Learning must like most things to be meaningful must have '*a local habitation and a name*'. This does not mean that we in our homes and villages must be like an island unto ourselves. Things no doubt have to be brought in from outside, and today we speak of one world. But these things that are brought in must be offered

not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is a condition of general development. A government supposed to represent a whole nation sitting at the centre in a remote metropolis without any intermediate institutions built up by the people cannot achieve this cardinal need.

There are of course souls which naturally revolt from their surroundings and seem to belong to another age and culture. Let them be free to follow their bent. It is God's arrangement that they should belong to a particular nation, age and society, that they should be "*children of the past, possessors of the present, creators of the future.*" The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future, our aim and summit.

The world from time to time has seen such geniuses as Washington, Newton, Voltaire, Emerson, Gandhi, not to speak of heroes of peace like Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and others who were nearest to our creator. They have meant much to the world which is yet evolving in the direction pointed out by these men-of-God.

We have suffered so much so long in spite of the empty boast of political leaders who lost their heads at the first taste of power when the country became politically independent. No doubt much has been attempted but only a little is done. The '*voting democracy*', which we are still trying to preserve is a shallow imitation of the western models developed to suit their genius. In spite of our neighbouring India which underwent several decades of disciplined suffering for independence, we as a people were almost indifferent to the need of preparing ourselves for a free country that was bound to have many years of patient and hard work that freedom entails. Our so called freedom was in fact the result of diplomatic negotiation that our leaders at the helm then made with our erstwhile masters as an act of political diplomacy. It was supposed to be a success. Initial "*peace*" that prevailed during and after the general elections for a time, had duped the

average voter, that at last he was free to order his life, to look after his family and be able to help others near and dear to him. He had merely to back the party that would emerge victorious once he casts his vote after every five years.

But it did not take long for him to realise that another long night of humiliation has set in. Though the alien rulers' onslaught had passed its peak, the European hang-over is still with us in various forms and shapes. We still do not see the need to reorganise ourselves into real nationhood by building up various institutions under genuine leaders that would link up the people and the government and make the government for the people meaningful. This is only possible if we could think of this small island rich in economic, social and cultural possibilities, as a united nation in the years to come and not certainly overnight. The awakening that Swami Vivekananda's visit to Jaffna and to Jaffna Hindu College in particular, in the last decades of the last century is in direct contrast to what is happening in our part of the country now - the last decades of this century.

We must consider that this second long night of humiliation is coming to an end; and the time has come to reorganise the classic work of the Swamiji which was followed by colossal labours of Mahatma Gandhi. This must be on new lines perhaps on a fresh basis, a new life based on what is best in the West and the East. Our country as a whole rich in its ancient heritage should look into the past and march forward, under wise leadership of men in our tradition - Philosopher - Statesmen which can only happen if we are ready and willing to be wise enough to discern the seed of suffering. And that needs understanding of a high order to put our house in order, if it is not to flare up in flames. This is a warning, not of a stereotype but one pregnant with meaning in this period of our history.

Life has meaning only through dedication to great causes. There is today a great cause for the Tamils to unite us as a

distinctive community, and to unite all the distinctive communities into a nation. If this fails as it has so far seemed to fail, then we the Tamils of this country will be driven to seek identity as a separate state - a measure that could ruin the future of a country that failed to discern the issues at stake.

Long years of active life lie ahead for the young, especially the students in our schools and universities. They have to live them creatively and strive for grace. Discernment as I use the word, is not an inborn gift. It has to be cultivated "*God sense grows through the effort to understand what is beyond us and the endeavour to appreciate that which we cannot yet understand.*" We must admit that we elders have failed to a large extent in this business. This revolt of our youths to some extent reflects their dynamism. But if it ends up in opposing any form of authority, then it is a very unhappy augury for our future. May I repeat that we are the inheritors of an ancient culture which has sustained our people through trials and tribulations under successive regimes of oppression - foreign as well as indigenous. The dissatisfaction we see around us is no doubt due to discrimination against a particular community. But it is more due to the basic fact that the country is confronted with an increase of population and the ordinary man is enlightened enough to realise what is due to him. Thanks to free education and the consequent understanding that it is the responsibility of the states to provide the basic necessities in a free country - more schools, more work places, more jobs and greater opportunities for the youth to fit themselves into a modern society.

In some ways our standards in the past have fallen because of the speedy increase in numbers seeking better prospects in every field. Quick increase in opportunity is also a phase when the right person is not always found for the right job; and what is worse still when the right person is not preferred for extraneous reasons.

And that leads to a question of redressing grievances. But

for trivial occurrences of wrong doing on the part of the state or private establishments riots are not the answer. The young must give up the habit of resorting to the methods of the street for that does not befit educated people that we have generally been. As Swami Vivekananda said "*True education is the training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently.*" As a respectable and responsible community, we must check all outbursts of violence and lawlessness which after all are touched off by very small minority. This is not to underrate the courage of youth organising themselves like a disciplined army to resist all forms of injustice which however should not involve violence of any kind. Violence, today as Gandhi said is man's main problem. Neither India in spite of Mahatma Gandhi nor we in Sri Lanka who preferred to follow Buddha and other sages and saints of our respective religions can claim to be more non-violent than other nations whom we hasten to brand as war mongers have shown more self-restraint.

Our youth cannot afford to feel alienated from the main stream of society on grounds of cast or creed, language or religion. The country belongs to them, the welfare of our people is in their hands. There is no individual advance for us except through the uplift of our fellowmen. As Lincoln said "*We cannot escape history*" fondly imagining that we are making it.

Whatever we do, whether it is work among the students or work in the villages, we must keep the larger values and aims constantly in view. There is need for immediate constructive action and our youth must give serious thought to such matters and take firm decisions. Our schools are pivots of well organised programmes of reconstruction; unless such actions are organised, intelligent and purposeful our story will be truly tragic and none of us can imagine such an end.

What happened to Germany under Hitler? The majority of people were content to keep quiet out of loss of spirit, so organised hooligans under the Fuhrer could rise to power, by misusing the

democratic apparatus. If our struggle for justice and freedom under democracy is to succeed we must learn to assert our right to orderly government rightly representing the people.

"The will of the people" is another vague phrase which could justify the tyranny of an elected President, or the Prime Minister all of whom are the real authority, finally in matters of the state. Different countries - particularly in the so called democracies of Europe and America have shown that people could be duped into accepting what is not good for them. But the evolution of an orderly government is possible. Orderly is a relative term and that could overlook consequences a democracy that virtually violates the basic interest of the common man; Great Britain is not a bad example at all of a democracy that could be termed orderly. But in fact we who belong to the eastern civilisation and a culture that continues to insist on spiritual values as the prime need of individuals as well as communities cannot be content with 'vote catching' forms of government which are bound to be depotic unless the rulers at the top represent a people who are generally good and God - fearing. This is a proposition that sceptics genuine as well as shallow may and will laugh at when science has marvellously accommodated all forms of devirly in the name of God. One example will substantially refute this jibe. It may be mere mythology, but Mahabharata is an ancient epic; Draupadai, the wife of Yudishthra (*Dharmar in our use*) declares against her fate and questions the moral government of the world, and calls it a mere fiction; *"If there is God, he acts arbitrarily"* she exclaims, but Dharmar rebukes her, that she is guilty of blasphemy. He repudiates her for her lack of faith in a living and just God. Love of God implies the freedom of man. To this day our people as a community hold on to this ancient Indian or rather oriental concept.

42. POSTSCRIPT?

What is this thing called Postscript when it comes on the heels of Summing up? I must explain that it is not an attempt to update the history of our "*Small War*."

Small they say is beautiful, but this "*Small War*" has become so ugly and cruel that it has earned the contempt of all countries; some of which at the start praised the bravery of our youth shedding their blood to end injustice and the merciless acts of cruelty that victimised their parents and their community; nor is this an indirect device of continuing the bits of autobiography that were frankly included in the body of the book. It is really the result of my experience intimate as they were during twenty years of retirement. Enforced retirement before three years under the decree of new government in 1970.

Its ruthless enforcement in compelling retirement of all public servants above fifty five - three full years in my case seem in retrospect a divine intervention. That was the year that saw the beginning of a violent struggle among the youth of Jaffna against the iniquitous system called '*Standardisation*'. In fact our own school playground was the focus of the potential undergraduates agitation from the various Collegiate schools in Jaffna.

Was it again another date with destiny that hot on the heels of quitting school I was invited to help out a Tamil regional daily the only one in the country then, as Editor or Editorial Adviser? Though it was not a lucrative post I accepted the offer and continued my "*Assault*" on the system which victimised our own school and other Jaffna schools more than any other in the country.

Let me frankly state that many of our ills, our own as well as those of other communities in the island are due to the oft repeated cliché - the prevailing system of education. I could

recollect from my own experience the scramble for seats in the University and the parental greed for their dear ones to graduate. Consequently our secondary schools - some of the best in Asia - before Independence, and Free Education strengthened by the *State take over* of schools have proved utterly incapable of meeting the challenge in the new situation.

Every change of government since 1947 tinkered with the existing system and was unable to see the new problems in proper perspective. Every Minister of Education had the chance of seeing the world in search of reforms and on his return was able to add to or adjust by introducing a few snippets here and there. Grafting of this kind has proved a total failure to this day unlike the effective kind of grafting that mangoes from Jaffna - one of the choicest delicacies in this island - are still called "*Karutha Columban*" meaning Colombo mangoes.

Political parties that exploited the situation created by free education and the mother tongue medium of education supplemented by the nefarious Sinhala Only Act to mislead the masses of the comparatively unenlightened South have brought this country to what looks like an unending impasse. The modern consumer society especially in the South was made to believe that once the "*Dravidian*" is kept in his place there will be enough for those who claim that this country belongs to them only, and their language the only language of administration. By now they must have realised the error of their ways. What is the cost if this is true? It has spilled out rivers of blood, the cream of our youth in large numbers have met with premature death induced to plunge into a fratricidal conflict. Some of those who came to power very foolishly imagined that a small contingent of the "*National Army*" sent to North would end all attempts of violence in North by a stipulated date. But after twenty years it remains an empty dream. All attempts to involve foreign military assistance and weaponry have miserably failed.

A sense of optimism almost congenital still haunts my mind that we could still muddle through to peace - that there is some hope for the youth of tomorrow. But while tomorrow seems uncertain what about the babes of today? When does education begin really?

It is said that after a lecture by an eminent educator a woman asked "*How early can I begin the education of my child?*" "*When will your child be born?*" "*Born?*" she gasped, "*why he is already five years old*" "*My goodness, woman*", he cried, "*Don't stand here talking to me - hurry home you have already lost the best five years.*"

Even he who was coming out with a piece of recent research could not perhaps comprehend what our Saint Manickavasagar of "*Thiruvacakam fame*" both on the topic of the evolution of the universe and the genesis of the child in the womb of the mother month after month. This is perhaps a saintly expression of a mystic experience of an ancient Saint. The East in general and India in particular is well known for such insights of sages and saints which are now confirmed by modern science and scientific research. In the West, particularly in the field of nuclear physics, in science, pre-natal education and in modern psychology, science is coming closer to philosophy, which some debunk as nonsensical through the intermediary of psychology.

How a man is made out of a babe is one of the deepest mysteries found in Hindu heritage. Science and biology in particular has revealed to us today secrets unknown to modern man. I speak of Hindu heritage because not only orientalists but all men of true learning have delved into the depths of Hindu Philosophy centuries ago. No doubt it is full of superstitions - even empty superstitions in the field of religion which in the light of modern scientific knowledge could and should be discarded. We have no quarrel with this attitude that demands evidence for every belief.

Let us see the other side of the story. Our schools of today

and in the next century that commences after about eight years have to adjust themselves to numerous trials and challenges that the end of this century has already begun to appear in every part of the world. *"The harsh antimony between the individual and society, between nation and mankind, we should hope will disappear. If we are able to catch a glimpse of the wisdom that all are complementary within the total process of evolutionary fulfillment of life. Past, Present and Future are similarly in its synthetic grasp. The sharp opposition between the ideal and the actual is reconcilable in the concept of increasing realisation of possibilities"*, says Julian Huxley the well known biologist who swears by the spiritual development of man through religion though he does not subscribe to the tenets of revealed religion.

We can't sit with folded hands in the fond hope that conflicts will vanish. But then they will appear in a new light as inevitable and even necessary steps that will continue to kill on some pretext or other, they will steal or act stupidly and deceitfully, as they have done in the past. But a spiritual discipline will prove inevitable in the light of the past and present disasters that are culminating in the atomic bomb that has proved a great deterrent to another world war.

The ideal of social and professional success that has been an obsession with us for some time based on a one - sided specialisation of some skills that brings in gold galore needs to be supplemented or replaced by the ideal of wholeness. Peace can only be produced as it must soon be, by developing an integrated personality, an inner harmony. Our temples, churches and mosques and our schools can no more continue in the age - old conservative idiom of set - rules, rites, ceremonies and the artificial petitionary prayer cannot bring in the fulfillment of a really religious life. Did not a new central idea of religious toleration bring religious persecution and wars of religion in christian Europe to end?

Do we not now see a serious attempt to bring in a new social order to end the turmoil among the various powers both developed and underdeveloped?

I hate to end up with a rhetorical device of washing up the Augean stables with a show of shallow optimism which Hercules himself of today would not dare.

Looking at the list of dangerous National leaders who have arisen in our times makes quite scary reading - Polpot, Peron, Arafat, Idi Amin, Ayatullah, Gaddafi - though they cannot all be tarred with the same brush, are yet pictures of terror for whatever cause they espoused. Even small countries like Sri Lanka did not fail to add to this formidable group though their impact was not on the international scale. For the common man here as elsewhere this has been a time when individuals have identified themselves with groups and movements. In America black nationalists have emerged even as Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka. Separatists here still stand their ground in spite of reverses for about a decade. By amassing in numbers the members of such organisations gained political influence and often effect political ends. Individuals find themselves to be of little stature overwhelmed with a fear that if one were truly to let things be then individuals must by necessity be swept off by massive surges. That was how individuals lost their place.

And yet a person like Pope - John Paul II proclaims - that all mysteries of existence do not bubble only in laboratories; and when communist Poland feared Pope's influence in the country it is simply because he reached the feelings of the people, no government could come close to.

For all the stark atrocities of our times, the mind still retains a shrine for invisibilities. One can never understand a place like Iran without acknowledging as much although Iran has also proved that faith unleashed no more gently than other executioners.

The only guide to man is his "*conscience*" said Churchill on Chamberlain. That can be no less true of our times than of others. The most agreeable irony in which this could be seen, is how close the world came to self destruction, but that did not happen. That the individual's claim on survival took precedent over all the wilder forces he let go.

How free can man be is yet a problem? The individual it must be admitted is concerned with the social consequences of liberation. Let us remember what Edmund Burke said of the French Revolution. "*I must be tolerably sure before I venture to congratulate men upon a blessing that they have really received one.*"

I do not think that in our schools knowledge and moral instruction ought to be too much separated. In some degree wisdom can be taught. Today the kind of specialised knowledge and skills in our secondary schools for various advanced courses in the profession and trades has very little to do with wisdom. But it should be supplemented by wider surveys to put in its place in the total of human activities. Even the best technicians should also be good citizens - of the world as our Tamil Sangam poet Kaniyan Poonkunran said "*Every country is my country and every man is my kinsman.*"

With every increase of knowledge and skill wisdom becomes indispensable as it increases our capacity for good or evil. How many of us know that the Soviet biographers of Einstein, the greatest scientist the world ever saw, stated that with the years the great physicist's political platform took a more precise shape. He said "*no*" emphatically to the use of the atom bomb and made an attempt to write to Roosevelt protesting against its use which reached the President after his death in April 1945, and was never read. He protested vehemently against American nuclear diplomacy, against the militarisation of science, against the arms race and all forms of cold war.

We need a new mentality and must learn to think differently and seek ways of preventing armed struggle. It is not after all entirely a new mentality nor is it entirely original. Its ideas were promoted by great thinkers like Einstein, Bertram Russell, Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy. There is depth in the well known paradox of Einstein's formula for peace and co-existence among nations. *"There has never been a bad peace or a good war."*

And if and when peace comes to us - as it must come let the urgency of rehabilitating our people demand three things. 1. All tall talk of organisation is the enemy of improvisation for success. 2. It is a long jump from knowing to doing. 3. Committees and sub-committees take the punch of war in its aftermath.

It was the same Edmund Burke whom I quoted earlier in regard to the French Revolution who said, or rather re-echoed the terse couplet of Thiruvalluvar's '*Pothumarai*' - common scripture - the Tamil classic of more than 2000 years ago - which states *"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"*. It emphasises Ahimsa or non-violence in its varied applications, ethical, economical and social. That shows the importance which ancient culture gave to it.

Was it not Milton the eminent English poet who said in his '*Comus*' *"If virtue feeble were, heaven itself would stoop to her"*.

But history is full of sages and saints who regarded virtue as not mere balancing or nice calculation. They aimed at righteousness with a passion and an adventurous enthusiasm that is reckless of life in the conflict between the divine and the undivine in man.

To overcome the conflict and integrate the personality is the aim of religion. True religious life must express itself in love and aim at the unity of mankind. *"The Hindu dreamt of universal peace and clothed his dreams in imperishable language"* says

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. This obviously cannot begin by teaching religion as a subject in our schools. In fact life in the world is a schooling which disciplines the soul and makes it perfect. That we are living in a world dominated by scientific advance does not detract from the importance of religion as an inevitable ingredient of classroom learning. By classroom is meant the atmosphere that prevails in our schools - in the laboratory, library, the playground, the workshop and above all the religious practices including the various doctrines that every pupil should have the chance to learn. But learning as a whole is an interdisciplinary exercise which cannot divorce religion as a vital component of culture. Science can vitally promote religious attitude if the right men are in the seats of power in their classrooms, in the corridors, wherever the school community formally or informally meets in this co-operative enterprise that education really is.

It does sound Oriweillian cynicism or what looks like an ancient platitude. But as history ancient and modern shows clearly that the world upto date has survived mainly through the indefinable influence of such men as Socrates, Buddha, Jesus and in our own times Gandhi and Tolstoy.

We cannot afford to be desperate on account of our present sufferings. It is better to be free than to be a slave, better to know than to be ignorant. The schools of the nation should enable the young to subject religious beliefs to scrutiny of reason. This certainly will help to eliminate the power of fraud that stalks our land, which needs to see a way out.

Secularism in the popular sense is unfortunately regarded as opposed to spiritualism which regards religion in the broader sense as inevitable. When secularism became the keyword and for the many religions and religious sects that infested India, Gandhi in consultation with top leaders endorsed '*secularism*' as the best word - a panacea for all the evils of religious strife that infested independent India. The ordinary citizen could not till to-day grasp

the depth of the idea that to be secular is not to be irreligious. In fact the word stands for the positive aspect that all religions must be fostered in the ideal sense that the soul of all religions is one; as the Saiva Siddhanta a cardinal creed of Hinduism proclaims that there is only one God, though called by various names. It equally denotes that there can be no discrimination against any religion.

It is the height of dangerous folly to assume that economic solutions are equated with a new social order that alone can bring peace.

The present conflict that prevails in many countries of the West and the East ultimately stems from the clash of cultures that imperial wars of the past have not yet got over. The hangover in continents, countries and their former colonies persists to the present day.

The worst is the divorce, conscious or unconcious between religion and education and the identity of the culture resulting from this subtle blend; and this starts from the village of man's birth, his lineage from the region, the common unity and the country, provided the identity is kept intact. It is obscurantism to hark repeatedly on the superiority or the inferiority of the erst-while rulers or the ruled.

Assimilation is inevitable provided that every community in any country can hold its own and thus save the world for peace; a very essential proviso that the world all along has regarded India as Hindu India must go. In fact after partition Prime Minister Nehru never preferred to repeat what Bharathi and other till today call India "*Bharatha Desam*".

Times have changed here and elsewhere particularly in the Western countries with an unprecedented record of religious wars, and so religion organised and otherwise cannot be washed away under the canopy of Christian or Hindu, or Buddhist and Mohammendan cultures.

In education, whatever the scientific and technological wonders may hold in store for us in the future as at present, religion the root of all forms of education not a mere subject in the curriculum is a must that would sustain all forms of culture, whose commonness alone can make for national or world unity. The world of the future should realise the wisdom as inevitable in its history, past and present.

Foot Note

"The emancipated democracies have renounced the idea that the purpose of education is to transmit Western culture. Thus there is a cultural vacuum which has produced progressive disorder. For the more men have become separated from the spiritual heritage which binds them together, the more has education become egoist, careerist, socialist and a social."

-Walter Lippmann.



