# "Something More Than a Knowledge of the Perishable Things of Life".

## A Study of the Educational Ideals of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan[1]

The educational philosophy of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan,[2] first elected representative of the "Fducated Ceylonese" in the Legislative Council, sometime Attorney-General of the Island, founder of the Ceylon National Association[3]

1. The present essay is the fifth in a projected series of papers in which an attempt is made to examine the development of "a tradition of radical protest" against the system of colonial English education that was prevalent in Sri Lanka during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first four papers in the series are as follows: "Strangers in their Own Land": An Outline of the Tradition of Radical Protest Against English Education in Colonial Sri Lanka", *Navasilu*, The Journal of the English Association of Sri Lanka, No. 1, 1976; "English Education and the Estranged Intellectual in Colonial Sri Lanka: The Case of James Alwis (1823-70)", *Modern Ceylon Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1976 (in press); "A Generation of Spiritual Bastards and Intellectual Pariahs: A study of Ananda Coomaraswamy's Attitudes to Colonial English Education in India and Sri Lanka", *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1976; and "Decoration Before Dress: A Study of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam's Attitudes to Colonial English Education in Sri Lanka", *The Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. 25, 1975 (in press).

2. Ponnambalam Ramanathan was born on 16th April, 1851, in the home of his maternal grandfather, Gate Mudaliyar Arumuganathapillai Coomaraswamy, the first occupant of the Tamil seat in the Legislative Council as newly constituted in 1833. Ramanathan's parents were Gate Mudaliyar Ponnambalam and his wife Sellachchi. The latter was the sister of Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy, the great orientalist and statesman, and father of Ananda Coomaraswamy. (For further details regarding Ramanathan's ancestry, parents and birth, see M. Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, Vol. 1, Ramanathan Commemoration Society, Colombo, 1971, Chapters 1 to 5). Having received his education at the Colombo Academy (now Royal College), and Presidency College, Madras, Ramanathan qualified as an advocate of the Supreme Court in 1873. The following year, Ramanathan married Chellachiammal, second daughter of Nannithamby Mudaliyar, and settled down at "Sukhhastan", his Cinnamon Gardens residence. On the death of Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy (his uncle) in 1879, Ramanathan was nominated by Governor Longdon to represent the Tamil speaking peoples in the Legislative Council. From 1894 to 1896 Ramanathan was the Acting Attorney General of the Island. From 1911 to 1916, and again from 1917 to 1920, he was the first elected representative of the "Educated Ceylonese" in the Legislative Council. From 1921 to 1924, he was again a nominated member of the Legislative Council, and from 1924 to 1929 the elected representative of the Northern Division of the Northern Province—an almost unbroken period of 50 years as a member of the Island's legislature. His death occurred in November 26th, 1930. The zenith of Ramanathan's political career was reached in 1915, when Ramanathan espoused the cause of the Sinhalese and fought the British administration for justice protesting against the excesses and atrocities committed by the authorities during the period of the riots and martial law in 1815. In this connection, see Ponnambalam Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law in Ceylon*, London, 1916.

3. The Ceylon National Association was founded by Ramanathan in the 1880s (E. F. C. Ludowyk, *The Story of Ceylon*, Faber and Faber, London, 1967 p. 227); the Association grew out of the Ceylon Agricultural Association founded by C. H. de Soysa to help Ceylonese agriculturalists (E. F. C. Ludowyk, *The Modern History of Ceylon*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1966, p. 129).

and the parliamentarian,[4] religious scholar, philosopher[5] and orator *par excellence* of early 20th century Sri Lanka,[6] may fittingly be epitomised in his own favourite phrase, "something more than a knowledge of the perishable things of life." Moving the first reading of "An Ordinance to Declare the Constitution of Parameshvara College, Jaffna" in the Legislative Council, Ramanathan declared: "Hindu parents in and out of Ceylon....feel that the kind of education that is being given to their boys and girls in the English schools....is not at all satisfactory. They want something more than a knowledge of the perishable things of life, too much of which is pressed on the attention of students as if there was nothing else worth considering and attaining."[7] The main purpose of the present paper is to discuss in some detail the "philosophy" of education that emerges from an examination of Ramanathan's speeches and writings, and Ramanatnan's practical application of his theories and beliefs in setting up two educational institutions during the latter part of his career in Jaffna—Ramanathan College (for girls) and Parameshvara College (for boys). This study would also enable us to place Ramanathan in his proper place in the important "tradition of protest" against colonial English education in Sri Lanka, a tradition that had been inaugurated as early as the 1830s by such eminent Englishmen as George Turnour and D. J. Gogerly, and continued later not only by a succession of native scholars, statesmen, and social reformers like James Alwis, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Ponnambalam Arunachalam, but also by a host of lesser-known Sinhalese nationalists, intellectuals and literary men like Piyadasa Sirisena, John de Silva, Arumuga Navalar, Anagarika Dharmapala and Kumaratunga Munidasa.

It has already been shown elsewhere[8] that the system of "English Education" in Sri Lanka, with its almost exclusive stress on English language and literature, and western culture was, contrary to popular belief, subjected to considerable criticism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and that both distinguished native Sri Lankan intellectuals and statesmen as well as non-native (principally British) scholars and educators were able, from its inception,

4. S. Namasivayam (in his *The Legislatures of Ceylon*, 1928-1948, Faber and Faber, London, 1951) describes Ramanathan as "a vigilant critic of government, and, during a period when criticism required some courage, he labelled governmental acts on the floor of the House as acts of mis-government. Together with a few other unofficials, he was ceaseless in the pursuit of information for the purpose of ventilating grievances." (p. 27). Sudhansu Bose, who edited a volume of the speeches delivered by Ramanathan from 1879 to 1894 in the Legislative Council, comments on Ramanathan's "extreme readiness in debate, marvellous command of words in English, and singular freedom from fear and favour, ill-will and anger." (*Selected Speeches of Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, Vol. 1, 1879 to 1894, Ceylon Daily News Press, 1929, Editor's Note). M. Vythilingam, Ramanathan's recent biographer, describes him as "a parliamentarian of the highest calibre, perhaps the greatest that ever graced this country's legislature." (*Op. Cit.*, p. 4). S. Arasaratnam describes Ramanathan's agitation for the release of the Sinhalese leaders indiscriminately arrested and detained during the 1915 riots as "one of the earliest attempts at political activity against sections of the government..which provoked people like Mr. (D. S.) Senanayake to enter the arena of nationalist politics..and convinced nationalist elements of the need for co-ordinated agitation if they were to make a mark on the colonial government," (S. Arasaratnam, *Ceylon*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., New Jersey, 1964, p. 1967).

5. Ramanathan's published works include the following: *Riots and Martial Law in Ceylon* 1915, London, 1916; *The Culture of the Soul Among Western Nations*, London, 1906, *Special Report of Crime in Ceylon*, (Sessional Paper No. 8, 1898); and *Memorandum on the Recommendations of the Donoughmore Commissioners.*

6. Some of Ramanathan's early speeches have been edited by Sudhansu Bose (see fn. 4 above).

7. *Debates in the Legislative Council of Ceylon* (*Hansard*), 1925, Colombo, 1926, p. 181.

8. See the four papers referred to in fn. 1 above.

to grasp clearly the pernicious aspects of the system of "Colonial English Education" that had been imposed on the Sri Lankans by their overlords. This dissatisfaction gradually (but clearly and inevitably) percolated from the representatives of the British themselves down to the relatively better-educated and more percipient natives (who were themselves, ironically, the most distinguished "products" of the colonial system of English education that they later debunked and castigated). Thus, in the late 1860s, for example, James Alwis took up arms against the then-prevailing system, labelling it as "a most pernicious system of education now carried on among my countrymen."[9] Ananda Coomaraswamy, too, hardly minced his words when he asserted that "a single generation of English education suffices to break the threads of tradition and to create a nondescript and superficial being deprived of all roots—a sort of intellectual pariah who does not belong to the East or the West, the past or the future."[10] Ramanathan's own younger brother, Ponnambalam Arunachalam, described the inefficacy of the system in terms as unequivocal as the others mentioned: "Our youth are unable, after a dozen years' study, to write or speak English correctly or to feel any interest in any good English literature..They remain strangers to Western culture, however much they may strive, by adopting the externals of Western life—dress, food, drinks, games, etc.—to be 'civilised' in the Western fashion."[11] Though thus united in a broad campaign of total and unequivocal protest against the contemporary system of English education, Alwis, Coomaraswamy and Anrunachalam each evolved his own, often highly individualistic, concept of the nature and content of education. Each of them also worked out for himself a practical scheme or programme for the reform of the educational system of Sri Lanka. As will be shown below, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, too, although he belonged unmistakeably to this "Great Tradition" of radical protest against English education, was, in matters of detail, highly individualistic in his approach towards the nature, content and aims of education in Sri Lanka. He was no mere "disciple" or follower of any of the reformers mentioned above; moreover, Ramanathan was no pure idealist —he was indeed the most practical-minded of the educational reformers who comprise the tradition of radical protest, for, unlike Alwis, Coormaraswamy and Arunachalam (whose ideas remained purely on the plane of theory), Ramanathan was fortunate enough to translate his ideals, at least partly, into concrete reality during his lifetime. He achieved this by establishing two colleges in Jaffna, Ramanathan College and Parameshvara College, through his own initiative and after sacrificing a large slice of his personal fortune.

Like Alwis, Coomaraswamy and Arunachalam, Ramanathan received the best type of colonial "English Education" available at the time. As Ramanathan himself declared, he was, like Coomaraswamy and many others

9. James Alwis, *Memoirs and Desultory Writings*, Ed, A. C. Seneviratne, Colombo, 1939, p. 17.
10. Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, New York, 1957, pp. 155-56.
11. *Speeches and Writings of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam*, Vol. 1, Cave and Co. Ltd., (n.d.), pp. 261-62.

of his generation, not only brought up and educated in a truly British atmosphere, but also trained to be a loyal British subject.[12]. Having completed his primary education at home, Ramanathan was sent to Royal College[13] from 1861, and studied his lessons in the distinguished company of C. A. Lorenz, the Nell brothers, William Gunatilake, and his (Ramanathan's) own brothers, Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy and Ponnambalam Arunachalam[14]. In 1865, their father, Mudliyar Ponnambalam, sent his two elder sons, Coomaraswamy and Ramanathan, to Presidency College, Madras, for graduation.[15] Ramanathan was then in his thirteenth year. The two brothers were left to their own devices by their father, who gave them Rs. 1000, a Persian horse, a passage to Madras through Rameshwaram, together with "guidance from God." Though somewhat perturbed by being thus ushered forcibly to manhood, Ramanathan was also evidently gratified by his change of school so early. Even at this youthful age he had grasped clearly the essential hollowness and poor quality of the English education he had imbibed at the Colombo Academy, for he said later: "Though by no means proficient in English or in any of the departments of knowledge commonly taught in English schools, I was able to see that the teaching offered in the first educational institution of the Island—the Colombo Academy where I was reading—was of a poor order."[16]

It was, perhaps, the kind of education that Ramanathan underwent at Presidency College (one that appears to have been radically different in many ways from colonial education in Sri Lanka) that laid the foundations for his non-conformist views with regard to colonial English education. Under the benign Principalship of Dr. Thompson, the college, though founded "for the purpose of imbuing the Indian people with a love for the learning and culture of their rulers, and generally for the propagation of all that was good and

12. Of his Western (mainly British) upbringing and his admiration for British traditions of justice and fairplay, Ramanathan himself said: "England, Sir—my heart melts at the sound of England. I feel that my whole life has been protected by England. I have from my infancy upwards been bred by England, taught by England, benefited by England, and I am deeply grateful for it not merely for the benefits which I have personally received, but for the reputation it has for justice, humanity, mercy and honour. However painful my duty may have been, I have discharged it because of the great and good who are standing up for the glory of the British Empire,because they want us to do our duty, in order that England may continue from generation to generation as the greatest, the best and the noblest country on the face of the earth." (Quoted in Zeylanicus,*Ceylon—Between Orient and Occident*, Elek House Books Ltd., London, 1970, p. 159).

13. The present Royal College was then known as the Queen's Academy. Its headmaster was Dr. Barcroft Boake.

14. For further details regarding Boake's stewardship of the Queen's Academy and Ramanathan's schoolmates, see Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80. Vythilingam quotes Dr. Isaac Thambyah, who writes of Ramanathan: "He confined his reading largely to novels. Happening to come across Madame de Stael's saying, "Novel-reading bleaches one's mind," (Ramanathan) betook himself with oriental avidity to more substantial reading." (*Op. Cit.*, p. 80).

15. Mudaliyar Ponnambalam's decision to send his two elder sons abroad was based as much (or even more) on moral grounds than on purely academic grounds. Cf. Ramanathan's own remarks in one of his speeches later: "We had a number of friends from outside our society coming in and instilling into us ideas that created irreverence and frivolity in our minds. My father looked at these things with sorrow and told me and my brother Coomaraswamy, "Sons, you are in great danger in Colombo. You must go out of Ceylon to a country where many more things are to be learnt than could be learnt in Colombo. Are you willing to go?" We said, "Yes, father!" (Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 80).

16. Quoted in Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

great in the civilisation of the West,"[17] did not ignore indigenous Indian culture. Presidency College in fact fostered the study of Sanskrit, the Indian languages, Indian History, Eastern philosophy and Indian religions. (The staff, comprising English professors and Indian scholars, represented a synthesis of *all that was best* in the West and the East.) Facilities were freely available for physical development too, in the form of activities and games such as athletics, riding, wrestling and boxing. Ramanathan was active in the debates of the Union where he developed the forensic powers that were to stand him in good stead in later life as a lawyer and parliamentarian. He won the English essay prize, drawing from Dr. Thompson the eulogistic remark that, as far as he knew, no other undergraduate "wielded the English language to better effect than he."[18] Unfortunately, however, Ramanathan's carreer at Presidency College was cut off prematurely; Mudaliyar Ponnambalam, alarmed by reports regarding his elder son Coomaraswamy's "youthful excessses". was compelled to recall both sons to the Island without ceremony. Ramanathan thus left Madras without a degree, having just passed his Intermediate Examination in Arts.

Back in Sri Lanka, Ramanathan, under the guidance of his uncle, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, (perhaps the most influential personality in Ramanathan's intellectual development), became an apprentice student-at-law under Sir Richard Morgan, the Attorney-General. Two years later he was called to the bar as an advocate.[19]

Thus Ramanathan, though he never attended a British university like his brother Arunachalam,[20] enjoyed at least the best colonial education that Sri Lanka and India could offer. His experiences of the educational systems followed in the two countries without doubt led Ramanathan to ponder seriously upon the subject of colonial education quite early. The fact that education was the foremost "national" problem in his mind early in life is attested also by the fact that during Ramanathan's initial years as a member of the Legislative Council,[21] his mind was engrossed by educational matters. Shortly after he took his seat as the representative of the Tamils in the Legislative Council, Ramanathan moved a motion entitled "On the Necessity of making more efficient the Department of Public Instruction" (on 19th November 1879). In proposing this motion, Ramanthan was perhaps impelled by the thought that Sir Mutu's mantle had fallen upon his own shoulders. Sir Mutu had, in fact, already inaugurated a reformist movement in education himself—in 1865, he had brought up the subject of colonial education before the Council and had even succeeded in getting a Select Committee appointed to inquire into the School Commission and the educational wants of the country.[22] Thus when Ramanathan succeeded his uncle as the representative of the Tamils

17. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
19. Ramanathan was examined by Sir Edward Creasy and Mr. Justice Charles Stewart in 1873. Sir Edward was the Chief Justice of the Island from 1860 to 1877.
20. Ponnambalam Arunachalam was educated at the University of Cambridge.
21. Ramanathan was appointed the representative of the Tamils in 1879, on the death of his uncle Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy. The latter had occupied that position upto that time.
22. The Select Committee, with Sir Richard Morgan as Chairman, sat for two years, and in 1867 presented an elaborate report (Sessional Paper No. 8, 1867) with certain far-reaching recommendations—among them, the abolition of the School Commission, the establishment of a state department of education with a responsible Director at the helm, and the revision of the Grant-in-Aid Scheme. See Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

in Council, he no doubt felt morally obliged to carry forward the reformist movement that Sir Mutu had already commenced. In a spirit of adolescent bravado mixed with an adult sense of responsibilty, therefore, Ramanathan moved in Council the necessity of placing the Department of Public Instruction on firmer foundations, almost immediately after entering the Legislative Council. He asked whether the Memorandum of the Director dated 12th May and referred to by him in his report for 1878, would be acted upon.

In his first important speech on education, the first of a series that marked his tenure of office as the representative of the Tamils, Ramanathan stressed two important points: the responsibility of the state for the education of its future citizens; and the ridiculously and criminally low sums of money then spent on education. Said Ramanathan on 19th November 1879: "I don't think it necessary to dilate on the obligation of the government to educate the people. I think that will be conceded, but I do wish to press on you, Sir, the fact that capital invested in education is reproductive."[23] Both these ideas were new and revolutionary in the contemporary colonial context. Having next quoted Sir Charles Macarthy and C. A. Lorenz in support of his contentions, Ramanathan went on to assert, in a tone of bitter self-reproach:

> We who speak of ourselves as rolling in wealth are the niggardliest in our expenditure on so noble a cause as education....Nothing is more universally admitted than the principle that the Government should provide for the education of the masses. The wealthier classes of Ceylon, absorbed in their own pursuits, do not think of the educational wants of the poor....The future policy of the Government should be to spend largely on the promotion of vernacular education.[24]

Thus, early in his political career, Ramanathan stressed not only the need for a state-sponsored and-controlled system of education not merely for a rich *elite* but also for the "masses"; he also drew the attention of the authorities to the need for the use of the *vernacular*, as opposed to the exclusive use of English, as the educational medium in the upper forms. Thus Ramanathan was one of the earliest advocates of the use of *swabasha* in education in Sri Lanka.

Like James Alwis before him, Ramanathan saw quite clearly the inseparable connection between contemporary English education and Westernisation with its attendant alienation of the English-educated from his own countrymen. A knowledge of English only made the Sinhalese youth hanker after the more superficial features of Western civilisation, not its really sound elements: "At present the great ambition of the Sinhalese youth, who has picked up a smattering of English in the Anglo-Vernacular schools, is to assume the external phases of Western civilisation only, without caring to aspire to those really sound elements of it which made that civilisation valuable."[25]

To Ramanathan, the ultimate and most obnoxious consequence of pursuing English education as a status symbol was, of course, the estrangement of the intelligentsia of the country from the ordinary masses, and the decay and

23. *Select Speeches of Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, p. 11.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

suppression of traditional customs, religions, cultures and ways of life, especially the pursuit of agriculture as a life-calling. It led, finally, to the degradation of life, and to the loss of personal happiness as well as individual income. Ramanathan evoked vividly the radical transformation (for the worse) in the pitiable recipients of English education thus: "When the Sinhalese youth comes to know a little English, his mind becomes unsettled. He discards the plough, the honourable and useful calling of his ancestors, idles away his time or becomes a petition-drawer or clerk on a miserable pittance. This is not as it should be."[26]

Not only did Ramanathan thus debunk the system of English education in the late 19th century; he also pointed to the self-obvious remedy: "The Government has hitherto devoted large sums of money towards instructing the youths of the country in elementary English education and neglected to give them the opportunity of entering upon a higher course of study in their language. The future policy of the Government should be to spend largely on the promotion of vernacular education."[27] Thus, like James Alwis before him, and Arunachalam and Coomaraswamy during his own generation, Ramanathan, a youth still in his twenties, championed the cause of *swabasha* as a medium of instruction and as a field worthy of higher learning, over three-quarters of a century before the indigenous languages were made the media of education in the Island.

Like James Alwis, Arunachalam and Coomaraswamy, Ramanathan apportioned the blame for the social ills stemming from the faulty educational system between the colonialist ruler and the subject-peoples. While the British rulers were certainly to be blamed for their jaundiced policy of ignoring the languages actually used in the country, the Sri Lankans were equally culpable for the criminal neglect of their own mother-tongues and traditional cultures. In a public speech on "The Denationalisation of the Sinhalese" delivered in 1904, Ramanathan dramatically and sardonically high-lighted the tragic plight of the Westernised, English-educated Sinhalese, tracing it to its deeper causes:

> "First and foremost, (the cause of the denationalisation of the Sinhalese) is the utter neglect of the use of the Sinhalese language amongst those who have learned to speak English.... I have asked these denationalised Sinhalese gentlemen, 'Will you tell me what constitutes a Sinhalese man?' Not knowing the answer, they have remained silent. I then asked them, 'Do you take delight in speaking the beautiful Sinhalese language at your homes, and among your friends when you meet in railway carriages and other places, and on public platforms?' They feebly smiled."[28]

Ramanathan concluded this revelatory account of the (to him inexplicable) behaviour of his countrymen in a tone of ironic and pathetic self-resignation: "Ah me! If Sinhalese lips will not speak the Sinhalese language, who else is there to speak it?"[29] Thus to Ramanathan, as to Coomaraswamy and to

26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
28. From a speech by Ramanathan on "The Denationalisation of the Singhalese", delivered at Ananda College, Colombo, on 3rd September, 1904, quoted in Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 479
29. Quoted in *ibid.*

Arunachalam, superficial westernisation was the inevitable corollary of English education, the two together leading to the destruction of everything that was valuable in indigenous culture.

Quite logically, to Ramanathan, the rising tide of westernisation and denationalisation could be stemmed only by a colossal attempt at a realistic self-examination of their unenviable plight by the Sri Lankans themselves. He constantly felt and urged that "Every Sinhalese man, every Tamil man, who knows what he is about, should raise his voice and protest against the denationalisation that is going on in this country."[30] Chastising the Sinhalese in indignant vein for their perverse refusal to learn and use their own mother-tongue, Ramanathan went on to define the national-minded Sinhalese as follows: "The man who speaks Sinhalese....without any admixture of foreign language, who can roll out sentence after sentence in pure Sinhalese, charged with sober sense, inspiring and grand to hear is a Sinhalese man indeed."[31] Ramanathan thereafter proceeded to call every man who could not speak his native tongue a "pariah",[32] a non-Sinhalese, and sounded the death-knell of the entire Sinhalese race in the following words: "(If you)....cannot or will not speak your native language on public platforms, in railway carriages and in drawing-rooms, and will not stand up for your national institutions, then I say none of you deserve to be called Sinhalese, 1,800,000 Sinhalese will soon dwindle to nothing. The nation will be ruined, and we must await with trembling knees the early destruction of the Sinhalese language."[33] This was, indeed, a warning first sounded by James Alwis in the late 1860s, and by Coomaraswamy and Arunachalam during the closing years of the 19th century.[34] Thus, to Ramanathan, as to Alwis and Coomaraswamy, the basic and most urgently-needed reform in the contemporary educational system was the change of the media of instruction from English to Sinhalese and Tamil.

A careful reading of the speeches and writings of Ramanathan indicates that although he never attempted to formulate a full-fledged and self-contained theory of education, his educational thought and reformist activities in later life imply a coherent grasp of certain fundamental tenets of education. It is clear from numerous comments on education in his writings and speeches that Ramanathan had pondered deeply on the subject of education in general as well as on the history of traditional education in the East, and on the unsuitability of the colonial system then in vogue in India and Sri Lanka. Ramanathan had acquired (probably through family tradition and upbringing, his stay in India and his extensive reading) a deep knowledge of the traditional (Sinhalese and Hindu) systems of education. The extent and depth of Ramanathan's study of the traditional Hindu and Sinhalese systems of education[35] are revealed

30. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 481.
31. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 482.
32. Note the common use of the word "pariah" ('outcast') to designate westernised and denationalised Sri Lankans by both Ramanathan and Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy described the English-educated youth in India and Sri Lanka as "a nondescript and superficial being deprived of all roots—a sort of *intellectual pariah* who does not belong to the East or the West, the past or the future." (*The Dance of Shiva, New York*, 1957, p. 156). Emphasis added.
33. Quoted in Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 482.
34. For details, see the papers on James Alwis, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Ponnambalam Arunachalam, mentioned in fn. 1 above.
35. Ramanathan described the Sinhala-Buddhist system of *Pansala* (temple) education as "a copy of the *pāṭhasālā* system indigenous to India." (*Select* Speeches, p. 35).

quite clearly in his speech on the "Proposed Revised Code of Education for 1881 and the Grant-in-Aid-System", delivered in the Legislative Council on 6th December, 1880, in which he outlined, vividly though briefly, the traditional Hindu system of education prevalent for ages in India and in the Jaffna peninsula. While conceding at the outset that the education imparted in the school of the hereditary village teacher could not be termed by any means "high or liberal", Ramanathan showed that such traditional education had nevertheless served its purpose quite adequately during the time and in the environment in which it had been used. With obvious approval Ramanathan quoted the following excerpt from the characterisation of the system of traditional Hindu education from a report of the Director of Public Instruction of Bengal: "It (i.e., traditional Eastern education) was not education at all in the proper sense of the word, but rather instruction in some of the most necessary arts of life".[36] It was "so eminently and intensely practical that it neglected everything that had not immediate reference to the daily concerns of a villager's life."[37] According to Ramanathan, the ancient Sinhalese and Tamil peoples of Sri Lanka had always set store by education of this highly useful, "intensely and eminently practical" type.

In clear eulogistic vein, Ramanathan went on to describe some of the features of the ancient educational system practised during the reign of the ancient Sinhalese kings: "It is mentioned of King Vijaya Bahu III, who reigned in 1240, that he established a school in *every village* and charged the priests who superintended them to take nothing from the pupils, promising that he would himslef reward them for their trouble. Such was the policy of enlightened Sinhalese sovereigns, the policy of bringing free education to the very doors of the people."[38] Free and state-controlled mass education was apparently not, therefore, something unusual or revolutionary in the Sri Lankan context.

State-sponsored and state-controlled education for the masses, in Ramanathan's opinion, could only be achieved through a system of small government schools:

> "The wealthier classes of Ceylon, absorbed in their own pursuits, do not think of the educational wants of the poor, nor are the labouring classes sensible enough or able to help themselves. It is therefore the duty of the Government to urge the masses to educate themselves and also to contribute largely and freely to the cause of such education. The circumstances of the colony permit of such education mainly by means of small schools, and the withdrawal of the grants from such schools will seriously affect the educational opportunity of the people."[39]

Ramanathan opposed vehemently the Government's attempts at the time to reduce the number of schools (by closing down small schools). The state's hopes of establishing larger schools with better teachers and tighter discipline Ramanathan surmised, was only "a vain hope."[40] "What is immediately,

36. *Select Speeches*, p. 35.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

required," he asserted, "is a network of small schools throughout the country. The people of this country do not appreciate education so greatly as to send their children to distantly situated large schools."[41]

To Ramanathan, the contemporary system of colonial education was unsatisfactory in several other important respects. Its gravest limitation was that it was weighted heavily towards the material aspects of life, not towards the religious and spiritual, which the orthodox Hindu valued very highly. This lop-sidedness, asserted Ramanathan, was an inevitable consequence of the slavish imitation of a foreign and alien educational system: "The curriculum of studies prescribed in the universities and schools in the west, except in theological circles, are confined to the things that relate to the perishable side of life."[42]

Ramanathan proceeded to describe how the adoption of the western system of education had led, within a half-century, to dire consequences. It had wrought a complete moral, ethical and spiritual change in the younger generation, and directed their minds to a striving for sensual gratification. Indeed, it had reversed completely the system of life-values upheld throughout the ages by tradition, custom and religion. Ramanathan's apprehensive vision of a newly-emerging immoral and irreligious generation emerges in passages such as the following:

> "Everywhere the complaint is that boys and girls are not as they were some 50 years ago. Formerly there was some peace reigning in their hearts. They respected their elders in their homes and societies and the rulers of the country, in councils of state and on political platforms. They were willing and ready to put into practice the principles they had been taught at their homes and schools. They loved to be self-controlled, obedient, thoughtful and helpful to others. They spurned selfishness and irreligion."[43]

What the new "English education" brought in its wake was the reversal of the virtues mentioned and an attendant growth in the sensual aspects of life: "There is now a vehement desire for the gratification of the senses at any cost, an extraordinary regard for pleasure, and a proportionate contempt for duty. The principles which make life a thing of beauty and joy forever have all been forgotten."[44]

To Ramanathan, the greatest loss suffered by pupils as a result of the decay of traditional education was the neglect of morality and religion. He complained bitterly that even teachers in "great colleges," "do not know how to teach God and morality."[45] To Ramanathan, education was essentially the pursuit of the truth, which could be achieved only through religion...i.e, through faith in God, the universal creator. Education was one pathway to the Divine Truth, and therefore all education had ultimately to provide answers to the people's questions on God and the universe:

41. *Ibid.*,
42. *Debates in the Legislative Council of Ceylon* (*Hansard*), 1925, Colombo, 1926, p. 182.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*

> "People want to know who God is, and what is God doing for us, how are we to know God, and what is our duty towards God. They also want to know what is Ethics or Morality, on what is it founded. What is the reason of the difference between things which are permitted and things which are not permitted, and what relation does pleasure bear to duty. Such questions, if not answered intelligibly, produce a doubtful and controversial state of mind, which ultimately leads to materialism and other sin."[46]

Thus, the neglect of religion, morality and ethics in 19th century education led, *ipso facto*, to the production of a generation who had lost faith in moral and religious values, and whose sole purpose was to

> "seize every opportunity to please oneself in every plane of the senses. The meaning of pleasing or enjoying oneself is to gratify every desire or passion that creeps into the mind. The result is a life like that of the butterflies, dogs, cattle, and other animals, which have no codes of religion and ethics, and which have no power to hear and understand them."[47]

Religion and morality were thus the cornerstones in Ramanathan's concept of an ideal liberal education. He did not, however, conceive of education being (of necessity) religious in the narrow sectarian sense. To Ramanathan, all major world religions were at bottom alike, in that they all upheld the same fundamental set of moral and ethical principles, "the principles of imperishable or eternal life....(which are taught) in order to save human beings from the dangers of worldly life"[48] as he described them. All religions emphatically assert that the "life eternal is not something high up in the skies, but is attainable in our own hearts amidst our worldly surroundings, and that a knowledge of the principles and practices of Eternal life is the only safeguard against the corruptions which beset our path on earth."[49] The function of educators and education was therefore "to bring afresh within the reach of our children the great traditions which have been crowded out of our schools and colleges by the advent of what is called modern civilisation."[50] Elsewhere, Ramanathan showed that the chief aim of education was to enable youth to save themselves from "the perils of selfishness and sensuousness combined, called worldliness."[51] A sound and effective system of education would (while giving the pupils a knowledge of the nature of "the perishable things of life") have to make a serious effort to "inculcate also some of the principles relating to the imperishable things known as God and Souls, and to teach the part which Evil plays in the destruction of humanity."[52]

When Ramanathan spoke of "the Life Eternal" and "God," he was not restricting himself to any one god in the Hindu pantheon or to the Christian God. To him all religions were different aspects of a single universal faith, and God was really an abstraction, though identified and worshipped under specific names and guises in the different religions. This notion finds explicit statement in the following passage:

46. Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, 122.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*

> "There is only one God for all nations. He is the only lord of all hosts, who can be worshipped by human beings. The methods of worship in the case of the great religions of the world may be different, but the object worshipped is identically the same."[53]

Only an ideal system of education which gave a predominant place to the inculcation of religious, ethical and moral principles could produce "really good men and women, really good citizens", the ideal products of a satisfactory system of education. The chief object of education, according to Ramanathan was, therefore, to make good citizens of pupils, and by "reminding them of our Spiritual Traditions,....to make them real assets to us and to the British Empire."[54] In other words, "education" was synonymous with the building up of good character, and cultivating in pupils "lofty ideals" as Ramanathan described them in this passage which epitomises his philosophy of education:

> "Education in the proper sense of the term implies something that is systematically neglected by our educationists....The more important side of Education is the training of boys and girls to lofty ideals of character, perfection in work, heartfelt devotion to God, and loyalty to the king."[55]

According to Ramanathan, however, the development of a "lofty character" was no easy or simple process—it could be attained only through a rigid control of the senses as well as of the mental faculties, supplemented by "abundant study and thoughtful action." Goodness of character, the avoidance of evil, was no inherited or congenital trait for the majority of the people in any country. For the masses, therefore, what was required was "a kind of education..that will lead them out of the mazes of wickedness."[56] It was the business of education to teach boys and girls that "indulgence in any desire, not permitted by law, conduces to debase one's character and brings about spiritual ruin;" that "the desire for gratifying each of the five senses should be carefully limited and controlled lest the mind, running promiscuously with the senses, be spoilt by the mire of sensualism;" that "an impure mind becomes the ally of evil, and the enemy of the soul"[57] and that there are certain principles and practices of Eternal Life a knowledge of which is indispensable to all men and women.

The second essential feature of a good educational system, according to Ramanathan, was the inculcation of the value of "perfection in work." A perfectionist himself all his life, Ramanathan believed that nothing really worthwhile could be achieved without hard work and infinite pains: "Perfection in work is not to be obtained except by taking infinite pains: and endeavouring to complete and polish up in every detail the work in hand."[58] Yet again, physical work could not be divorced or separated from mental activity, nor could intellectual excellence be attained without spiritual perfection. Moreover, there was no distinction between so-called "little things" or "great things"

53. Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
58. *Ibid.*

which men are called upon to perform: "in the case of everything," declared Ramanathan, "our duty is to turn out excellent work, and we shall have our reward which is steadfastness of purpose, poise, purity of heart, and prosperity in peace"[59]—for the great God, the Creator of the Universe, has provided man with excellent models and examples of structural perfection, beauty and co-relation of the various constituent parts.

The third of the main ideals of Ramanathan—loyalty to the King—was obviously dictated by the contemporary social milieu into which Ramanathan and his contemporaries had been born and in which they had to live. Ramanathan and his generation had to live, willy-nilly, under the yoke of British colonialism at a time when there was not even a distant prospect of self-government or *swaraj* and it is not surprising that Ramanathan was obliged to pay lip-service to loyalty to the king and the British Empire. In asserting the neccessity of this "virtue" of loyalty, Ramanathan declared (with his tongue in his cheek, perhaps): "We still make much of this virtue. If the throne and its surroundings are disturbed, there will be confusion in society, and many great dangers will stare us in the face."[60]

Ramanathan was quite explicit regarding the subject of educational reform and the necessity for educational "experts". From his youth to the end of his life Ramanathan never had any doubts regarding the necessity for overhauling the educational system of Sri Lanka. Just four years before his death, in 1926, Ramanathan said "Some effort should be made to recast our system of education upon better lines."[61] Speaking on the subject of educational expertise in the Legislative Council during the debate on "The Educational Policy of Government," on February 25, 1926, Ramanathan emphasised the view that mere book-learning or familiarity with the writings of the philosophers could not make an "educational expert"; instead, the "expert" needed was a man of practical experience:

> "Because a man is familiar with the writings of Plato and other philosophers he is no expert. The expert we want, sir, is a man with a ripe understanding, who having the power to act independently of likes and dislikes, is pure in heart, and has a clear perception of the goal of education, which is God. That is the man we want. He must also be a man with a world-wide practical experience of the affairs of human nature. We do not want a man who is simply learned in books."[62]

This passage again shows that Ramanathan was no ivory-tower idealist with his head high in the air, that he was an idealist-cum-realist of the best type.

59. Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Debates in the Legislative Council of Ceylon* (*Hansard*), 1926, Colombo, 1927, p. 379.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 374-75.

Like James Alwis,[63] Ananda Coomaraswamy[64] and Arunachalam,[65] Ramanathan too had to re-define the place of English *vis-a-vis* the indigenous languages, Sinhalese and Tamil, in the Sri Lanka educational system. Ramanathan accepted the general view that "there ought to be a proper balance maintained between English and the local languages", but inquired how such a balance could be maintained when the Department of Education was not providing any facilities for the promotion of bilingualism. An advocate of bilingualism as the panacea for many of the administrative, social and psychological ills of contemporary Sri Lankan society, Ramanathan pressed for the restoration of the native languages[66] to their rightful place of equality in status with the official language, English:

> I for one cannot condemn the deeper study of the English language. I would say that the local language, Tamil or Sinhalese, should be taught to the same extent..that sort of bilingual facility is essential and should be developed. I should like a Tamil or Sinhalese man born here to know English as well as his own language. Thus we may be great co-operators in the work for the good of this Island. The production of this bilingual facility in our schools, would be good for Ceylon and for the rest of the British Empire.[67]

And this bilingual facility, said Ramanathan, should "go on from the lowest stage of a school up to the highest."[68]

In Ramanathan's view, the preservation and fostering of the native literatures, cultures and customs of the various communal or linguistic groups in Sri Lanka, too, was one of the vital functions to be entrusted to the country's educational systems; as Ramanathan put it, each race should safeguard its traditions, language and literature. "There is no other way for its leading men to teach, uplift, and preserve their people. We must be loyal to our ancient traditions and customs....Every right-thinking man would say, 'Let us preserve those ancient traditions'..We must really encourage the efforts made by our members to bring about a revival of her ancient traditions."[69] Here, once again, Ramanathan was treading the beaten track already followed by his predecessors, Alwis and Coomaraswamy.

As has already been shown, the hallmark of Ramanathan's ideal system of education was the primary role that the "spiritual" or religious element would

63. See the paper on James Alwis mentioned in fn. 1.

64. Coomaraswamy's attitude towards English *vis-a-vis* the native language of the pupil is exemplified by the following comments: "Do not think that I am at all opposed to the study of English in addition to the mother tongue; on the contrary, the people of India will do well to take every advantage of their opportunities of becoming a bilingual people ..Let him..know well his own tongue and also English.." (Ananda Coomaraswamy, 'Anglicisation of the East', *The Ceylon National Review*, No. 2, July 1906, p. 185).

65. Ponnambalam Arunachalam too advocated bilingualism for the Sri Lankans, as indicated by statements such as the following: "Every Sinhalese or Tamil should be compelled to devote some time to the systematic study of his mother tongue, so as to be able to speak and write it correctly." (P. Arunachalam, *The Census of Ceylon*, Vol. 1, Colombo, 1902, p. 133; Describing the study of English as "a subject of essential importance to us," Arunachalam declared that "a knowledge (of English is necessary for the earning of a living—but more important still it is our only avenue to Western culture." (P. Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 1, Colombo, n.d., pp. 260-61).

66. *Debates in the Legislative Council of Ceylon* (*Hansard*), 1926, p. 375.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 378.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

play in it. Pupils under this ideal system should be trained to "prefer always the needs of the soul to the cravings of the body."[70] Only such a spiritual education could wean young people away from "indulgence in selfishness, unrestrained gratification of sensual desires, and the preference of pleasure to duty[71] —what Ramanathan characterised as "a bondage to evil and its subtle corruption." The cultivation of love (which would ideally be threefold) should be the ultimate goal of such an educational exercise—"to protect the little leaven of love and light that is in every man, and to develop them successfully, first into neighbourly love, and then into philanthropic love, and then to Godly love."[72] In short, the spiritual bias in education was for Ramanathan a *sine qua non* for the "direction of the higher desires"—but, unfortunately, the colonial system of English education which "thrust aside religious ethics"[73] was woefully incapable of achieving such a lofty aim.

It is for crucial reasons that Ramanathan, when he introduced his motion to establish Parameshvara College included a section in it laying down clearly that, in addition to the usual curriculum of studies, the religious traditions of the Hindus should be carefully taught to every Hindu boy there. However, Ramanathan was no religious fanatic; perhaps to prove beyond doubt his religious tolerance,[74] Ramanathan employed some Christian teachers in addition to Hindus at Parameshvara College, and also made it possible for boys belonging to all religions to gain admission to the school. Ramanathan pointed out that Hinduism was in fact an all-embracing and tolerant faith which "inculcates that the souls of boys and girls and men and women, of whatever faith or race, are all children of one and the same God, that parents as well as teachers are trustees of God, that God exists in the heart of every human being, and that all the affairs of this world must be interpreted in terms of the prevailing power and grace of God."[75] Indeed, Ramanathan was himself the perfect embodiment of the broad, humane tolerance typical of the Hindu religion.

In keeping with the basic tenets of his educational philosophy (based as it was in large measure on local traditions, especially the spiritual traditions, as shown above), Ramanathan paid only passing and secondary attention to the necessity for education to be employment-oriented. In any case, said Ramanathan, it was not really practicable to make education" enable an outgoing student to find a livelihood for himself" at the primary stage between 6 and 14 years of age. If at all, such job-orientation, "the training for a clerkship or other vocation for earning a living wage"[76] would be possible only in later years, say, between 14 and 19 years. However, Ramanathan clearly subordinated the type of "education that is required to gain a livelihood, so as to keep body and soul together"[77] to the other ideals of his that have been outlined previously.

Ramanathan differs from the other prominent representatives of the tradition of radical protest against English education in Sri Lanka from another crucial point of view. He and he alone was capable of translating his precepts

70. *Debates in the Legislative Council of Ceylon* (*Hansard*), 1925, p. 185.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 185
73. *Ibid.*
74. The fact that Ramanathan had no religious fanaticism is also exemplified by his scholarly studies of other religions, especially Christianity. (e.g. *The Culture of the Soul Among Western Nations*, 1906).
75. *Debates in the Legislative Council of Ceylon* (*Hansard*), 1925, *p.* 187.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

into tangible form though only towards the tail-end of his career. Ramanathan, who had early in political life confined himself to the criticism of the *status quo* in education, ventured farther afield than Alwis, Coomaraswamy and Arunachalam, by taking the practical step that was unfortunately beyond the reach of any of his compatriots. He established two educational institutions by his own efforts, grounded on the theoretical foundations that he had built up gradually over the years. These tangible symbols of Ramanathan's educational ideas and ideals were Ramanathan College (for girls) and Parameshvara College (for boys), both in Jaffna.

On his return from his lecture tour of America,[78], Ramanathan decided to "devote (himself) to national work amongst (his) countrymen and whatever resources were in (his) hands, (he) hoped to devote to the service of his country." He continued: "I am afraid that to my own generation, I cannot be of much use, but I certainly hope to be able to do some good at least to some of your children and children's children."[79] The idea of founding a national Buddhist-Hindu college in Colombo, to serve as a model for other institutions which it was part of his plan to establish in various parts of the island, however, had been conceived by Ramanathan as early as 1890. Such an educational institution would, he believed, provide facilities for the higher education of the Buddhist and Hindu youth against a predominantly Buddhist and Hindu background, and ultimately provide a common haven for Buddhist and Hindu culture—the essential foundation for a united Sri Lanka. However, Ramanathan's hopes were dashed to the ground at the initial stage as a result of a serious split between the leaders of the two communities on the question of management. When the plan thus proved abortive, Ramanathan turned his attention to the establishment of an institution of higher learning for Hindu girls in Jaffna. Ramanathan turned to practical educational reform in preference to purely political work, after he had realised the ephemeral nature of all political activity. Ramanathan explained the way in which he took to the founding of colleges as follows:

> "The idea of founding a college for girls has been in my mind for about 10 years....Great as political work is, I am not satisfied with the results attained through labour on the platform. It is mostly of ephemeral value and does not deeply affect the real welfare of the people in their everyday life. I think purely educational work is far more important."[80]

After a lapse of several years caused by the difficulty of finding a suitable site,[81] the foundation stone for Ramanathan College was laid at Chunnakam by Ramanathan himself, on 3rd June 1910. The buildings, which were completed in 1913, were formally declared open on 20th June 1913.[82] The staff was representative of the best aspects of the cultures of the East as well as the West. Ramanathan provided a synopsis of his philosophy of education when he defined his aims and objectives of establishing the College as follows:

78. For details regarding Ramanathan's lecture tour of America in 1905-06, see Vythilingam *op. cit.*, chapter 35, pp. 509-33.
79. Ramanathan, quoted in Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 541.
80. Ramanathan, quoted in Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 545.
81. Considerable opposition had to be faced from the Christian missionaries who believed that Ramanathan was attempting to oust them from their strongholds in the Jaffna peninsula. For details, see Vythilingam, *op. cot.*, p. 547.
82. The principal of the college was an English lady, Mrs. Florence Farr Emery, a product of Cheltenham Ladies' College.

> "To give the girls such a training as would make them not only thoroughly efficient at home and in society without being denationalised, but also devoted to God, loyal to the king and desirous of the welfare of the people; and to embody in practical form the ancient Indian system known as *Guru Kula Vasam*, wherein the privileges of residence and constant association with cultured teachers was deemed essential to the development of the moral, intellectual and spiritual qualities of the pupil."[83]

As becomes quite clear in the final sentence of the above quotation, Ramanathan's system of education was based largely upon the traditional Indian system called the *Guru Kula*.[84] It was this same system that had been revived by Rabindranath Tagore in his Vishvabharati university at Shantiniketan in India.

The curriculum at Ramanathan College included training in the *Jñāna Śāstras, Dharma Śāstras, Purāṇas*, and *Itihāsas*, and "ancient legends of God's mercies and national stories of famous dynasties intended to illustrate sound principles of political and social life."[85] With the very young, "a combination of the ancient Tamil system with the (German) Kindergarten and the (Italian) Montessori systems"[86] was to be used. English, too, was to be taught, side by side with Tamil. Thus Ramanathan's practical education scheme was eclectic, and drew freely upon the traditional as well as on the best and most up-to-date educational methods, techniques and theories then current in the West. In no sense could it be said that Ramanathan was conservatively harking back to a decadent tradition.

Nor did Ramanathan disregard completely the necessity for education to be (at least in part) employment-oriented for, within the premises of Ramanathan College he set up a Śaiva Training School for girls who, after completing their collegiate education, chose to become teachers.[87]. The College also had a farm of its own at Kilinochchi, which supplied provisions for the school.

Religion at Ramanathan College was considered to be at the heart of education. Morning and evening worship at the College temple was considered an integral part of student life. The entire atmosphere and way of life at the school was the traditionally Hindu one, above all, Ramanathan himself was personally present at religious gatherings, and directed the students and their teachers in worship and joined in the singing of hymns of the Śaivite saints in the traditional manner. Ramanathan wished the products of Ramanathan College to become models of the best models of Hindu womanhood, as exemplified by women like Sītā, Sāvitrī and Damayanti. Of course, Ramanathan's concept of the woman's place as being legitimately in the home (where of necessity she was the sole mistress) was more traditional and orthodox than "modern" or "revolutionary".

The other concrete symbol of Ramanathan's ideas in education was Parameshvara College, Jaffna, for boys. On June 18, 1925, Ramanathan (now Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, Kt., K.C., C.M.G., and Member for the Northern Province, Northern Division in the Legislative Council) moved the first reading of "An Ordinance to Declare the Constitution of Parameshvara College, Jaffna, and to Incorporate the Board of Directors of the said College".

83. Ramanathan, quoted in Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 550.
84. The *Guru Kula* system is referred to in several Jataka tales.
85. Ramanathan, quoted in Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 551.
86. Ramanathan, quoted in Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, p. 551.
87. Vythilingam, *op. cit.*,p. 553.

The lengthy and inspired speech that Ramanathan delivered on this occasion was a synopsis, as it were, of all that Ramanathan had thought, written and practised during a lifetime of devoted service to his nation and to the Tamil community. The need for education to impart to pupils and citizens "something more than a knowledge of the perishable things", Ramanathan's constant *leit motiv* regarding education, runs through his epoch-making speech. Addressing the Speaker of the Legislative Council, Ramanathan once again reiterated his lofty aims and ideals in establishing Parameshvara College as follows:

> "I have thought for many years that it was my duty to help Hindu parents in this country and India to attain their heart's wish. This is the reason, Sir, why Parameshvara Vithyalayam was founded. Vithyalayam means a house of learning, and Parameshvara means the most high. Any student who is admitted there will be given facilities to know something more of life than the perishable side of it."[88]

Parameshvara College was expressly designed to "lead (children) out of the mazes of wickedness, through an appropriate spiritual training and development", and as a model which could "widely direct the higher desires and endeavour to find peace in the culture of one's own personality", to enable pupils (ultimately and ideally) to pass from "the kingdom of earth to the kingdom of God, from the things of perishable life to imperishable life or the Life Eternal."[89] It is with such phrases that Ramanathan fittingly concluded his impassioned speech on this important occasion.

The fact that Ramanathan was no mere ivory-tower educational dreamer with his head in the clouds may be further demonstrated by reference to the sentiments expressed by him a few years later, on the occasion of the debate and battle regarding a site for the establishment of a University for Sri Lanka. On that occasion, he sided firmly with that group of legislators in Council who supported the Buller's Road site (i.e., the champions of the Colombo site as opposed to those who advocated a hill-country site). Significantly, Ramanathan, the educational realist that he was, preferred human beings to beautiful but inanimate Nature as agents and instruments of education, for he showed that the ivory-tower seclusion of the salubrious hill-country (Peradeniya or Dumbara) would hardly be conducive to serious education. Speaking in support of the Colombo site, Ramanathan said:

> "If we want the ability to uplift peccant humanity and draw them up from the vanities, crudities and wickednesses of life, *inspiration must be drawn from the best men by being in the midst.* What is there at Dumbara to equip our boys effectively for the best manner of performing the various duties of life in society and in business circles? *Can going down upon their knees and contemplating the clouds and the falling streams help them in the contemplation of life and in the perfection of actions*?"[90]

To our own generation with its hindsight, the above sentences with their characteristic tone of ironic and sarcastic venom today seem replete with a deep sense of farseeing prophecy.

Ramanathan was, therefore, not only an educational idealist but also a highly practical educational reformer of rare calibre. Unlike most other representatives of the tradition of radical protest against colonial English education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, he was fortunate enough to see

88. *Debates in the Legislative Council of Ceylon*, 1925, p. 183.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
90. *Debates in the Legislative Council af Ceylon*, 1927, Debate on the site for the Ceylon University, Oct. 27, 1927, p. 1575.

his ideals translated (at least partly) into reality. Unfortunately, however, he did not live sufficiently long to witness the final fruition of his life-long endeavours: he died on November 26, 1930 a few years after he had established Parameshvara College.

The following passage in which Ramanathan outlined his objectives of founding Ramanathan College may be taken as an epitome of his aims and ideals in education in the specific context of late 19th and early 20th century Sri Lanka:

> "Every effort will be made to create in the pupils an intelligent devotion to God, loyalty to the king and public spirit, to foster national ideals, and promote the harmonious development of mind and body. In these courses of instruction, particular attention will be paid to impart to the students, by a graduated series of lessons, the principles of the Saiva faith and all the ideals and practices necessary for the maintenance of the national life of the Tamils. Every endeavour will be made to revive interest in Tamil literature, music and other fine arts."[91]

The present account of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan's ideas and ideals of education indicates that he was thinking, writing and acting firmly within the context of the "tradition of radical protest" against colonial English education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Sri Lanka, a tradition which has been defined and described in more detail elsewhere, for at the same time, however, Ramanathan was not a blind follower or disciple of any one of his predecessors on the tradition, nor a complete conformist (to traditional Hindu educational ideals). Ramanathan's concept of an ideal Sri Lankan education carries its own special and individual flavour, although (as has already been pointed out above) his views and ideals show obvious marks of cross-influence and fertilisation from several others who preceded him in the tradition (especially James Alwis and Ananda Coomaraswamy).

Thus Ramanathan was, without doubt, writing in a well-established tradition of protest when he (like Alwis and Coomaraswamy) opposed unequivocally the *status quo* in contemporary English education, as described in the first part of the present paper. While he spoke in almost the self-same voice as Alwis, Coomaraswamy and Arunachalam in pleading for the restoration of the indigenous languages (Sinhalese and Tamil) as the principal media of instruction, for the cultivation of bilingualism, and for the recognition of the cultures and traditions of the pupils in the educational structure, Ramanathan distinctly differed from the others named above in that he highlighted the religious (or, more appositely, the "spiritual") and moral limitations of the prevalent system of colonial education. This was an aspect of educational policy that had been largely ignored by the earlier representatives of the tradition. The hallmark of Ramanathan's philosophy of education was the necessary centrality of religion and spiritual development—the axis round which all education worthy of its name should revolve. It was only a spiritual education of the type that he advocated that could ultimately produce citizens of unimpeachable "moral" character, persons who would lead the nation to spiritual regeneration, and, through the latter, give birth to an ethically immaculate and therefore viable, nation, a nation that would not be lured away into ruin by its concentration upon the merely "perishable things of life."

SARATHCHANDRA WICKRAMASURIYA

91. Ramanathan, quoted in Vythilingam, *op. cit.*, pp. 151–52.