

A tale of two nations – Part IX

The Sinhala nation that came into existence at the time of King Pandukabhaya evolved with time absorbing more people of the Yaksha tribe and also others who came from abroad from time to time. However, the Vedda tribe remained outside the Sinhala nation, which did not force the former to be incorporated into the nation. It appears that the absorption into the Sinhala nation has stopped with large scale immigration from the South of Bharat after about the twelfth century. The Tamil speaking Muslims could not be descendants of Arab fathers and Sinhala mothers as claimed by some, for the simple reason if it was the case they would have spoken either Sinhala or Arabic and not Tamil. Even if we assume that they spoke Sinhala or Arabic first and then switched over to Tamil due to some influx of Tamil speaking Muslims from South Bharat at least some Sinhala speaking Muslims should have survived in some parts of Sinhale as Sri Lanka was called then (The present day Sinhala speaking Muslims are descendants of “Malay” people who were brought to this country by the Dutch). In any event the Tamil speaking Muslims who would have wanted to retain their Muslim culture would not have volunteered to be absorbed into the Sinhala nation. The Sinhala on their part would not have forced the Muslims to become part of the Sinhala nation as in the case of the Vedda tribe.

The Sinhala Buddhists unlike the Western Christians (including the Catholics) and the Muslims themselves have not fought wars to convert people of other cultures to their culture, and it helped the Muslims to remain as Muslims until the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka. The Muslims though they did not become Sinhala did not go against the latter until some of them were influenced by the English to do so in the nineteenth century. They fought on the side of the Sinhala against the invading westerners and when the Portuguese harassed the Muslims it was the Sinhala king who settled them down in the present eastern province. The English were more subtle and knew how to create dissension among the Muslims against the Sinhala and even today it is mainly the English educated Muslims who complain of so called discrimination by the Sinhala against the Muslims. While there are so many Sinhala Buddhists who are not selected to the Sri Lankan cricket team on a regular basis some Muslims would make it a point to shout discrimination when two particular Muslim players are not selected for the team. I myself would have liked to see one of them playing regularly for Sri Lanka as he happens to be the son of a friend of mine and also a friend of my son. It is time that Muslims revert back to the pre English days and fight against western cultural, political and economical colonialism on the side of the Sinhala nation without being pawns in the hands of the westerners who are determined to wipe out Muslim and Buddhist cultures from the surface of the earth if possible.

In this series of articles we consider the history of the Tamils and the Muslims in so far as they have been used by the westerners against the Sinhala nation, on the side of what we call the alien nation. The Muslims were first used by the British to help the Tamil elite to dominate the Sinhala and the former were considered as Tamil when it came to representation in the Legislature. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Mr. Ponnambalam Ramanathan claimed that he was the representative of the Muslims as well

in the Legislative Assembly. This was opposed by the Muslims and later a Muslim was appointed to represent the Muslim community in the legislature. After more than a century the leadership of the alien nation in the UNP following the English “is mooting the idea of setting up a Tamil Unit within the party to benefit the Tamil and Muslim communities. A proposal to this effect has been submitted by Tamil party representatives, and party Treasurer D.M. Swaminathan is tipped to head the body,” according to the secretary of the party. We do not know how the Muslims would react to this proposal but it clearly shows the way the leadership of the UNP is thinking.

The Tamils in this country do not have a history going before the seventeenth century in the sense that the present day Tamils in the northern province are descendants of the Tamils who were brought by the Dutch for their tobacco cultivation. Even in the nineteenth century there were Sinhallas in the Jaffna peninsula and the so called Arya Chakravarthi kingdom of Jaffna was not a Tamil kingdom as such. It was only a dynastic kingdom of sea pirates and the inhabitants were Sinhallas as well as Malayalams from Kerala together with some Tamils. I have written on this topic number of times and the fact that the Tamil spoken in Jaffna peninsula is not very much different from the Tamil spoken in Tamil Nadu in general gives ample testimony to the fact that the separation of the Tamils in Jaffna from the Tamils in Tamil Nadu in general has not taken place more than three hundred and fifty years ago.

It is neither the Tamils nor the Muslims that draw our attention but the alien nation that has been established in this country by the Portuguese, Dutch and the English finally. This alien nation has been established only with the purpose of depriving the Sinhala nation and the Sinhala culture their due place in the country. The Burghers were given the leadership of this nation in the beginning who wanted to create artificially the Ceylonese nation. However, as we have stated it was an aborted nation and though some of those belonging to the alien nation still try to resurrect the aborted nation by the name of a Sri Lankan nation with equal status for all cultures, it is a non starter.

The English gave more privileges to this alien nation that consisted of Burghers, elite Tamils and elite Sinhallas in that order. Thus the Burghers enjoyed privileges that neither reflected their population nor the contribution to the culture of the country. However, very soon it became clear that Burghers could not provide the leadership to the alien nation that the English expected and an elite Tamil family was given prominence and made to be the leaders of the alien nation. The elite Tamils have been used by the English not only against the Sinhala nation but even against the elite Sinhallas who were members of the alien nation.

The antagonisms between the elite Sinhallas and the elite Tamils in the early part of the twentieth century were over this and the English on their part did the mistake of giving Sri Lanka universal suffrage towards the end of the twenties. When a senior citizen who pontificates the virtues of so called scientific stated last Sunday that universal suffrage was a cause for “winning” free education I had to think hard on the scientific method practiced by him. It is very clear among all the countries that “enjoy” universal suffrage at present it is in Sri Lanka and may be in a few other countries that there is free

education from the kindergarten to the university. I do not believe that there is a so called scientific method but I think if Mr. A Ratnayake proposed free education it was not merely to win a few votes that he did so. The senior citizens are forgetful of the past of this country where we had “free education” for all in Pirivenas and perhaps Mr. Ratnayake was influenced by this cultural heritage more than Mr. Kannangara. I give this as an example to show how some people even today attempt to give credit to Donomourgh and his colleague and Sydney Webb even on a thing like free education ignoring the Sinhala Buddhist culture of the country while pretending to be champions of that culture.