

## Book Review

### HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN CEYLON

By

K. H. M. SUMATHIPALA

*Pages XXII + 416 + 1 plate, Tisara Prakāsakayo, Colombo, 1968, Price Rs. 35.00.*

Although the book has been called the 'History of Education in Ceylon', its attention has been focussed particularly on Dr. C. W. W. Kannangara and his work. The first impression one would get by going through the contents, may be that it would have been called either 'The Kannangara Era in the History of Education in Ceylon' or 'Kannangara's Contribution to Education in Ceylon'. However, it is no doubt a history of education in Ceylon (1796-1965) with special reference to the contribution made by Dr. Kannangara to the educational development.

Apart from the fact that Kannangara made a significant contribution to the educational development of Ceylon, there are other reasons why this period under study may rightly be called the Kannangara Era in the history of education in Ceylon. (1) He was Ceylon's first Minister of Education. (2) He occupied the ministerial chair for nearly 16 years (1931-47). So far no other Minister of Education has held that position for more than 5 years. (3) Kannangara Era in Education is important constitutionally as well. It was the period of transition from Crown Colony to Dominion Status. Commonly referred to as the Donoughmore Era, it is the formative period of modern independent Ceylon. Author appears to have made an attempt to show that Kannangara was one of the great socio-cultural reformers while being the greatest educational reformer of modern Ceylon.

In his attempt author gives a fairly detailed account of, (1) Kannangara's educational thought for which 50 pages have been devoted, (2) Kannangara's educational reforms, being the longest section of the book covering nearly 175 pages; (3) Kannangara's critics, taking over 30 pages. Thus the main theme of the book covers more than half of the book. The first two parts which the author calls the Prologue and His Life, provide the historical background (1796-1931) against which this socio-cultural and educational drama was acted and the biography of its main actor respectively. These two sections alone take nearly 135 pages, leaving only about 20 pages to the author's Epilogue summarizing the 'Reaction and Repercussions'.

In the last chapter the author appears to have made an attempt to summarize the aftermath of Kannangara's reforms. This traces the political aspects of the educational history from 1947 to 1965. Looking at the title of the book and the contents therein, one is compelled to conclude that the history of education particularly in independent Ceylon is quite inadequately dealt with in the present work.

#### BOOK REVIEW

Including the introduction, the whole book runs to nearly 450 pages. Thus even if one considers its length, it is a book that should receive the attention of the Comparative Educationist and the Educational Historian. More so because it can quite well serve the purpose of a source book for further studies on the subject.

The book is controversial from the beginning to the end. In fact the author appears to take a mischievous delight in 'pelting a stone' at every hornet's nest he meets. The author is not an English scholar and does not claim to be one either, but the language appears to be very strong and the attacks rather merciless. He takes Colebrooke to task for his single sentence on the pansala schools—'the education afforded by the native priesthood in their temples and the colleges scarcely merits any note'.

His attempt to trace the first Buddhist school of modern Ceylon brings out much new knowledge on the topic leading to more investigations. The 'Battle of sites' or the University Controversy that raged from 1926 to 1938 is another topic at which the author looks at from a critical point of view, quite different from the normally accepted.

The Rural Scheme, an experiment in education, started at Handessa in 1932, the only one of its kind in Ceylon was long thought to be a modification of Gandhi's Basic Educational System. The author makes an attempt to show that it was an original contribution of Kannangara and goes even a step further by a passing hint that Gandhi himself may have been inspired by Kannangara's Rural Scheme. This is perhaps a point that may not go unchallenged.

The long delay in drafting his first Education Bill (originally entrusted to the legal draftsmen in 1931 who took seven years over it and still never completed it) is dealt with in detail, though the author fails to find the motive behind this undue delay. Matters pertaining to the Free Education proposals themselves, never before expressed in this manner, have been brought to light in this work. The chapter on 'Education and Culture' may bring new inspiration to those of the new generation who are working for a renaissance including educational reforms.

Even the note on the author given on the jacket of the book is rather out of the ordinary. The author's only claim to scholarship is his broad general knowledge rather than any specialised knowledge. He appears to take pride of the fact that he comes from the peasant class often called *Godayas*, the unsoiled and unsophisticated Sinhala villager, who will have to play the most significant role in bringing about an economic, cultural, and even spiritual revolution in this country.

Assessing the book as a History of Education, it is quite inadequate but serves as a very useful source book for further studies. As a book on the Kannangara's Contribution to the Educational Development of Ceylon, it is undoubtedly quite comprehensive and conclusive. As a contribution to the study of Comparative Education it has no equal in Ceylon because it provides a point of view never before made available so well to the English reading public.

It was Warren Weaver, a Kalinga Prize winner, who said thus in regard to the mirage of objectivity in science and scientific investigations;

'But we now fully recognize what we should always have realized, first that we obtain so-called facts only through observation, and that the observer is himself an essential part of the fact system, thus at one stroke destroying both ultimate precision and ultimate objectivity: and second, we know that elements of choice, presuppositions which have neither a factual nor a logical analytical basis, enter into the structure of all theories and into the selection of the group of facts to be dealt with'.

If this conclusion is accepted (which of course is not quite new to those who are aware of the teachings of Buddha), any scientific study of the History of Education in Ceylon, must necessarily be a result of a critical analysis of all points of view. Sumathipala's History of Education, provides one such point of view seldom expressed so well and so faithfully and it is left to the other scholars (and even himself) to analyse and examine it critically in the interest of those who wish to understand the education problems of the contemporary society, in this country.

L. G. Hewage