

A tale of two nations – Part I

It is true that there are two nations living in Sri Lanka and the problems we face are due to this. However, the two nations are not Sinhala and Tamils or Sinhala and non Sinhala. They are sometimes referred to as patriots and non patriots, nationalists and non nationalists, English speaking pariahs and others, westernized and non westernized but it is very difficult to describe them using these labels. However, the presidential elections showed that the country voted as two nations or precisely as one nation and a large number of people following the minority that belong to the other nation, which is a tiny but powerful group of people governed by the west intellectually as well emotionally.

Almost all Sri Lankans have to go through the western education system which is imposed on us dictatorially. The westerners who make a hue and cry on choice on anything from underwear to undertakers are dictatorial when it comes to education. We have no choice but to follow the western system from Montessori to University. Thus “intellectually” we are all governed by the westerners unless we make a conscious effort to breakaway from the system. Whether one is an English speaking pariah, a Colombian or not most of us belong to the westernized group having washed our brains with western concepts and theories. The Liberals, Marxists, postmodernists, professionals, so called open minded people and of course intellectuals belong to this category even though they may fight among each other on some issue or other very often non existing. Today most of the nationalists would consult a western doctor even if their fathers had been Sinhala vedamahaththayas.

However, one good quality among human beings is that they cannot be affected emotionally purely by education. The education we receive is very superficial to most of us and even the so called specialists very often fall back on our culture when it comes to taking decisions on personal matters. If not for the ineffectiveness of education in general in this regard we would have voted for Sarath F(ailed) and he would have succeeded.

When the British established schools in Sri Lanka it was not for the good of the people of the country but for the good of the colonialists. The first chief school inspector of Sri Lanka or Ceylon (perhaps equivalent to the Director General of Education) was also the chief priest of the Anglican Church and it is needless to say that improving Sinhala Buddhist culture would have been furthest in his mind. The education as far as the British were concerned was a way of imposing the English Christian culture on those who attended not only the English schools as such but the Sinhala and Tamil schools as well.

However, it was the English school that was most affected by the British education as the medium of instruction plays a role in imposing (and cultivating) a culture. The curricular, co-curricular and extra curricular activities were all geared to impose the English Christian culture on us and with the privileges given to a few among the locals in professions and government jobs the English were able to create a class (though not in the Marxian sense) who would be absorbed into the English Christian culture. These people were English speaking pariahs, Colombians, *Kalusuddas* and what not. They were alienated from the Sinhala Buddhist culture or the Tamil Hindu culture as the case may be and very often were Anglican Christians in religion. The

English had displaced Sinhala Buddhist culture from prominence, dominance and significance in the country and replaced it with the English Christian culture. It was a displacement as well as a replacement and it is wrong to say in 1956 the Sinhala Buddhist culture displaced the English (or western) Christian culture. It was not a displacement as English Christian culture had no place in this country except by force. What happened in 1956 was a continuation of the movement of Anagarika Dharmapala after driven into oblivion for more than half a century as shown by Dr. Gunadasa Amarsekera.

In fact it has a history that goes even beyond the Dharmapala movement. Let us analyse what happened after 1505 (or 1506 as some Historians prefer). The Portuguese and the westerners in general were not only interested in economical and political control of the colonies. If it was the case then there is no need to speak of English speaking pariahs, Colombians and *Kalusuddas*. The western colonialism has three interdependent components the political, economical and cultural. The Portuguese tried to establish a class of people that had a different culture from the rest of the masses and to displace the Sinhala Buddhist culture. In fact they wanted to create another nation an alien nation that included the Portuguese who came from Portugal, which spoke Portuguese and was Portuguese Catholic in culture. It has to be remembered that they were successful to a certain extent and the lingua franca of the nation that succeeded this first alien nation even during the time the Dutch were here was Portuguese and not Dutch. Don Juan Dharmapala was the first Portuguese Catholic in culture in this country and he belonged to the alien Portuguese nation of the country. If the Portuguese were merely interested in trade and politics there was no need for them to create this alien nation that was different from the Sinhala nation whose culture was of course Sinhala Buddhist. The Portuguese displaced Sinhala Buddhist culture from the dominant, prominent and the significant position it held before the arrival of the Portuguese and replaced it with Portuguese Catholic culture by force in the maritime provinces. A tiny minority that belonged to the new alien nation ruled these areas using power and nothing but power of the gun.

From that time onwards the Sinhala wanted to claim the rightful position that they had held in the country for many centuries. It was not replacing Portuguese Catholic culture as that particular culture had no place in any part of the country except by force. The Dutch not only continued with the process but imported Vellalas from Coromandel Coast for their tobacco cultivation and created a subservient class of Tamils who spoke Dutch/Portuguese and was prepared to do the dirty work for the Dutch. A Tamil mudliyar was entrusted with writing *Yalpanam Vaipava Malai* a so called history book that could be used by the Dutch to claim the present eastern province from the Sinhala king. The present day Tamils do not have a history that goes beyond the sixteenth century. Not all these Tamils were absorbed into the new alien nation of Dutch with a Dutch Reformist Culture but the few who were absorbed were able to dominate the other Tamils with the Dutch behind them.

To cut a long story short after the English were able to occupy the interior of the Sinhala kingdom breaching the Sinhala English treaty of 1815 they were able to replace and strengthen this alien nation by an English speaking nation in the country as an alternative to the Sinhala nation with its Sinhala Buddhist culture. The new nation consisted mainly of British, Burghers initially and comprised the English speaking Anglican Tamils and Anglican Christians in that order. The Colombo

Academy was the cradle of this new nation, but it does not imply that all those who attended this school belonged to the new nation, Anagarika Dharmapala himself being one of the prominent exemptions. Most of the English speaking Catholics were also part of the alien nation. As we mentioned earlier education is not that effective in converting people into different cultures and conversions into religions is far more effective in this “nation building”. If one follows the present debates on so called non ethical conversions one would find how the opponents are divided along the lines of the two nations, the alien and the Sinhala (Buddhist). (To be continued)