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Race, Religion and Economic Opportunity in the University of Ceylon

■HE University of Ceylon abides strictly by section 7 of the Ceylon University Ordinance, No. 20 of 1942, which in effect forbids discrimination on the basis of "race, religion or class." With few exceptions all students must pass the University Entrance Examination: and in accordance with Regulations the candidates are distinguished only by numbers. Accordingly, the examiners are quite unaware of the identities of the candidates, of the "races" to which they belong or of the religions which they profess. bution of "races" and religions among the students of the University is thus not under the control of the University. It is determined solely by (a) the number of candidates who present themselves for the University Entrance Examination and the standard that they attain; and (b) the ability of students to pass the internal examinations and to provide the necessary funds (with or without assistance from the University, which is given on a strictly nondiscriminatory basis) to maintain themselves there. For administrative purposes, in fact, "race" and religion are entirely without interest, and it was not the practice of the Ceylon Medical College to collect the figures. It is, however, the duty of every public body, and above all of a University, to provide any data which may be useful for sociological investigation. It was therefore the practice of the Ceylon University College to collect statistics of "races" and religions, and the figures for 1928 were published in the Report of the University Commission¹. The University has continued the practice and publishes the figures in the Council's annual report'. There is no doubt that the figures are of considerable sociological value. With other published figures (alas! far too few) they enable the structure of society to be analysed and, when they have been continued for a sufficiently long period, they will be an index of social change.

^{1.} SESSIONAL PAPER IV of 1929, p.52.

^{2.} The (English) University Grants Committee publishes figures relating to "Hcme Residence," type of school, etc. See also the Report on Higher Education in Malaya (Colonial No. 173, 1939), where details of racial distribution are given: e.g., as to Raffles College, p. 23.

^{3.} The present writer has used them in the section on "Ceylon" in the forthcoming publication *British Dependencies* (Royal Institute of International Affairs). See also speech of Minister for Education, *State Council Debates*, 1944, p. 845.

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The distribution of "races" in the University during the past three years is given by Table I, which includes, for purposes of comparison, the Islandwide distribution at the census of 1921.

TABLE I: RACES OF STUDENTS (1).

			Island %.	1942	1943	1944
Sinhalese			67.0	519	509	575
Tamils			24.9	289	307	325
Moors and Malays			6.6	25	21	29
Burghers			0.7	54	52	55
Others	• •	• •	0.3	17	15	12
			100	904	904	996

The comparison with the Island figures, however, introduces an element of error. Though no statistics have been kept, it is known that there are proportionately few Kandyan Sinhalese students and hardly any Indian Tamils or Indian Moors. Table II is therefore more nearly accurate.

TABLE II: RACES OF STUDENTS (2).

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		Island %	1942	1943	1944
Low-Country Sinhalese		69.6	57.4	56.2	57.8
Ceylon Tamils		18.7	32.1	34.I	32.7
Ceylon Moors and Malay	s	9.6	2.8	2.3	2.9
Burghers		I.I	6.0	5.7	5.2
Others		I.O	1.7	1.4	I.I
		100	100	100	100

Table II thus emphasises the conclusion which may be drawn from Table I, namely, that the Tamils and Burghers are proportionately more numerous, and the Sinhalese and Muslims proportionately less numerous, than in the Island population.

III

The figures for religion are given in TABLE III, and are compared with those for the Island in 1921.

TABLE III: RELIGIONS OF STUDENTS.

		Island %	1942	1943	1944
Buddhists	 	61.6	345	318	380 (38.1%)
Hindus	 	21.8	201	193	197 (19.8%)
Christians	 	6.6	338	364	384 (38.5%)
Muslims	 	6.7	27	25	29 (2.9%)
Others	 	.02	3	4	6 (0.7%)
		100	904	904	996
					-

The Christians are thus represented much above their proportionate strength in the Island; the Hindus are represented roughly in proportion to their strength; and the Buddhists and Muslims are much under-represented.

The relation between "race" and religion has not been worked out in the University. In the Island the relationship is as follows:

220		Buddhists.	Hindus.	Christians.	Muslims.
Low-Country Sinhalese		86.3	.02	13.7	.004
Ceylon Tamils	٠.	1.3	83.0	15.8	.02
Ceylon Moors and Malays		·ıı	.02	.05	99.9
Burghers		I.I	.05	98.8	.oı

If the students of the University were representative of the people of the Island we should, by relating Table II and Table III, obtain the relation between "race" and religion roughly as in Table IV.

TABLE IV: RACE AND RELIGION (Hypothetical)

		Buddhist.	Hindus.	Christians.	Muslims.	Total.
Low-Country Sinhalese		430		68	_	498
Ceylon Tamils		4	249	47		300
Ceylon Moors and Malays		W-0-00			25	25
Burghers	٠.	I	-	49	-	50
				·		
		435	249	164	25	873

It will be seen that the horizontal totals do not entirely correspond with the figures in Table III. Accordingly, the distribution of religion is not entirely due to the distribution of "races." The latter clearly has some effect, however.

The comparatively large number of Burghers is part of the explanation of the comparatively large number of Christians, since it may be assumed that 99 per cent. of the Burghers are Christians. Also, the higher proportion of Tamils to Sinhalese increases the number of Christians, since 15.8 per cent. of Ceylon Tamils and only 13.7 per cent. of Sinhalese may be presumed to be Christians. Even so, it is not enough to explain why the "races" are not in proportion to their numbers in the general population; we must also explain why, among the "races," the several religions are not proportionately represented.

IV

One obvious source of explanation is that the University does not in fact draw equally from the whole Island but that certain sections of it are more strongly represented. This is shown by the home residences of students.

TABLE V: HOME RESIDENCES OF STUDENTS.

*	I	sland %	1942	1943	1944
Western Province		27.7	503	514	548
North Western Province		10.9	13	13	22
Northern Province		8.3	152	172	186
North Central Province		2.1	4	2	3
Central Province		16.0	70	70	73
Eastern Province		4.3	12	14	14
Province of Sabaragumuwa		10.2	20	14	20
Province of Uva		5.2	8	II	8
Southern Province		14.9	116	94	122
			904	904	996
				-	

These figures support the view that the Kandyan Sinhalese and the Indian Tamils are few in number, since they are mostly to be found in the Central and North Central Provinces and the Province of Uva. The vast majority of the students are drawn from three Provinces only, the Western, the Northern and the Southern. Every Province is under-represented except the Western, which is 100 per cent. up, and the Northern, which is 120 per cent. up. The University has no figures which would enable the relationship between residence and "race" to be worked out, but on the basis of the Provincial distribution of "races" in 1921, the following hypothetical table might be compiled.

TABLE VI: RACE AND RESIDENCE (Hypothetical)

		Low-Country Sinhalese,	Kandyan Sinhalese.	Ceylon Tamils.	Indian Tamils.	Ceylon Muslims.	Indian Muslims.	Burghers.	Total.
Western Province		400	5	IO	35	21	6	8	485
North Western Prov	ince	2	9		I	I	_		13
Northern Province		I	I	154	2	6	_	-	164
North Central Provi	nce	-	3	—		I	_		4
Central Province		6	33		30	3	I	_	73
Eastern Province		-		7		4	_	-	, II
Sabaragamuwa		I	II		3	2	_	_	17
Uva			6	-	4	I	_	_	ii
Southern Province		94				3		_	97
						_	-		
		504	68	171	75	42	7	8	875
							_	_	

It will be seen that the number of Low-Country Sinhalese bears a close resemblance to the number of Sinhalese given in TABLE I, but that the other

figures bear very little resemblance to the figures in that Table. In other words, the under-representation of the Sinhalese may be associated with (a) the over-representation of the Western Province, with its mixed racial population, (b) the over-representation of the Northern Province, which has few Sinhalese, and (c) the heavy under-representation of the Kandyan Sinhalese. On the other hand, geographical distribution has little association with the representation in the University of other "races."

If the same process is undertaken for religion, we obtain Table VII.

TABLE VII: RELIGION AND RESIDENCE (1) (Hypothetical)

	Buddhist.	Hindus.	Christians.	Muslims.	Total.
Western Province	 341	35	92	31	499
North Western Province	 10	I	2	I	14
Northern Province	 -	140	23	6	169
North Central Province	 2	_	_	-	2
Central Province	 36	27	I	I	65
Eastern Province	 I	7	1	6	15
Sabaragamuwa	 10	3	-		13
Uva	 7	4			II
Southern Province	 93	2	2	3	100
	500	219	121	48	888

The horizontal totals do not produce so close an approximation to Table III as do the horizontal totals in Table IV. They show, however, that the fact that the University draws so heavily from the Western and Northern Provinces has some influence on the lack of proportion in the distribution of religious beliefs. In those Provinces the proportions of Christians are respectively 18·35 and 13·94 per cent. as compared with an all-Island percentage of 9·86: on the other hand, the proportions of Muslims are respectively 6·26 and 3·53 as compared with an all-Island percentage of 6·73. The Southern Province, the Province from which the third largest section of the students is drawn, has only 3·3 per cent. Muslims.

There is, however, an error involved in working with the Provincial figures. Most of the students come from urban areas, and the distribution of religions among the four main urban areas in 1921 was as follows:

		I	Buddhists.	Hindus.	Christians.	Muslims.
Colombo	• •		36.35	17.65	28.81	19.69
Kandy			51.13	9.75	19.89	19.18
Galle			70.79	1.19	6.17	21.83
Jaffna District			.26	87.24	11.33	1.17

If it could be assumed that all the students in the Western, Central, Southern and Northern Provinces come from these areas respectively, the figures would be as in Table VIII.

TABLE VIII: RELIGION AND RESIDENCE (2) (Hypothetical).

		Bi	uddhists.	Hindus.	Christians	Muslims.	Total.
Colombo			182	85	134	100	501
Kandy		• • •	36	6	15	15	72
Galle			70	2	6	22	100
Jaffna				153	20	I	174
	To	otals	288	246	175	138	847

If the Muslims be ignored, this obviously brings us much nearer the distribution in Table III. It supports the inference that the students are largely urban.

It is, however, clear that we have not yet exhibited all the aspects of the problem. All University students are English-educated. In 1921, the percentages of English literates according to "race" were as follows:

			Males.	Females
Low-Country Sin	halese		 5.9	2.0
Kandyan Sinhale	ese		 1.3	0.3
Ceylon Tamils		• •	 8.5	2.1
Indian Tamils		• •	 2.5	0.4
Ceylon Moors			 3.5	0.3
Malays			 48.3	6.8
Burghers			 82.6	81.4

If the University had 900 males and 100 females and they were recruited in strict proportion to the numbers of English literates among the "races," other than Kandyan Sinhalese, Indian Tamils and Indian Moors, the distribution would be indicated by Table IX.

TABLE IX: RACE AND ENGLISH LITERACY (Hypothetical)

				Males.	Females.	Total.
Low Country Sinhalese				516	51	567
Ceylon Tamils				200	14	214
Ceylon Muslims				66	2	68
Burghers			• •	118	33	151
				900	100	1,000

There is so little relation between this Table and Table I that it suggests the absence of any relation between English literacy and the proportions of "Races" among the students. This clearly cannot be so for English literacy is a fundamental preliminary for a course of study leading to University Entrance. The figures are old and probably inaccurate. Moreover other factors intervene to make mere literacy a test of slight value. For instance, though

a high proportion of Malays is "literate" in English, it is often the kind of literacy which qualifies for service in the police force, not that which qualifies for the University. The most that can be inferred from the above Table is that the fact that most Burghers speak English at home gives them a considerable impetus in their educational careers.

Relating religion and English literacy, we find that in 1921 the percentages were as follows:

		Males.	Females.
Buddhists	 	 2.6	0.6
Hindus	 	 3.1	0.4
Christians	 ٠	 19.8	13.9
Muslims	 	 4.3	0.2

Compiling a table for 900 male students and 100 female students, we obtain Table \mathbf{X} .

TABLE X: RELIGION AND ENGLISH LITERACY (Hypothetical)

		Males.	Females.	Total.
Buddhists	• •	272	21	293
Hindus	• •	147	5	152
Christians	• •	416	73	489
Muslims	• •	65	I	66
		900	100	1,000

This is quite a near approach to Table III, but the fact that Table IX bears a much less close resemblance to Table I suggests that the concurrence may be partly accidental. It is however clear that the fact that the Christians tend to be English-speaking or at least to receive education in English is a factor of considerable importance.

VI

English literacy may be due to the availability of English schools. It may be noted, however, that no assisted English school in Ceylon rejects a pupil on account of "race" or religion. The assisted schools are denominational, but no case is known in which admission has been refused on account of religion. On the contrary, the usual complaint is that the Christian schools do not limit their educational activities to children of Christian parents. In 1944 the candidates for admission from certain of the larger schools were analysed, with the following result.

TABLE XI: RELIGIONS OF 1944 CANDIDATES.

	Bua	ldhists	Hindus C	hristian.	s Muslims
Royal College (undenominational)		8	8 .	13	2
Ananda College (Buddhist)		69	12	13	_
St. Joseph's College (Christian)		6	8	36	3
St. Thomas' College (Christian)		9	3	II	I
Trinity College (Christian)		IO	2	8	

It should be noted that the candidates from Royal College, which is an undenominational State School, showed an even more disproportionate representation than the University itself, while the school which showed roughly the same proportions as the University was St. Thomas' College, one of the leading Christian schools.

More important, probably, is the location of the schools. In 1944, there were (omitting private candidates) 600 candidates submitted by 43 schools. The details were as follows:

TABLE XII: SCHOOLS OF 1944 CANDIDATES.

			Se	chools.	Candidates.
Colombo				19	372
Other Western Prov	ince		• •	5	48
Northern Province		* *		10	123
Central Province				5	38
Southern Province			• •	3	17
Sabaragamuwa				I	2
				43	600

There is of course nothing to prevent parents from sending sons and daughters to schools outside their districts, but as this increases the cost the disability flowing from economic conditions is thereby increased. Preference is thus given by the educational system to those who live in Colombo, Jaffna, Kandy and Galle. It will be seen from Table VI and the comments thereon that there is a relation between the under-representation of the Sinhalese and the residences of the students. This may now be explained, at least in part, by the concentration of English schools in Colombo and the Jaffna District. Table VII similarly shows that there is a relation between residence and religion. Here too the explanation is, in part, the concentration of schools in Colombo and the Jaffna District. In this connection it may be convenient to separate the Colombo schools according to religious bias. Table XIII gives the result.

TABLE XIII. COLOMBO SCHOOLS IN 1944.

				S_{i}	chools	Candidates.
Undenomin	national		• •		3	138
Christian		• •			12	131
Buddhist	• •	• •		• •	3	99
Muslim	• •	• •	• •	• •	I	4
					_	
					19	372

VII.

It is however very probable that we have barely mentioned the most important element in the figures, the distribution of wealth. Unfortunately the Ceylon statistics are very defective. If we assume, however, that most of the wealthier group is to be found in Class C (Public Administration and Liberal Arts) of the Census classification of 1921, we obtain the following relation between "race" and wealth.

TABLE XIV. RACE AND WEALTH (ALL-CEYLON).

			Number.	Percentage.
Sinhalese,	Low-Country	 	75,402	60
	Kandyan	 • •	14,639 \$	00
Tamils,	Ceylon	 	29,540	24
	Indian	 	6,117 ∫	~+
Burghers		 	8,947	6
Muslims,		 	6,723	
	Indian Moor	 	509 >	7
	Malays	 	4,382	
Others		 	4,914	3
			151,173	100

The concurrence between these figures and those of Table II is really quite remarkable. It is almost true to say that the "races" are represented in the University in proportion to the number of persons of those "races" who are employed in Public Administration, the professions, and similar occupations. We note, however, two divergencies, that the Tamils are on this basis over-represented and the Muslims under-represented. The explanations cannot be found wholly in the statistics, but may be hazarded from observation.

The parents of a substantial number of the Jaffna Tamils in the University are small landowners. In many cases, and perhaps in most, the incomes would not appear to be sufficient to bear the cost of English education up to University standard. There are, however, special features of the Jaffna District which help to explain why students drawn from this class can reach the University from Jaffna and not from elsewhere. These are:—

- (1) In the Jaffna District there are good schools on the spot (cf. Table XII), while in the Sinhalese areas the schools are concentrated in Colombo, with a few in Kandy and Galle. The Jaffna student can thus live at home, while the Sinhalese student outside Colombo, Kandy and Galle has to be boarded, at least after the Senior School Certificate Examination.
- (2) The cost of living is apparently lower in Jaffna than elsewhere.

- (3) The fees charged in the Jaffna schools tend to be lower than those charged in the schools in other areas.
- (4) The family system is much more closely knit in Jaffna than elsewhere. Not only is the "bright boy" subsidised by all the members of the family, even to the extent of sending him to Colombo for University education, but also he in turn assists, and expects to assist, the other members of the family when he begins earning.
- (5) The Jaffna student draws inspiration from an environment in which Nature is less bountiful than elsewhere and in which a living can be obtained only by hard and persistent labour. Other things being equal, he is therefore more successful than the student from elsewhere.

The Muslims appear to be exceptional all along the line, and none of the Tables gives any explanation. It is true that Table XIV is in this respect a little misleading. Class C includes a sub-class consisting of members of the naval, military and police forces, in which the Malays in particular are strongly represented, but which are actually at a lower economic level than most of the other occupations in Class C. Of the 4,382 Malays in Class C, no less than 2,076 were in this sub-class. The factors which limit the number of Muslim students are, however, generally social. Business rather than a professional career tends to attract the Ceylon Moors. The practice of purdah not only reduces the number of women students but also has effects on the education of boys, for it is well known that the children of educated mothers have an advantage which they never lose. The necessity for learning the Quran in Arabic may also have effects and there are apparently difficulties over the home language. Finally, it must be remembered that educational backwardness is self-perpetuating. Other things being equal, the children of educated parents are more easily educable.

It is unfortunately impossible to relate wealth and religion owing to the complete absence of statistics. The facts already given show that there is a relationship. An under-representation of Sinhalese implies an under-representation of Buddhists, and this tendency is strengthened by the fact that few of the Sinhalese students are Kandyans, among whom 98 per cent. are Buddhists. The facts adduced for Ceylon Moors and Malays are equally applicable to Muslims, since the Moors and Malays are nearly 100 per cent. Muslims. In fact, the terms are regarded as inter-changeable, and in the University statistics Moors and Malays are simply classed as Muslims. What the figures fail to give is a complete explanation of the over-representation of Christians. The over-representation of the Burghers is part of the explanation, since 99 per cent. of them are Christians. The fact that the University population is drawn so largely from the Western and Northern Provinces, and especially from Colombo, is also an important element. The

schools, too, are concentrated in four towns, and especially in Colombo, and the proportion of Christians is higher in the towns (except in Jaffna) than in the villages. The fact that most of the schools are Christian is, apparently, of very little significance. In short, the real explanation must be economic. Indeed, the explanations already given (except in the case of the Muslims and to a less degree of the Hindus) are largely a reflex of economic conditions. Though statistics are not available, observation suggests that a high proportion of the wealthier class is Christian. Figures have been produced to show that a majority of those in the Civil List consists of Christians. Similar figures might, however, be produced for any employment (other than the army and the police) in Class C. The Christians are inevitably to be found most strongly represented among those who have been in closer contact with the West. Government servants and professional men have had the closest contacts and continue to have those contacts. They desire "English education" and most of them live in Colombo. The schools have been provided to meet their need. Any other explanation cannot be more than partial: compulsory baptism under the Portuguese, the attitudes of the Dutch and British Governments, the activities of missionaries, etc., have no doubt been important. Far more important is the fact that Western education and indeed the whole Western social system had an essentially Christian foundation. Even if there had been no preference shown by Governments in the past, the economically dominant class would have been the most westernised class, and the most westernised class would have been the most strongly impregnated with Christian ideas.

VIII

The University is interested in "race" and religion merely from the angle of academic sociology. It belongs to the most widespread community of all, the community of learning. It is, however, concerned with the fact that it can draw from only a very small section of the population. Even if the total in Table XIV is doubled, the number is only 300,000, or 5 per cent. of the population. Modern sociology suggests that 5 per cent. of a people contain 5 per cent. of the natural ability. If this be true, it must follow that 95 per cent. of the academic ability, which ought to be in the University, is going to waste. It would explain, too, why there is so much wastage in the University. A proportion of 1,000 students to a population of 150,000, or even of 300,000, is very high and necessarily the average quality must be low, entrance requirements notwithstanding.

A University must reflect the social conditions in which it exists. So long as the deep social stratification of Ceylon persists, it is inevitable that the top stratum, mainly Class C of the Census return, should be the most strongly represented. It would be possible, however, to make movement between the strata far easier than it is at present. In England, which was

once highly stratified (as Marx and Engels pointed out, though they did not realise that, even as they were writing, the situation was changing) commerce and industry have been the main instrument. Hobson (of Hobson's Choice) lived and died as saddler to the gentlemen of the University of Cambridge; but Morris, cycle-repairer to the gentlemen of the University of Oxford, has lived to be Lord Nuffield and the University's principal benefactor. Nevertheless, England has also blurred the strata by its educational system. There had been since the sixteenth century a multiplicity of privately endowed scholarships. As the population grew, however, these scholarships became comparatively fewer, for private benefactions did not keep pace with the population changes. Also, their efficacy in drawing from the whole population depended on universal elementary education, which did not exist throughout England and Wales until 1880. The creation after 1902 of the public secondary schools, which offered free tuition to "scholars" and the provision, by private endowment, of numerous scholarships at the modern Universities, helped considerably: but most of the advantages went to the lower middleclass because, so long as education was voluntary beyond the age of 14, most of the working class were unable to afford to keep their sons and daughters at school even with free tuition. The provision in 1918 of maintenance grants for those studying for the Higher School Certificate and the creation of local authority and State Scholarships at the Universities still left the 14 to 16 gap, which will be filled under the Education Act, 1944, when education is made compulsory to the age of 16. Thus the complete post-war structure will provide:-

- (I) free and compulsory education to 16;
- (2) free tuition and maintenance grants to "scholars" from 16 to the Higher School Certificate; and
- (3) "scholarships" providing free tuition and maintenance at the Universities.

The "scholars" will be drawn from all classes and will ascend the social scale as they climb the educational ladder. Indeed, this was in large measure the case even before the war. The following figures give the percentages of students who entered the Universities in 1938-39 and who began their education in public elementary schools.⁴

England				38.6
Wales				92.0
Scotland	• •	• •	• •	65 7
Great Britain	• •	• •		46 4

^{4.} University Grants Committee: Returns from Universities and University Colleges, 1938-39, p. 5.

With these figures must be associated the figures of those in receipt of financial assistance. The latest figures, for 1934-35, are as follows:

England	 		39.2
Wales	 • •	•••	57.0
Scotland	 		45·I
Great Britain	 		41.7

While the English system has thus not reached equality of opportunity, it has enabled the Universities to draw on all sections of the population.

The situation in Cevlon is curiously reminiscent of that in England at the time of the Newcastle Comission (1861) the difference being that nobody in England claimed in 1861 that education was compulsory. Though there were then 2,500,000 children at school ,this was 1,000,000 less than the number who ought to have been at school. This million was made up of a comparatively small number who never attended school, and a larger number who attended for one, two or three years. What is more, attendance was irregular, being as low as 76 per cent. In Ceylon, according to the estimates of the Director of Education, there ought to be 1,500,000 children at school, but in 1939 there were only 770,000 and the current estimate is 850,000. the balance, 100,000 are estimated not have attended school at all, while the emainder is due to the fact that most pupils attend for a few years only. The average attendance is 75 per cent. of those on the roll. Thus Ceylon in 1944, with "compulsory education" is worse than England in 1861, without "compulsory education." What is more, England in 1861 had a wide variety of endowed scholarships which enabled at least a small proportion of the working classes and lower middle-classes to reach the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, London and Durham. Cevlon has practically no scholarships except in the University itself, where 17 per cent. of the students are in receipt of financial assistance. The obvious solution is that which England has already adopted, namely, compulsory education to 14 (extending to 16 when schools and teachers have been provided) and a good scholarship system thereafter. This was the scheme proposed by the rejected report of the Special Committee on Education, which the present writer intended to sign (with reservations about the inadequacy of the emphasis on compulsory education and scholarships). The report eventually signed by the majority promises free tuition only and thus will provide only a slightly increased representation of the lower middle class and will wholly fail to bring to the University any of the pupils from the labouring class.

W. IVOR JENNINGS.

^{5.} University Grants Committee: Report for the period 1929-30 to 1934-35, page 55.