

A tale of two nations – Part II

The word nation in this series does not imply the usual meaning of the word. What is described here is a situation where the nation that was living in this country before the Portuguese arrived, lost power to an alien nation initially in the maritime provinces and then in the whole country after 1815. The first alien nation to capture power was the Portuguese and if one were to say that there were no nations before the advent of capitalism we ignore that, as that particular definition leads to contradictions. The Portuguese were a nation and after capturing power in the maritime provinces, as the other colonial powers have done since then, tried to incorporate some locals into their nation.

The Portuguese had a culture, a language (*lingua franca*), a way of living and also a king in Lisbon, who could be called the Portuguese king. It is not necessary that the king should be of the same ethnic group as the people but he should be able to identify with the culture etc., of the people. The queen of England may not be English as far as puritans are concerned but she and her Windsor ancestors have identified themselves with the English people. For all purposes she is the English queen.

The Portuguese having arrived in Sri Lanka converted Don Juan to their culture and incorporated him into their nation. Don Juan Dharmapala became a Catholic, spoke Portuguese and accepted the Portuguese king as his king, and moreover going by the present day alienists would have given up his Sinhaleanness and perhaps felt ashamed to call himself a Sinhala person. Don Juan may have spoken Sinhala but the *lingua franca* of the alien nation in Sri Lanka was Portuguese. Don Juan was not the only Sinhala person to become a Portuguese Catholic and all such people belonged to the alien Portuguese nation.

The rest of the people in the maritime provinces continued to belong to the Sinhala nation, and of course there were different grades of “loyalties” among them to the Portuguese. Some became Catholics and/or took Portuguese names some spoke Portuguese at home with or without ignoring Sinhala and so on and so forth. Some of those who continued to belong to the Sinhala nation would have perhaps accepted the Portuguese king as their king but given half a chance would have preferred a Sinhala king to the Portuguese king. The line of demarcation between the Sinhala nation and the alien nation would have been not very sharp at some points but what is essential is that there was a group of people who considered them to be Portuguese than Sinhala. In any event it was the Portuguese nation that ruled over the Sinhala nation and the Portuguese nation in Sri Lanka (Seylan) did not comprise only the Portuguese from Portugal.

It is most probable that there were number of categories among those who comprised the Sinhala nation. One group would have been Sinhala both intellectually and emotionally while some of them would have followed the locals who had been incorporated into the Portuguese nation. Then there would have been others who were intellectually Portuguese but Sinhala emotionally. These concepts would become clear when we consider the present population after being subjugated by the English. Incidentally the word British just camouflages the English dominance among the non English people living in what is now known as Britain.

The Dutch continued with the project of the Portuguese but they were more concerned with establishing schools thinking that it was effective in converting people to their culture and incorporating the latter into their nation. However, as we have said previously schools are not very effective and during the period the Dutch were here the *lingua franca* among the locals, some of whom who became alienated, was Portuguese and not Dutch. The Portuguese would have mixed with the people and introduced their *bailas* and *kapirinnas* to the locals through interactions. The alien nation created by the Dutch would have consisted of the Dutch from Holland (Netherlands) whose *lingua franca* was Dutch and locals whose *lingua franca* was Portuguese. However the *lingua franca* of the entire Dutch nation would have been Dutch. This is not to say that there was no Dutch influence on the Sinhala culture but in spite of schools established by the Dutch, the influence of the Portuguese on the Sinhala was much more than that of the Dutch.

The English were the most influential as they were the “better” schemers among the European nations. They knew how to colonise the Irish, Scots and the Welsh, absorbing them into their nation lately without giving the impression they were being colonised. The English would have called the process unification making English the *lingua franca* of the British Isles. In Sri Lanka also they carried out the same strategy with success that the Dutch could not achieve.

The English nation in Sri Lanka at the beginning comprised mainly the English and some Scots (especially among the planters), Welsh and Irish. Then there were the Burghers who adopted English as the *lingua franca*. They all had a more or less similar culture and all accepted the king of England as their king without any reservation. The Tamils and Sinhala in that order who were incorporated into the English nation had English as the *lingua franca* and had absorbed the mannerisms of the English. They would have been educated at the so called English schools of the government, the Anglican Church and the other churches such as the Catholic and the Methodist. The pride of place was given to the government College initially known as Colombo Academy and then Royal College and then to the schools of the Anglican Church. However, it does not mean that all the boys who attended these schools ended up as members of the English nation and there were many who retained their Sinhala and Tamilness emotionally even though they might have ended up as English intellectually. It was those Sinhala and Tamils who became English both intellectually and emotionally who were incorporated into the English nation beside the “original” English from England and its colonies Scotland, Wales and Ireland and most of the Burghers. There were some Burghers who had a sympathy for the locals and they would have been neither English nor non English.

The Sinhala who had become English in their culture, adopted English as the *lingua franca*, become Anglicans in religion and had ignored Sinhala and the Sinhala people, and very often had contempt for anything Sinhala were rewarded by the English for their loyalty would have become “equals” of the English and would have mixed with the governor and his officers at official and other functions. They would have ashamed to be called Sinhala even by mistake. They were alienated from the Sinhala culture and though some of their off springs would have picked up Sinhala could not become Sinhala emotionally and very often make mistakes in referring and addressing the Mahanayake Theras and also referring to Bhikkus. Though some Sinhala who have become English intellectually but not emotionally may refer to

Bhikkus as Buddhist Priests, they are very unlikely to refer to some “Peviddas” who met “Mahanayake”. (To be continued)