

EDUCATION IN CEYLON

# School Commissions of Ceylon 1834-1867

## *A Discussion of their Educational Policy*

ALTHOUGH the educational reforms recommended by the Colebrooke Commission<sup>1</sup> were accepted by the Secretary of State, and the Governor of the Colony was instructed "to put into force the suggestions of the Commissioners at the earliest opportunity"<sup>2</sup> no tangible alterations were made to the existing system of government schools for the following two years. In the absence of any change, the Archdeacon who was also the Principal of schools and King's Visitor, continued to be in charge of the Government Schools Establishment.

The Parish schools<sup>3</sup> which were the only kind of schools the government maintained in the villages (or the parishes) dwindled gradually and by 1883 they almost ceased to exist.<sup>4</sup> The cause for the failure of Parish schools can be attributed to the recognition of English as the lingua franca of the country. The Parish schools, primarily being vernacular schools soon found no place when the cry for English education was gaining momentum. The decision of the Colebrooke Commission to make English the official language, and to convert the existing schools into English schools expedited the dissolution of the Parish schools.

The Academy or Seminary,<sup>5</sup> which was as a matter of fact the only English school of the Government, also faced the same calamity. The Rev. J. P. Horsford who had been the principal of the Academy since 1831 was succeeded by J. C. Arndt, who in turn gave up the appointment to enter priesthood in 1833. The Academy by this time had been reduced to a small establishment described as the Hulftdorp school. With Arndt's departure J. A. Hesse became the principal. The removal of the Sinhalese

1. For a description of the recommendations of the Colebrooke Commission, see Ranjit Ruberu, *Education in Colonial Ceylon*, Kandy Printers, Ltd. 1962. pp. 248-257.

2. C. O. (Colonial Office, London, Records) 55, 74, Letter of Secretary of State to Horton, 14 September, 1832.

3. Ranjit Ruberu, op. cit., pp. 59-64, also pp. 229-234.

4. L. J. Gratiæn, *The First School Commission (1832-1841)*, Colombo Historical Association Pamphlet 11.

5. Ranjit Ruberu. op. cit., p. 234.

master of the school to Moratuwa, to be in-charge of a newly established government school under the Chaplain there, left Hesse as the sole teacher during the last years of its existence.

### **The School Commission (1834—1841) and its educational Policy**

The implementation of the recommendations of the Colebrooke Commission on educational reforms commenced only after the arrival in the Island of Sir Robert Wilmot Horton<sup>6</sup> as the Governor. The first act in the direction of educational reform was the appointment of a School Commission on the lines recommended in the Colebrooke Commission report. The School Commission, so established by a gazette notification of 19th May 1834, was comprised of the following members: the Archdeacon (President), the Treasurer to the government, the Auditor-General, The Government Agent of the Western Province and the Clergy (of the established Church) resident in Colombo. Provision was made for the Governor to nominate additional members, "not exceeding half the number of official members as may appear expedient".<sup>7</sup> Subordinate committees were also established in the four principal towns of Kandy, Galle, Jaffna and Trincomalee. These sub-committees had the Government Agent of the Province as the President with the District Judge and resident Clergy (of the established Church) as the other members.

The duty of the School Commission in Colombo was "to supervise the school establishment generally throughout the Island" and, to advise the Governor on "the measures they consider it expedient to adopt for the establishment of efficient schools and for the extension of education".<sup>8</sup> The outstation sub-committees were to advise the School Commission in Colombo "upon the efficiency and management" of schools in their respective areas.

The School Commission was also entrusted with the responsibility of distributing whatever money the government was to appropriate for purposes of education in the provinces. The sub-committees therefore were given the authority only of superintending the working and the financial management of the schools in their areas. The appointment of teachers was to be done on the recommendation of the Commission and the basic qualification of schoolmasters for appointment was that they "possess a

6. Sir Robert John Wilmot Horton (1784-1841) was the Governor of Ceylon from 1831 to 1837.

7. Ceylon Government Gazette, 19th May, 1834. In December 1836, the Governor nominated J. J. Stork, L. de Livera and S. H. Dias to the Commission.

8. Ceylon Government Gazette of 19th May, 1834.

competent knowledge of English".<sup>9</sup> This apparently was designed for the purpose of popularising English education in the country, as had been recommended by the Colebrooke Commission.

The progress made by the Commission during the first few years was rather slow, and for some time since it began to function there was no record of any noteworthy achievement to its credit. Although the number of government schools went up from fifteen to thirtynine<sup>10</sup> there is no record of any systematic work being carried out by the School Commission. No regular meetings were held, and it is significant that its first report—which proved to be also its last—was published only after the appointment of the Rev. Joseph Marsh as its Secretary in August, 1835.

This report attributed the Commission's tardiness in the expansion of education to the "difficulty of obtaining suitable masters".<sup>11</sup> Since the appointment of Marsh as Secretary, the Commission showed signs of activity. One significant work of the School Commission during the tenure of Marsh, was the adoption of a Code of rules and regulations framed for the guidance of the sub-committees and the school masters employed by the Commission, for the implementation of which Marsh was held responsible.<sup>12</sup> These Rules and Regulations which were enforced with a view to "ensure a uniform system of Government schools"<sup>13</sup> included the following :

1. All government schools were under the School Commission, but it was desirable to consider Chaplains as invested ex-officio with the supervision of the schools in the areas where they functioned.
2. In the absence of a Chaplain the Assistant Government Agent and the District Judge of the area to be the superintendents of the schools.
3. New schools were to be established by the Government only on condition that :
  - (a) the people of the area asked for them,
  - (b) the attendance of at least forty to fifty children was assured, and
  - (c) some government officers residing in the area would superintend the school.

9. See Ranjit Ruberu, op. cit., pp. 251-255.

10. First Report of the School Commission, 1835.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *The Ceylon Chronicle*, 24 July, 1837.

13. L. J. Gratiaen—*The First School Commission, 1834-1841*. Colombo Historical Association, Pamphlet 11.

4. The School Commission (in the case of the Western Province) and the sub-committees (in the other provinces) should examine schoolmasters before appointment.
5. Salaries of schoolmasters were to be fixed by the School Commission or the sub-committees.

It is apparent that the purpose of enforcing such rules was to secure for the Commission a greater control over the management of Government schools and school masters. Nevertheless, there is no indication of the regulations being seriously applied.

A change in the mode of paying salaries to schoolmasters was introduced in June 1837. The practice hitherto was to pay them a monthly salary with no check on the work they had done. The Commission now decided to pay the salary in two parts, described as Fixed and Contingent. The fixed salary was a monthly amount to which every school-master was entitled irrespective of the condition of the school or the work he did. The contingent salary, on the other hand, was paid only on the recommendation of the examiners appointed for the purpose of superintending government schools.<sup>14</sup> This required a regular system of examining schools which in all probability the Commission could not organise.

It is evident that, the Commission worked under stress and strain, primarily due to lack of personal harmony among its members. For instance the Archdeacon, the Ven'ble J. M. S. Glenie, was not in favour of the appointment of Marsh as the Secretary of the Commission. He made personal accusations against Marsh on irregularities in the conduct of meetings.<sup>15</sup> There was again friction with regard to accounts. The Archdeacon upheld the view that as King's Visitor he was empowered to deal with the accounts of the Commission. The Commission, however, did not accept this claim and the Governor had to issue a minute superseding the power of interference with the administration of the Commission which the Archdeacon claimed to possess as the King's Visitor. He too resigned from the Commission, apparently owing to such disputes. Missionary rivalry, chiefly due to the exclusive representation on the Commission accorded to the Clergy of the established Church, also hampered its activities.

14. *Ibid.*

15. At a meeting held in January 1837, Glenie complained that a notice of the meeting was not sent to him. Marsh's explanation was not accepted by the Commission and this led to his resignation.

Although there were such shortcomings, the founding and maintenance of schools under the Commission continued. English schools increased in number, whereas the vernacular schools decreased.<sup>16</sup> The policy of government being to spread English education, it is not surprising to see a decrease in the number of government vernacular schools.

The establishment of a College in Colombo, which the Colebrooke Commission had recommended, materialised only in January 1836, two years after the creation of the School Commission. The college was started under the name Colombo Academy,<sup>17</sup> by taking over for that purpose a private school which had been conducted by Marsh in Colombo.<sup>18</sup> The college started to function as two schools under one roof—a Preparatory school and a higher or Classical school. It was popular from the start and soon gained considerable prestige locally.

Judging on the progress of education in the country during the period, it can be concluded that the School Commission did not justify its existence. Opinion gained ground that it was not functioning properly and Governor Mackenzie's own observations bear testimony to this — "having for the last two years made anxious inquiry into the state of education generally in the Island, I cannot undertake to say that the machinery set in motion under the School Commission is altogether adequate for that great work".<sup>19</sup>

Several reasons can be suggested as factors responsible for the failure of the School Commission. In the first instance the Commission was formed of government servants whose primary responsibilities were elsewhere rather than in the administration of schools. Such officers could not devote the time and effort the Commission required to function as an able administrative body. The fact that meetings were not held regularly or when held had to be adjourned due to lack of a quorum showed the defect of having "an unpaid and irresponsible Board"<sup>20</sup> to undertake the running of government schools.

16. By 1841 there were 38 English schools and 39 Vernacular schools under the Commission. Thus the number of Vernacular schools had decreased from the 97 Parish Schools the Government maintained to 39. See Ranjit Ruberu, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

17. The Colombo Academy was the fore-runner of present day Royal College.

18. After leaving the secretaryship of the School Commission in January 1836, Marsh opened this private school.

19. Governor Mackenzie's address to the Legislative Council, 16th December, 1839.

20. Evidence of John F. Dickson, to the Sub-Committee of the Legislative Council (the Morgan Committee), 15th May 1866.

A situation where clergymen of the established Church alone were represented made the Commission too narrow in composition, and this brought severe criticism from other religious sects in the country. Very often the government schools were looked upon not as State Schools but as Anglican Schools. Petty quarrels and conflicts between the Anglican clergy who ran the schools, and those of other denominations<sup>21</sup> rendered the Commission a battle field. Only an even representation of the clergy of different sects as well as an adequate section of the laity could give satisfaction.

### **Governor Mackenzie's Attempted Reforms**

Dissatisfaction with the working of the School Commission prompted Mackenzie to introduce several reforms to the existing machinery of school administration. In his address to the Legislative Council on the 16th of August 1839, he indicated the impracticability of abolishing the School Commission without the approval of the Home Government, even though he was convinced of its inefficiency, and that, with the intention of remedying the existing situation he had communicated with the Bishop of Madras on the question of organising education in Ceylon.<sup>22</sup> On a subsequent occasion he reported to the Legislative Council: "I was placed in communication with the Bishop of Madras, since his Lordship's arrival in India, in this all-important and interesting subject—the general education of the natives of Ceylon . . . the results of the communications between the Bishop of Madras and myself . . . have proved on the whole to be very favourable."<sup>23</sup> Described in brief, the reforms suggested by Mackenzie included the following :

1. "The establishment of a Translating Committee of educational and elementary works in Sinhalese and Tamil." This is an indication of the importance he attached to teaching in the vernacular languages.
2. The establishment of Normal-Schools for training teachers, one each for Sinhalese and Tamil. ". . . To plant these seminaries for training masters," he declared, "will be an invaluable gift to the colony, leading to the indefinite improvement of education by not only teaching the masters the branches of learning and science they are now deficient in, but (also), . . . by instructing them in . . . the didactic Art—

21. G. C. Mendis, *Ceylon Under the British*, Colombo Apothecaries Co. Ltd., 1944, p. 44.

22. Governor's address to the Legislative Council, 16th December, 1839.

23. Governor Mackenzie's address to the Legislative Council 17th November, 1840.

the mode of imparting to others knowledge which they have or may acquire, the method of training and dealing with children in all that regards both temper, capacity, and habits".<sup>24</sup>

3. "The appointment of a superintendent to visit the schools under the Government Commission all over the Island, .. upon which appointment .. the success of the whole attempt to extend universal instruction will very much depend; for besides transmitting to the Commission regular and accurate reports of the state of each school, it will form no unimportant part of the visiting superintendent's duty to assist the Commission in the selection of places for founding schools, where they do not exist or improving them where already established, which can be alone adequately accomplished by his constant visiting and inspections."

4. "... to select from the Colombo Academy two scholars to be educated and maintained at Bishop's College, Calcutta<sup>25</sup> at the expense of Colonial revenue."<sup>26</sup>

These measures could have brought about significant improvements in the administration of schools as well as the quality of work done in them. By appointing a superintendent to examine schools in the manner suggested in the third clause above, work in schools could have been watched more closely.

A majority of schoolmasters employed by government were not competent to teach. This was the opinion of conditions several years later expressed by the Inspector of schools, W. J. Sendall. His comment was "there being no facilities for learning the profession of a teacher, and no such thing as a class of trained teachers, our ranks are necessarily recruited from men of an inferior stamp. . . unhappily my experience forbids me to doubt that a great deal of conscious incompetence exists among the teachers".<sup>27</sup> Governor Mackenzie's proposal to establish Normal Schools as training colleges for teachers was a valuable step to remedy this situation.

In spite of Mackenzie's foresight and enthusiasm no improvement in the working of government schools could be made as long as the School

24. *Ibid.*

25. The idea of sending students to the Bishop's College, Calcutta, was envisaged earlier by Governor Barnes in 1823. See Ranjit Ruberu, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

26. Governor Mackenzie's address to the Legislative Council, 17th November, 1840.

27. Sessional Paper VIII of 1867.

Commission remained the centre of control. Disappointments and controversies on the composition of the Commission prevailed both within and without the Commission. The public viewed with suspicion the policy of leaving the management of government schools to the authority of a Board which was dominated by clergymen of the established Church alone. Apart from the regrettable events which occurred from time to time, the endeavours of the Commission did not justify its further continuation.

### **The Central School Commission (1841 – 1867) and its educational Policy**

The disorganised state of the School Commission was notorious and it was revealed that the success of any reforms to be introduced to the Commission “depended on depriving the Archdeacon and the chaplains of Control,” in the Commission.<sup>28</sup> The situation continued to deteriorate and a dissolution of the School Commission became inevitable. Accordingly, “in March 1841 at the very close of his government, Governor Mackenzie issued a minute dissolving the Commission and substituting one of nine members appointed by himself”.<sup>29</sup>

The minute of 27th March 1841 dissolved the School Commission and created the Central School Commission “for the education of the population of Ceylon”. The Central School Commission was to be composed of “not exceeding nine members, three of whom . . . (were) to be, a clergyman of the Church of England, a Presbyterian minister, and a Roman Catholic priest or a layman”.<sup>30</sup> In addition, “a paid officer who shall act as Secretary to the Commission and Inspector of Schools” was also to be appointed to the Commission.

It was made an obligation on the part of the Central School Commission (a) to keep a diary of the proceedings of the Commission which had to “be submitted to the Governor monthly for his inspection” and (b) to print and publish a half-yearly report “in the months of January and May and laid on the table on the Legislative Council . . . . before the annual grant for the support of schools is voted”.<sup>31</sup>

28. *Ceylon Almanac*, 1844, p. 490.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Minute of Governor Mackenzie, 27th March, 1841.

31. *Ibid.*



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Again, in a minute of 26th May 1841, the Governor made further observations for guidance of the School Commission. These observations can be listed as follows :

- (i) "The Government Agent for the Western Province is a member because, through his agency it is desired that their pecuniary transactions should be conducted. It will be necessary to constitute sub-committees at outstations on the same principle."
- (ii) "The Government Agent in each province will conduct the pecuniary transactions of the Commission."
- (iii) "members have been selected . . . . from the clergy and some of the missions in Ceylon, in addition to the lay members . . . . it is their duty by every means in their power to promote the education in the English language of their fellow subjects of all religious opinions in the Colony."
- (iv) "It is highly desirable that Sunday Schools should be established . . . . and one hour daily should be set apart for religious instructions . . . . but it is not obligatory on any one, being found to hold conscientious objections, to attend the Sunday Schools or at the hour set apart for religious instructions."
- (v) "Besides the establishment of government schools, the Commission will be at liberty to grant sums in aid of any private schools which they may consider deserving of encouragement; but always on condition that they shall have full right of inspection and examination."
- (vi) "The Commission should endeavour . . . . to maintain a friendly communication with all educational institutions throughout the Colony and obtain permission to inspect their schools, as well as any private school that may be established. For the execution of this duty the Secretary of the School Commission has also been appointed Inspector of Schools."
- (vii) ". . . it will also be a most important portion of their duty to promote the religious education of such of the community as belong to the Christian faith, and the funds under their management will therefore be equally applicable to this purpose."<sup>32</sup>

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32. Minute of Governor Mackenzie, 26th May, 1841.

Such precautions taken by the government on the appointment of the School Commission indicate that the Central School Commission was constituted with planning and foresight. The defects and flaws found in the School Commission were remedied to a considerable extent although not completely. Apparently the government learnt a lesson from the School Commission and took precautions to make the Central School Commission more workable and acceptable to many. Although it cannot be regarded a perfect administrative body, several valuable safeguards for better administration of schools were incorporated.

A significant feature was the provision made for using public funds to support Christians, particularly of the established Church. Such a policy was undemocratic, as well as unjustifiable. Such provision in favour only of particular religious groups, but denied to others, caused alarm and unrest in the minds of the underprivileged sections in the country. This continued to be the bone of contention throughout the Central School Commission's period of school administration.

The first Central School Commission nominated by the Governor included the following members.

- President : Philip Anstruther (*The Colonial Secretary*)  
 Members : Rev. J. P. Horsford (*Colonial Chaplain*)  
               Rev. G. J. Mac Vicar (*Presbyterian Chaplain*)  
               Rev. C. Antonio (*Roman Catholic Priest*)  
               Rev. D. J. Gogerly (*Wesleyan Mission*)  
               Rev. Joseph Bailey (*Church Mission*)  
               John Armitage (*Unofficial Member of the Legislative  
                                   Council*)  
               Sir P. Oliphant (*Chief Justice*)  
               P. E. Wodehouse (*Government Agent, Western Province*)

The Postmaster-General, George Lee,<sup>33</sup> was appointed Secretary to the Commission and Inspector of Schools on a salary of £200 per annum with an additional travelling allowance.<sup>34</sup> The School Commission so constituted continued to function until some changes in the membership were effected in 1845. In this year Anstruther retired and was succeeded as President by Dr. James Chapman, the Anglican Bishop of Colombo.<sup>35</sup>

33. Lee had served in 1837-1838 as the editor of the Government newspaper, *The Ceylon Chronicle*.

34. Governor Mackenzie's minute, 27th March, 1841. *Ceylon Almanac*, 1844, p. 130.

35. The other members who replaced some sitting members were Rev. J. D. Palm (Presbyterian), Rev. A. Renaud (Roman Catholic), G. Crabbe (Legislative Council Member), W. C. Gibson (Acting Auditor General), Emerson Tement (Colonial Secretary).

With Anstruther as President, the Commission worked quite harmoniously with the Government, but with the Bishop as its head misunderstandings were bound to occur. The first such conflict was on the appointment of Rev. Andrew Kessen, a Wesleyan Missionary, to the Academy by the Governor.<sup>36</sup> Legally such appointment had to be made by the Commission itself. The dispute over this made the Governor to declare by minute dated 14th August 1847 that the Commission's appointment of masters, administration of funds, and all its proceedings which involved the expenditure of money were subjects which needed his approval. Furthermore, appointments carrying an annual salary of over £100 were to be made in the first instance by him.<sup>37</sup> Such interference and restrictions by government caused Bishop Chapman to resign. Sir James Emerson Tennent, the Colonial Secretary, took his place as President.

The Bishop's resignation created new problems, such as the non-co-operation of some of the clergy on the Board. Apart from this, petty sectarian jealousies emerged again and disrupted the proceedings of the School Commission. A policy of enforcing unwanted control by government over a body which had been working on a voluntary basis caused damage to the Commission.

Dr. Mac Vicar is said to have "made a voluntary surrender of his office for the maintenance of Christian peace".<sup>38</sup> He was replaced by J. Fraser, the keeper of Government Records. Fraser's successor, C. J. MacCarthy (later Sir Charles MacCarthy) served as the President till the end of 1859 to be followed by W. C. Gibson. Gibson as the President, with Rev. Brooke Bailey as the Secretary, served the Central School Commission during the last years of its existence.

Although the composition of the Central School Commission and the powers vested in it differed widely from the School Commission it replaced, the administration of schools by the new Commission proceeded in the same or a similar manner. The School Commission in Colombo was assisted in its work by sub-committees in outstations. The sub-committees appointed superintendents in their areas, who advised the Colombo Commission regarding the work of schoolmasters and also inspected schools on its behalf. The superintendents worked as liaison officers by carrying out the

36. Lord Torrington, Governor of Ceylon, 1847-1850.

37. Governor's letter to the Central School Commission, 14th August, 1847.

38. Central School Commission Report, 1848.

decisions of the Commission to the schools and supplying the Commission with information on the working of the schools. By the year 1866<sup>39</sup> the Commission maintained 103 government schools with 5291 pupils at a cost of £ 14,673. 13s. 6d.<sup>40</sup>

One innovation of the Central School Commission was the introduction of a system of grants-in-aid for non-governmental schools, as indicated by Governor Mackenzie in his minute dated 26th May 1841.<sup>41</sup> Working on this principle, the Central School Commission passed a resolution on 18th September 1843, to pay grants-in-aid to schools which were established "for the education of boys or girls through the medium of English language".<sup>42</sup> The following are some of the conditions which rendered schools eligible for grants from government.

Such schools "shall contain at least 30 pupils" and the minister who is establishing the schools "shall be the sole superintendent". Teachers "shall be appointed and dismissed by the superintendent with the concurrence of the Central School Commission," teachers' salaries to be decided by the Commission "as in other schools under their direction" based on the recommendations of the Inspector of schools, and the sub-committee of the province, in which the school is found. The sub-committee "shall inspect and examine the schools with respect to both secular and religious instructions".

Besides such conditions, the Central School Commission retained the power of withdrawing whatever allowances it made to such schools; if and when the schools "do not continue to give satisfaction to the Central School Commission". They were to be removed from the care of the minister superintending and placed under another superintendent without the consent of the master holding that appointment.<sup>43</sup>

Additional provision was made in 1846 for the payment of grants to schools maintained by chaplains who refused to superintend government schools. The arrangement was that if a chaplain raised a quarter of the expenses of his school by subscriptions or fees, made monthly returns,

39. This was the last year of the Commission's administration of schools.

40. Central School Commission Report, 1866.

41. See above, p. 42, clause V.

42. Resolution passed by the Central School Commission at a meeting held on 18th September 1843, *Ceylon Almanac*, 1844, p. 135.

43. Resolution passed by the Central School Commission on 1st September, 1843. *Ceylon Almanac*, 1844, p. 135.

taught up to a minimum standard, kept within the Commission's scale of salaries, and allowed inspection, the government would give three-fourths of the school's expenditure. These schools came to be known as Chaplain's Schools.<sup>44</sup>

Governor Mackenzie in his address to the Legislative Council on 17th November 1840, indicated his practice of giving grants to some mission schools, when he stated "... still further calls were made on me for assistance to education on the part of a numerous body—the Catholics, as well as from... the Baptist Missionary Society. They both have formerly received from me a grant towards erecting schools".<sup>45</sup> By such grants he made to the Catholics in 1838 "they were enabled to establish a school at which ninety scholars<sup>46</sup> attended. The school had a monthly income of between £ 6 and £ 7, but the cost<sup>47</sup> was more than double that sum".<sup>48</sup> It was to cover such gaps that these grants were given.

By a circular dated 5th February 1861 the Central School Commission extended grants-in-aid to Christian mission schools as well as private schools provided such schools were maintained in compliance with rules and regulations outlined by the Commission.

Only those schools "in which some fee is exacted from the scholars" and established "not in the neighbourhood of an existing school," were entitled to grants. The grant could not exceed the amount the school received from other sources and the granted money had to be utilized for certain specific purposes such as the purchasing of furniture, books, maps, apparatus, subsidising salaries of teachers as well as the addition of new teachers to the existing staff.

44. L. J. Gratiaen: *The Central School Commission, 1841-1848* Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch, Vol. XXXI, p. 500.

45. Governor Mackenzie's address to the Legislative Council, 17th November, 1840.

46. 74 Catholics, 14 Protestants and 2 Hindus.

47. Details are as follows :—

	£	s.	d.
House Rent	1	—	—
Principal's salary	8	6	8
1st Assistant Teacher	3	0	0
2nd Assistant Teacher	1	10	0
Sinhalese Teacher	—	12	0
Servant	—	7	6

48. Governor Mackenzie's address to the Legislative Council, 17th November, 1840.

For a Mission school to be entitled to grants-in-aid, it had to comply with the following rules with regard to the teaching of religion : (a) Only the first hour of the day was to be employed for imparting religious instruction, (b) religious instruction had to be confined to simple explanation of the Bible and the leading tenets of Christianity conducted in such a spirit as to avoid the exclusion of any scholar on ground of denominational teaching, (c) any child whose parents or guardians object to his receiving religious instruction shall be permitted to stay out of his class during that period.<sup>49</sup>

Although the payment of grants to mission schools was welcomed, these rules and conditions prevented some missions from availing themselves of the grants. The rules were also regarded as strict or even "objectionable". The Rev. J. J. Stephen, vicar of Jaffna, described the Commission's "attempt at regulating the nature and the mode, and at limiting the amount of the religious education to be given" as "insufferable".<sup>50</sup>

In spite of such discontent with the conditions which governed the extension of grants-in-aid, several missions obtained such grants in support of their schools. It was in Jaffna that the grant system "really took root". There, the English schools which had been opened by the Commission were closed chiefly due to difficulties in superintending, and in the grants system the government discovered a way to establish schools in Jaffna by subsidising missionary effort. The American Mission and the Wesleyan Mission in Jaffna, which were the two active missions there, received grants to the tune of £ 200 and £ 100 a year respectively.<sup>51</sup>

The depression of the 1850's had its effects on the progress of education under government. The need to introduce new taxes on dogs, guns, carts, boats and so on, and the government's determination to cut down expenses resulted in its instructing the Central School Commission to slash the vote on schools for the year 1848 from £ 10,634 to £ 6,000. It was advised to run schools "on a reduced scale of expense" but with as great efficiency as possible. A "system of self-support to a certain extent without any sudden shock" to schools was prescribed.<sup>52</sup>

49. Circular issued to schools by the Central School Commission, 5th February, 1861.

50. Letter of Rev. J. Stephen to the Sub-Committee of the Legislative Council (Morgan Committee), 1865.

51. Central School Commission Report, 1846.

52. Central School Commission Report, 1848.

Emerson Tennent as the President of the Central School Commission was responsible for putting this policy into practice. He started to re-organise the schools "on a reduced scale of expence with greater efficiency" by retrenching teachers and raising school fees. Such action caused a deterioration in government schools which did not disappear even after the country's recovery from the depression in the 1850's.

The Parish schools had provided instruction free of charge. But the schools of the two Commissions, which replaced the Parish schools, charged fees from their inception. The charge fluctuated from time to time and place to place. In a majority of schools the fee was three pence or two fannams a month.<sup>53</sup> But schools with monthly fees as high as one shilling six pence were found, particularly the girls' schools. When the fees collected for the year 1866 is recorded as £ 1830<sup>54</sup> it becomes clear that the sum which the government recovered by way of school fees was not inconsiderable.

There is a significant event which rendered the Central School Commission memorable. This was the inception of a Local Examinations system in 1862, by which students in government as well as non-government schools could sit and get qualified. The examination was in two parts. The first part which was compulsory included reading, dictation, grammar, arithmetic, geography and English history. The second part, which was to be taken a year after, included several subjects<sup>55</sup> of which the candidate could offer from two to four. Successful candidates were awarded certificates which qualified them for appointments in public service. The top few at the examination were given scholarships at the Academy. The local examinations gained popularity, but most of the candidates came from schools other than government ones.<sup>56</sup>

### **Schools Organised by the School Commissions**

The schools of the School Commissions (1834-1867) fell into different kinds. Under the School Commission (1834-1841) in particular, government schools were started according to the whims of the Commission as well as the government of the colony. But in course of time government schools took a definite form and shape, and began to be organised into a

53. There were exceptional cases where free tuition was given to poor and deserving children.

54. Central School Commission Report, 1866.

55. English including Composition, History, Geography, Latin, Greek, Sinhalese, Tamil, Arithmetic and Algebra, Euclid, Trigonometry, Mensuration and Mechanics.

56. Reports of the Central School Commission since 1863 describe in detail these local examinations giving the question papers set, marks scored by candidates, and pass lists.

school system which served a particular function required of them. A brief analysis of their structure and function as attempted here can help to discover the educational policy pursued by the Commissions.<sup>57</sup>

### Elementary Schools

These were the original English schools which were established after the inception of the School Commission and took the place of the Parish schools. At the early stages such schools were opened only in the principal towns, but in course of time their numbers went up. In the year 1848 there were sixty of these schools with a larger concentration of them in the Western province.

Elementary schools usually were small, with an attendance never exceeding fifty. Twenty to thirty pupils was the rule but an exception was seen in Colombo schools where numbers were larger. All of them charged a fee of three pence a month but stationery was supplied free. Each school was under a headmaster who was often assisted by pupil teachers. The pupil teachers were appointed after an examination of their knowledge in English. The curriculum included English, arithmetic, history, geography, and religious knowledge. The Elementary schools provided an education in English for children of poor classes, who were not in a position to attend private schools where school fees were high. The establishment of Elementary schools in large numbers helped to spread English education among the people.

### Normal-Schools and Normal-Classes

The establishment of Normal-schools was suggested by Governor Mackenzie in his proposed plan of educational reforms discussed earlier.<sup>58</sup> He recommended Normal-Schools as "schools for training native teachers" in the subjects they were going to teach "as well as in the methods of teaching them". Inefficient teaching, for which the government schools were notorious, was attributed to teachers being untrained and ignorant of the subjects they attempted to teach.<sup>59</sup> The Normal-schools were

57. No attempt will be made here to describe in detail the schools organised by the School Commissions. For such description see the series of valuable articles by L. J. Gratiaen: *The Story of our Schools: the First School Commission, 1832-1841*, (Colombo Historical Association pamphlet, No. 11); *The Central School Commission, 1841-1848*, (Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch, Vol. XXXI, pp. 488-508); *The School Commission, 1848-1859*, (idem, Vol. XXXII, pp. 37-54) and *The Last Years of the Central School Commission, 1858-1869*, (idem, Vol. XXXII, pp. 328-346).

58. See above, p. 39.

59. This criticism was repeated 25 years later in letter of Louis Nell to the Sub-committee of the Legislative Council (Morgan Committee).



designed with a view to remedy this situation. Governor Mackenzie indicated his intention to start two Normal-schools for instructing Sinhalese and Tamil teachers as early as 1839.<sup>60</sup> Although the government recognised the need to establish Normal-schools there is no indication of their being started so early.

The first step in this direction was the commencement of a "Normal-Class" at the Colombo Academy in 1842 where a group of twelve students (under the name of Normal-students) who were to be teachers, received instruction in English. These Normal-students were later transferred to the Central Schools established in Colombo where a Normal-Class was added for the purpose. The Normal-students received instruction for a period of three years during which they were paid an allowance of £ 10 a year. As for the teaching done in the Normal-classes the method "pursued in the Normal Seminary of Glasgow" was followed.<sup>61</sup>

Conducting Normal-classes attached to Central Schools became the pattern for some time, and a majority of Central Schools had such classes. The policy of training teachers was later extended to the vernacular section as well, and in 1845 a Native Normal Institution for training Sinhalese teachers was started in Colombo. The Native Normal Institution had two classes with twenty students each; ten of them were women. Normal students remained for three years at the end of which they were examined by a board of examiners which included the President of the Central School Commission, the Inspector of Schools and even distinguished officers of Government such as the Governor and the Colonial Secretary.

The Normal-Schools movement did not receive much recognition in the country and even before the dissolution of the Central School Commission the Normal-Schools ceased to exist. The possible cause for their failure to gain popularity was mainly the fact that teaching was not recognised as an attractive vocation. Because of the low wages paid to

60. Mackenzie's address to the Legislative Council, 16th December, 1839.

61. This was an attempt to transplant into Ceylon a device in vogue in contemporary England. The idea of Normal-Schools for training teachers originated in contemporary England when the sub-committee of the Privy Council, appointed by Queen Victoria on 10th April, 1833 for promoting education, formulated Normal-Schools as schools where "candidates for the office of teachers in schools for the poor classes may acquire the knowledge necessary to the exercise of their future profession". The committee had been acquainted with the work of the Glasgow philanthropist and educationist David Stow (1793-1846), who outlined a training system in the Glasgow Normal Seminary he started in 1836. For a description of the Normal-School system in England see John William Adamson, *English Education 1789-1902*, Cambridge University Press, 1930, pp. 124-135.

teachers, teaching was looked down upon by many. Even those who were trained in the Normal-Schools and Normal-classes “preferred seeking their livelihood in some other profession, to accepting the meagre salaries which were offered them on leaving the Normal-Schools”.<sup>62</sup> The Rev. Barcroft Boake held the same view when he stated “the reason why Normal-Schools . . . produce no good results was that teachers were not sufficiently paid. Most of the students after they had been appointed teachers left the department for other offices of greater emolument”.<sup>63</sup>

The importance of training teachers was recognised by the Commission. Yet its efforts met with little success owing to the prejudice entertained against teaching as an ill-paid profession.

### **Central Schools (or Superior Schools)**

The origin of the Central Schools can be traced to the recognition by the Central School Commission of the short-comings found in the existing system of education in the country. It was realized that the education provided in its schools “was by no means practical” and the Commission decided to establish Central Schools to remedy this defect. The Commission expressed the hope that an impetus would be given to practical education in the Island, and that “the Ceylonese youths would in future avail themselves of it to qualify themselves for agricultural and other lucrative employments”.<sup>64</sup>

The first Central School was started in Colombo in August 1843 by William Knighton with forty boys on the roll. This was followed by another in Galle,<sup>65</sup> and the third in Kandy.<sup>66</sup> It was into the Colombo Central School that the Normal-Class of the Academy was transferred later.

All headmasters appointed to the Central Schools were those got down from England. Knighton, Millar and Murdoch who headed these schools had been trained in the Glasgow Normal-School referred to earlier.

62. Letter of John Hill to the Sub-committee of the Legislative Council, 1865, (Morgan Committee).

63. Letter of Rev. B. Boake to the Sub-committee of the Legislative Council, 1865, (Morgan Committee).

64. Central School Commission Report, 1842.

65. Established in 1844 by J. Millar.

66. Established in 1844 by Murdoch.

The curriculum of the Central Schools as outlined by the Central School Commission had a practical bias. If the schools adhered strictly to this curriculum the Central Schools would have imparted a useful practical education, the country was denied of. But in reality something else happened; and as the Morgan Committee pointed out later, "many a subject required to be taught in them (was) omitted and others which ought not to have had a place . . . substituted".<sup>67</sup> With such modifications being introduced in the curriculum, the Central School could not produce the desired results and in course of time they began to show signs of decline. By 1867 the Central School in Colombo was closed but those in Kandy and Galle continued to function. The Commission did not make any substantial contribution to the country by its Central Schools.

### **Mixed Schools (Anglo-Vernacular Schools)**

The term Mixed School, although it was used by the Commission, was a misnomer, because these schools were not schools for boys and girls, as the name would indicate, but schools where both Vernacular and English were used in teaching. All schools of the Commission where teaching during the first few years was in Sinhalese and changed over to English in later years, were called mixed schools. The mixed schools charged a fee of six pence which was later reduced to three pence. These mixed schools did not succeed, and the criticism levelled against them was that, although on principle they were to teach Sinhalese during the early years of a child's schooling and in English later, they began to use English throughout. Thus the Mixed schools lost the purpose for which they were originally intended.

### **Female Schools**

Female education in Ceylon received more attention from the Christian missionary societies than from government.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the Central School Commission also made some attempts to establish girls' schools in the principal towns. However, the girls' schools of the government did not prosper. The Inspector of schools, J. Sendall pointed this out. "The children attending the mixed and vernacular girls' schools in 1864 . . . have

67. The curriculum suggested by the Commission included the following subjects:

General geography and history.

Commercial arithmetic and book-keeping.

Mathematics including algebra, geometry and trigonometry, and their application to mensuration, gauging, surveying and navigation.

Outlines of Natural philosophy and chemistry and their application to agriculture.

68. Ranjit Ruberu, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-215.

been 510 in number against 3306 in the same classes of boys' schools." Sendall was of the opinion that apart from the girls' schools of the missions "nothing worth recording" had been achieved by the efforts of the government in imparting female education in the country.<sup>69</sup>

Although the Central School Commission did recognise the value of promoting female education, its achievements in such work remained at a low level. The prejudice of the parents, as well as the difficulty of finding female teachers, remained obstacles to the spreading of girls' schools. The same difficulties were confronted by the missions engaged in such work, but they being a more enterprising lot, overcame most of the difficulties<sup>70</sup> and were able to achieve more on the education of girls.

### **Vernacular Schools**

The Colebrooke Commission disapproved the continuation of government vernacular schools, and advocated their abolition. Such actions made Christian missions the sole authorities for vernacular education in the country—a field in which the missions achieved considerable success.

A change in this attitude of the government became evident from the time of Mackenzie's administration in the suggestions he made to the Home Government on the desirability of the government's taking some responsibility for the teaching of the vernacular languages in the country. This was discouraged in 1846 by the Secretary of State as incompatible with a policy committed to the exclusive use of English. In 1847 however, this policy was changed, and attempts were made to establish vernacular schools by the government. The Commission undertook the establishment of vernacular schools by taking over for the Commission's administration some of the missionary schools and by opening a few others afresh. The students of the Normal Institution were appointed as teachers to these vernacular schools.

The Vernacular schools of the time were exclusively Sinhalese schools, found only in the western province. Instruction imparted in Vernacular Schools included reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and history. A majority of them were for boys, but a few girls' schools also existed. Thus, vernacular education which the government refused to support in

69. Sendall to the Sub-committee of the Legislative Council—(Morgan Committee).

70. Ranjit Ruberu, *op cit.*, pp. 209-215.

the thirties, received favourable attention in the forties, and was well spreading in the fifties. The number of Vernacular Schools went up from twentyfour in 1848 to forty five in 1862.

### **The Colombo Academy**

The apex of the government school system was the Academy in Colombo, which gained a reputation as an institution meant particularly for children of well-to-do parents who were interested in receiving the best education available in the country.<sup>71</sup> As an institution preparing students "for the higher professions and positions in Society," the Commission deemed it "necessary to strip the Academy of its inferior classes and present it to the public as an institution distinguished from all other schools of the Commission by the specific education it afforded".<sup>72</sup> In keeping with such a policy, the curriculum was planned on lines similar to what was prevalent in Grammar schools in England. The sole aim was to impart "a sound classical and mathematical education".<sup>73</sup>

The progress of the Academy was uneven, and particularly during the period of the depression, Tennent's retrenchment policy affected the Academy rather adversely. When he abolished the lower school, raised monthly fees in the upper section of the Academy to a pound instead of the ten shillings hitherto charged, and retrenched three of the English school masters, the Academy was reduced to a school with only two teachers and thirty students. It was on the verge of collapse; but a reduction of fees to ten shillings a month brought an influx of students and kept it going.

Restoration of the Academy was accelerated by the addition of the Queen's College section to it in 1859. The Queen's College was begun as a part of the Academy for preparing students for the Calcutta University entrance examination. But in course of time it developed into a college affiliated to the Calcutta University and prepared students to the intermediate and the final examinations of that University. This caused the expansion of the Academy into two sections, the Queen's College and the lower section, the Academy proper.

The Queen's College remained a small unit with sometimes only two students. The lower school was always large and in 1868 it had 313 students. The Rev. Barcroft Boake continued to be the principal of the Academy throughout its existence under the Central School Commission.

71. Central School Commission Report, 1852.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*

### The Commission's Policy on Vernacular Education

Vernacular education in Ceylon was for some time the monopoly of the Christian missions, and their hold on vernacular education was so strong that even the government felt reluctant to compete with mission schools. This was evident in the observations of Governor Torrington. "The extension of vernacular education by Government is also rendered somewhat delicate in consequence of the field being to a considerable extent occupied by missionary schools. . . . Government schools, though conducted at a much greater expense, cannot compete successfully with missionary schools in the same field."<sup>74</sup>

The School Commission's policy of supporting only English education continued uninterrupted until 1847, when it was realised that it was not an advisable policy to pursue it further. Governor Mackenzie sounded a warning on the undesirability of this policy as early as 1839 when he told the Legislative Council: "before English shall be taught each scholar should learn to read his native language."<sup>75</sup> His successor Governor Torrington also held similar views as is apparent from his observations. "English education has now been extended as far as there is a legitimate demand for it, thus leaving the government free, while it merely provides for the efficiency of the present English educational establishments, to direct its efforts towards the extension of education in the vernacular language of the natives."<sup>76</sup> Governor Torrington went even further than advocating such a policy by opening Sinhalese schools in the country. The "preparing and publishing of school books in the Sinhalese language" was also undertaken at the same time by the Translation Committee appointed for such work. The Vernacular schools which were described earlier came into existence only after the Commission's attitude had changed in favour of vernacular education.

It would be of interest to discuss the causes which led to this change of policy. Following the recommendation of the Colebrooke report, the government had given its support exclusively to education in English and English was taught to all and sundry. This procedure had some ill-effects by way of producing a group of people who after getting "a smattering of English shunned manual occupations and became misfits in the Society".<sup>77</sup>

74. Letter of Torrington quoted in George Barrow, *Ceylon Past and Present*, London, 1857, p. 164

75. Mackenzie's address to the Legislative Council, 24th December, 1839.

76. Letter of Torrington, George Barrow, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

77. D. D. de Saram, *Social class difference in education under the Central School Commission*, University of Ceylon Review, Vol. XVII, pp. 99-105.

A realisation of this situation made the Commission to restrict English education only to those of whom such education was "a boon . . . and not a calamity".<sup>78</sup> In other words the Commission found in vernacular education a way out of the problem of giving an unrestricted English education to all. By establishing vernacular schools, the government could divert some section of the population to those schools and thereby limit English education to a few, particularly to children of rich parents.

Although vernacular schools were started, the policy of the government on the use of the vernacular languages was not decided. There was division of opinion. While some considered that English should be the sole medium through which Western knowledge should be made available to all people alike, others were of the opinion that such an education was completely alien, and unsuitable. George Barrow explains this situation quite clearly. "It was contended by some that, to do any good at all, or communicate any instruction worth acquiring or retaining, we must not only impart quite new knowledge to the native mind, but also impart it through a new medium; others on the contrary maintained that an education of this kind, imparted by means of English books and in the English language, would at least be but a feeble and sickly exotic incapable of taking root in the native soil, much less of bringing forth any fruit."<sup>79</sup>

The Commission arrived at a compromise by which it was decided to make "English language the principal but not the sole vehicle of instruction" in the Commission's schools.<sup>80</sup> This policy was to be implemented by introducing instruction in the vernacular during the early years of schooling as a preliminary stage to English education which was to follow later. The Mixed Schools described earlier, where teaching during the first few years was in vernacular and later continued in English, came into existence only after deciding on such a policy.

### **Failure of the Central School Commission**

Although some progress in education was achieved during the course of its administering schools, the Central School Commission did not win the prestige and confidence of the public. It was criticised, chiefly because of the inefficiency and apathy for which it had been noted. Recasting of the original School Commission into the Central School Commission did not bring the desired results anticipated by its creators.

78. Central School Commission Report, 1858.

79. George Barrow, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Evidence given before the Sub-committee of the Legislative Council of 1865 (Morgan Committee)<sup>81</sup> provided sufficient proof of the inefficiency that prevailed in the working of the Central School Commission. There was dissatisfaction over the composition of the Commission. It was argued that it consisted of those members "having different interests" who did not agree on important issues, with the result that "the principles of action vary according to the temporary predominance of individual opinion".<sup>82</sup> There was also the criticism that "several superior men amongst the original members have been replaced by inferior men"<sup>83</sup> and it was suggested that "men of education wherever resident throughout the Island" should be "invited . . . to a seat on the Commission".<sup>84</sup>

Adverse criticism on the Central School Commission came from the Colonial Chaplain the Rev. S. O. Glenie when he remarked that "from the experience of upwards of 20 years I look upon the School Commission as worse than useless; as real obstruction to the spread of education in Ceylon". He condemned the policy of entrusting the administration of education to a voluntary body such as the Central School Commission by pointing out the "absurdity of expecting harmonious enlightened action from a forced union of members of jarring sects". He believed not in the modification or improvement of the existing Commission, but in its complete abolition as the first step towards any improvement in the progress of education in the country.<sup>85</sup>

Besides such inherent defects, some of the methods employed by the Central School Commission for administering schools were also criticised. For instance, the inspection of schools, on which was based the payment of grants to them, invited considerable criticism and was deplored by many. It should be recollected that there was only one Inspector of Schools to inspect and report on schools all over the country. His inspections were described as being "of a most superficial character consisting mainly of a hasty glance into the interior of a few schools in the Central and Western Provinces, a glance only cast on them once a year".<sup>86</sup>

81. See Sessional Paper VIII of 1867.

82. *Ibid*, evidence of W. W. Cairns. (Morgan Committee).

83. *Ibid*, evidence of F. W. Willisford, M.D. (Morgan Committee).

84. *Ibid*, evidence of Louis Nell, Deputy Queen's Counsel.

85. *Ibid*, evidence of Rev. S. O. Glenie.

86. *The Ceylon Observer*, 15th July, 1844.



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For these reasons it became evident that efficient control of education in the country could no longer be assured in the hands of a Board formed essentially of volunteers preoccupied with other responsibilities. It was to remove this outmoded form of educational administration that the Sub-committee of the Legislative Council (Morgan Committee)<sup>87</sup> was appointed in 1865. This Committee recommended the abolition of the Central School Commission and the creation of a Department of Public Instruction in its place, with a Director of Public Instruction in charge. A more centralized form of educational administration originated with the implementation of the recommendations of the Morgan Committee and a new chapter in the history of education in Ceylon opened.

T. RANJIT RUBERU

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87. It was appointed to "inquire into and report upon the state and prospects of Education in the Island; the amount of success which has attended the working of the present System of Education and any improvements that may be deemed advisable to make thereon". See Sessional Paper VIII of 1867.