

Inauguration of English education in Sri Lanka was one of the most important recommendations of Colebrooke. Employment of Englishmen to run the administration of the country necessitated the payment of large salaries to them. Therefore, Colebrooke intended to provide English education to Sri Lankans, employ them at low salaries and thereby reduce government expenditure. This enabled the natives to get an English education and hold government posts under the British. In this manner, the group of people who received English education later became a class of persons who embraced European culture and despised the traditional culture of the nation. Through this step, they became a separate, distinct elite class.

A large number of schools had been opened up in the south west and northern coastal areas that provided education. Education in these institutions was provided without any caste considerations. Therefore, in addition to the urban upper classes, the families that could afford to send their children to these schools were in a position to secure employment in both state and private sectors for them. In the coastal areas, this system of education made it possible for the so called low castes to utilise this education to secure high positions. The emergence of an English educated middle class consisting of this group of learned persons who held high posts in the government and engaged in other professions was an outstanding development in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This group of people who faithfully followed European customs and manners increased their wealth by the sale of arrack under the tender system and by providing transport services. Businessmen who came to the Kandyan areas from the low country earned huge incomes through the provision of transport facilities needed by the plantation sector and clearing of forests, constructing buildings etc.

By the time of the first two three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they had contributed to the tea and rubber plantations and the Sri Lanka's large scale coconut plantations virtually belonged to this Sri Lankan middle class. This is proved by the fact that almost all the plantations within the famous 'coconut triangle' comprising the area within the triangle joining Negombo, Chilaw and Kurunegala were virtually owned by Sri Lankans. Persons who had amassed huge fortunes from the graphite industry also occupied leading positions in this class. They used their wealth to provide higher education to their children. The English education they received enabled them to receive education in British universities. Therefore, by about the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a native middle class came into being. They comprised those persons who had amassed wealth due to the economic activities of the British and those who became 'English educated' as a result of the English education they had received.

Although it had wealth and education, this middle class had no corresponding political power. Administration was still in the hands of the British. This group of people, who were born as a result of European administration and western orientation due to the English education, became a new social force. In the subsequent period, they began to engage themselves in a movement aimed at securing political power through a display of their strength. Accordingly, in the subsequent period, they carried out an agitation for constitutional reforms with the objective of securing political power.

## Labour Movement

Under the traditional system of government, labour requirements for common services of the government were met by the compulsory non paid labour contributed by the people through the Rajakariya. Persons resident in the country provided several days of free service every year for the government activities such as the construction of tanks and canals, repairing of channels, construction of roads and their maintainance.

However, this system underwent a change under the British with the establishment of plantations in this country, and system of selling one's labour for money came into being. The British took steps to obtain labour through the payment of wages instead of obtaining free non paid labour. Yet, the people of this country, who had been accustomed to a free style of life, resented paid labour as a degrading practice. Therefore, it became difficult to obtain the labour needed for plantations from this country. Accordingly, labourers from South India were obtained to work on the coffee and tea plantations in the central mountains.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became necessary to obtain labour to perform different types of services in cities such as Colombo, Kandy and Galle. Labour was needed in cities to perform activities such as loading and unloading of goods, washing clothes, driving carts etc. While the South Indian labourers were engaged on the estates, the labour requirements of cities were met by the locals who got attracted to urban areas. In this way, the South Indian labourers were concentrated on the plantations. They lived as a separate community within the society of Sri Lanka and did not mix with the local labour.

The labour class consisted of workers who performed heavy work for a very low wage both on the estates and in the cities. From this time, they began to develop as two distinctly different sections as urban labour and Indian labour.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the urban middle class began to agitate for their rights. Since this class originated with Colombo as its centre which was also the centre of administration and commerce, agitation by the working class also sprang in Colombo. The Printers' Strike of 1893 could be considered as the first instance of a struggle that took the form of a workers' struggle. In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the workers organised several strikes with the support of the middle class.

The chief of which were:

- \* Carters' strike
- \* Strike at the Wellawatta weaving and spinning mills.
- \* Launderers' strike

Ceylon Printers' Association that came into being during this period, can be considered as the first trade union of Sri Lanka. In the subsequent period, trade union organisations of various professionals began to emerge and during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, strikes based on various rights became a common occurrence. Agitation for improvement of working conditions and better wages began during the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The leader of this movement was A.E. Gunasinghe.

Some time later, the estate labourers began to organise trade unions. This movement started in 1935 under the leadership of a person named Nateser Aiyer. At this time, young members of the middle class influenced by Marxist teachings during their time of education in England, returned to Sri Lanka and began to organise the working class. Lanka Samasamaja Party was founded in about 1935 under the leadership of persons such as Philip Gunawardane, Dr. S.A. Wickramasinghe and Dr. N.M. Perera. Subsequently, they established trade unions among both urban and estate labourers and pioneered the organisation of the working class.



**Figure 2.9 A.E. Gunasinghe**



**Figure 2.10 Dr. S.A. Wickramasinghe**

## Student Activities

- \* Collect information related to the way in which a middle class arose in Sri Lanka.
- \* Answer the following binary choice questions related to the birth and expansion of the working class under the British.
  1. The main system of labour that existed in 1800 was the system based on wages / a system based on compulsory labour.
  2. What was implemented in 1833 was a system based on wages / a system of compulsory labour.
  3. Indian labourers who were brought to Sri Lanka from 1833 lived predominantly in towns/on estates.
  4. Native workers provided labour mostly in cities/on estates.
  5. The first leader of the urban workers was A.E. Gunasinghe/ Dr. N.M. Perera.
  6. The person who first gave leadership to the estate labour was Nateser Aiyer/Dr. S.A. Wickramasinghe.
  7. The first political party that organised the working class was the United National Party/Lanka Samasamaja Party.
  8. In the working class struggles in Sri Lanka it did/did not receive the co-operation of the middle class.
  9. The first stike was the strike of Colombo Printers/Wellawatta weaving and spinning mills.
  10. Estate workers began to establish trade unions in 1835/1935.

## National Movement

The national movement of Sri Lanka had its beginnings in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It operated in the country as religious and cultural movements and political movements. As a result of the Colebrooke Cameron reforms, subsistent system of agriculture that prevailed in the country disintegrated and a plantation based economic system began to spread in the island. Under these conditions, the planters began to organise in order to meet their needs and set up the Ceylon League in 1865 for this purpose. This organisation provided the precedents for the agitation movements conducted to win the rights of the natives.

The national movement of Sri Lanka consists of two sections namely, the national renaissance movement that began in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the agitation for constitutional reform that has its beginnings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Swabhasha educated persons organised themselves to bring about a religious and cultural revival while the English educated classes began to agitate for political power.

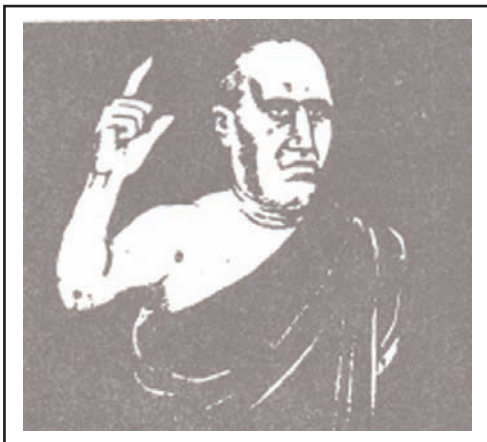
## Religious and Cultural Renaissance

During the British rule, educational activities in this country were led by the missionary organisations. Spreading Christianity in this country as much as possible and conversion of the natives to Christianity were the two objectives of missionaries. Christian priests learned indigenous languages and conducted education in missionary schools through those languages. Books on Christianity were printed in Sinhala and Tamil and were distributed in missionary schools. These activities posed a threat to the traditional religions of the country, leading to their decline. The government did not support Swabhasha education, but provided patronage to missionary schools. Therefore, the Swabhasha schools began to decline. Sections of the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities who realised the onslaught on their religions and culture, began to organise various movements from about 1860, to revive their religions and cultures.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were several Buddhist priests who pioneered a Buddhist renaissance.

Following are important among them:

- ✧ Venerable Walane Siddhartha Thero established the Parama Dhamma Chetiya Pirivena at Ratmalana in 1939.
- ✧ Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thero founded the Vidyodaya Pirivena at Maligakanda in 1873.
- ✧ Venerable Ratmalane Dharmaloka Thero founded the Viyalankara Pirivena at Peliyagoda in 1875.
- ✧ Venerable Migettuwatte Gunananda Thero led the famous Pancha Maha Vada (great fivefold debate)



**Figure 2.11 Venerable Migettuwatte Gunananda Thero**



**Figure 2.12 Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thero**

## **Venerable Migettuwatte Gunananda Thero**

Realising the emergence of a Buddhist revival under the Buddhist monks, Christian rulers and priests attempted to put down this force. The Buddhist Bhikkhus had to engage in various debates with Christians to highlight the importance of Buddhism. The Buddhist Bhikkhus of that time had to challenge the Christian priests by holding debates at places such as:



**Figure 2.13 D.B. Jayatilake**

- \* Baddegama - 1864
- \* Waragoda - 1865
- \* Udammita - 1866
- \* Gampola - 1871
- \* Panadura - 1873

Of special significance among these debates is the Panadura debate conducted by Venarable Migettuwattee Gunananda Thero. As a result of these debates, a Buddhist renaissance began to emerge throughout the country.

Henry Steel Olcott, an American national who had come to know about the Panadura debate from newspapers became convinced the value of Buddhism, came to Sri Lanka and embraced Buddhism. The honour of laying the foundation for organized system of Buddhist education in Sri Lanka goes to him. He arrived in Sri Lanka in 1880, established the Buddhist Theosophical Society and through that organisation, established Buddhist schools. Among the important services performed by him are the following:



**Figure 2.14 Henry Steel Olcott**

- \* Establishment of the Buddhist Theosophical Society and the founding of Buddhist schools such as Ananda, Nalanda, Dharmaraja and Mahinda under its patronage.
- \* Launch of the ‘Sarasavi Sandaresa’ newspaper and through that publication bringing about unity among the Buddhists.
- \* Opening of Sunday Daham Schools.
- \* Contributing to the declaration of Wesak day as a public holiday.
- \* Setting up of girls’ schools such as Vishaka and Museus.



**Figure 2.15 Piyadasa Sirisena**

Establishment of Buddhist schools in many parts of the island led to the creation of a sense of national consciousness among the Buddhists of Sri Lanka. This led to a significant enthusiasm about the Sinhala Language, customs and manners and the history of the country.

After Sir Olcott, the leadership in the Buddhist renaissance passed into the hands of young leaders like,



**Figure 2.16 Walisingha Harischandra**

Anagarika Dharmapala

Walisinghe Harischandra

D.B. Jayathilake

Arthur V. Dias

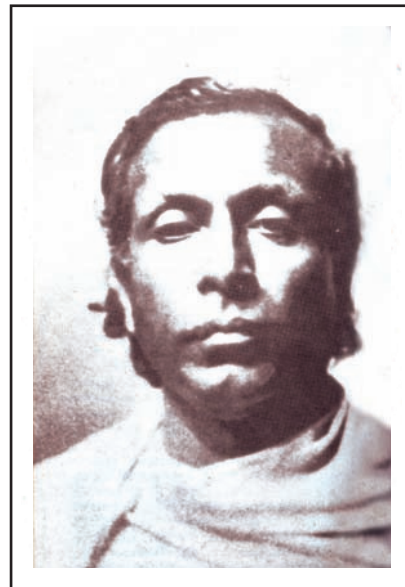
Piayadasa Sirisena

Amadoris Mendis

R.A. Mirando

D.A. Hewawitharana

Among these persons, Anagarika Dharmapala who was the chief follower of Sir Olcott can be considered as the most important person of the renaissance. He made a great effort to revive the national pride that had been destroyed by foreign domination. Attempts made by him to ensure international fame for Buddhism here and abroad is extremely praiseworthy. For this purpose, he travelled in foreign countries as well. He acted with great commitment to save Buddha Gaya and strived hard to create self confidence and pride among the Buddhists and to bring national feelings to the forefront. Mahabodhi Society started by Anagarika Dharmapala in 1890 and the Young Men's Buddhist Society founded by D.B. Jayathilake in 1898 were two powerful organisations that strengthened the forward march of the Buddhist renaissance.



**Figure 2.17 Anagarika Dharmapala**



## Hindu Revival

The Hindus also organised themselves to face the challenges posed by Christian missionary education. As a result of this, a Hindu religious revival came into being. There was a fear that the education imparted through schools maintained by Christian missionaries would lead to the destruction of Hindu culture and the traditional customs and manners of the people. This resulted in the rise of movements against missionary education among the Hindus. Leadership of this Hindu renaissance was taken by Arumuga Navalar.



**Figure 2.18 Arumuga Navalar**

Navalar, who had received a Christian education had translated the Bible into Tamil with a Christian priest named Percival. Subsequently, he strived very hard to protect Hinduism while replying to the attacks on Hinduism through publications by the Christian missionaries. He took steps to expound the importance of the great heritage of his people and the religion of Saivism. He established an English school at Pannai in Jaffna which came to be known as Hindu College. The Saiva Prakasha Sabai started in 1853 rendered a great service in creating a national revival among the Hindus.



**Figure 2.19 Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan**

Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan is also one of the persons who performed a great service for the revival of Hinduism. He was a leader who had won the respect and admiration of not only the Tamil people but also of the Sinhalese. He acted with great commitment and dedication to secure the freedom of the Sinhala leaders who had been kept in custody without trial during the Sinhala- Muslim riots of 1915. The service rendered to the Hindu revival by this leader who founded the Paramesvara College and Ramanathan College from his personal funds is really commendable.

## Islamic Revival

In parallel with the Sinhala and Hindu renaissance in Sri Lanka, a cultural resurgence also came into being among the Muslims. M.C. Siddhi Lebbe pioneered the creation of pride and a renaissance of the language and religion of the Muslims. At a time when the Muslim population was not very much interested in education, the activities of Lebbe helped to a great extent to generate enthusiasm for education among them. He encouraged the Muslims to study both English and Arabic. He acted for the reorganisation of the Muslim religious schools known as 'Madrassa'. In 1882, Zahira College was started at Maradana under his leadership. A school for Muslim girls was also founded in Kandy. He pioneered the founding of the Colombo Muslim Education Society and took steps to regenerate Muslim culture by the launch of two newspapers 'Muslim Nation' and 'Gnana Deepam'.



**Figure 2.20 M.C. Siddhi Lebbe**

At a time when the indigenous religions, languages and cultures were facing a decline, Siddhi Lebbe pioneered a religious and a cultural revival among the Muslims and provided a valuable patronage to the national movement of this country.

T.B. Jaya is also one of the persons who contributed to the revival of Muslim education and culture. He tried to convince the Muslim Community the importance of education in his articles published in the magazine "Ceylon Muslim Review", initiated in 1914. Zahira College is the living example of the immortal service he has rendered to the Muslim Community. He became the Principal of Zahira College in 1921, and worked for the betterment of the Muslim Community from 1936 - 1947 as a member of the State Council appointed by the Governor and in 1947 as the Minister of Labour and Social Service.

### Student Activity

- \* Prepare a booklet containing information about Sinhala, Hindu and Muslim leaders who pioneered the religious and cultural renaissance in Sri Lanka.