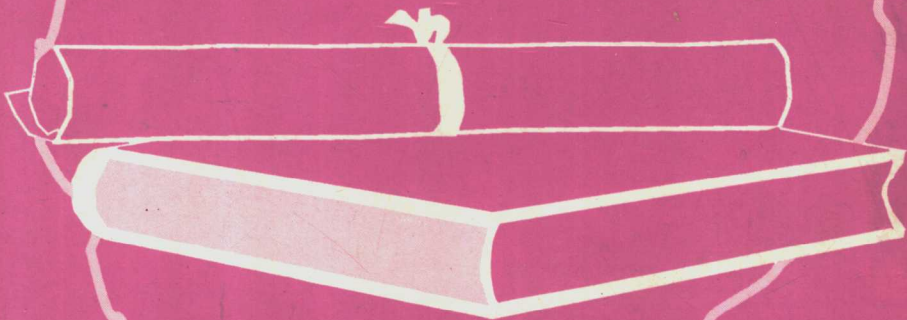


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EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA 1948-1988



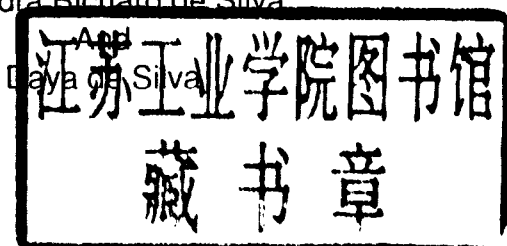
CHANDRA RICHARD *de* SILVA
&
DAYA *de* SILVA

EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

1948- 1988

An Analysis of the Structure and a Critical
Survey of the Literature

Chandra Richard de Silva



NAVRANG, NEW DELHI
1990

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P R E F A C E

This study was completed in 1986 under the sponsorship of the Asia Foundation, Colombo. A few copies of the original typescript were prepared and were distributed among libraries in Sri Lanka. The positive response we received from the users prompted us to get the typescript published to make it available for a wider public. Since the recent disturbances in the island have adversely affected the educational system and the structure of education has changed somewhat, we have updated this section.

In the preparation of this volume many friends have helped us in various ways. We appreciate the help given to us by the late Mr John Guyer of the Asia Foundation, Colombo. A special word of thanks is due to Dr Lorna Dewaraja, the then Programme Officer of the Asia Foundation, Colombo, whose expertise and friendly advice were of great value. Mrs L.A.Kobbekaduwa of the Department of Education, University of Peradeniya spent considerable time locating unpublished dissertations. The library staff of the numerous institutions we worked in were unfailingly helpful. All of them are remembered here with gratitude.

October 1989
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INTRODUCTION

Objectives

Education is one of the key priorities of the state in Sri Lanka. In fact for three decades since the attainment of independence in 1948 some 4 to 5 per cent of the current expenditure of the state has been spent on education. Although these percentage figures have fallen due to the massive state expenditure on development projects since 1977, state expenditure on education in the last twenty years has continued to rise faster in terms of current prices than expenditure in any other area of social welfare except housing. Education to-day is a major concern involving four million children and a hundred and fifty thousand teachers in state-run primary and secondary schools alone (1988 figures). Over fifty thousand students follow various types of tertiary education courses. The rise of a variety of private institutions largely in urban and semi-urban areas testifies to a continuing and indeed even a rising interest in education among parents and adults.

Despite the great interest in the field of education in Sri Lanka, there is no study which gives a comprehensive overview of the formal education scene or which gives a guide to the current literature. The last effort to provide an overview of the history and structure of the state education system was in a three volume work published by the Ministry of Education in 1969 (See item 96 in the bibliography). This work was very uneven in its coverage and in any case it is now completely outdated. The few short surveys written in the 1980s such as that by Olle Engquist (item 17) & G.H. Pieris (item 36) are less known than they ought to be

The lack of a comprehensive overview is not due to the lack of research or interest in writing in a specific area. Indeed, the last three decades have seen an increasing flow of information on many specific aspects of education in Sri Lanka not only in terms of books and articles in scholarly journals but also in the form of reports, memoranda, proceedings of seminars and University theses. Unfortunately, many of these documents are available only in the institutions responsible for their origin and

thus, most people including researchers and government policy makers are often unaware of their very existence.

Finally, there is also a singular lack of co-ordination in educational research. There are a number of institutions which conduct seminars and organise research on education in this country. They include the Universities at Peradeniya, Colombo and Jaffna, the Ministry of Higher Education, the University Grants Commission, the Ministry of Education, the Marga Institute, the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute and the Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority of Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, there is hardly any co-ordination of research activity amongst these institutes. Not only is there no clear-cut national policy relating to educational research but also it seems evident that no institution has a plan to cover gaps in educational research even on its own. Indeed, each of these institutions is generally unaware of the research programmes in others and projects have been started and funded with little regards to work being done elsewhere or to alternative areas of research.

In this context, the present study was conceived as a means of changing the above situation - at least in part. The principal objective of the project was to formulate an annotated guide to the literature on education in Sri Lanka in order to avoid duplication of work. This guide was originally planned to cover both published and unpublished material in English, Sinhalese and Tamil. In view of the lack of authoritative general accounts of the education system as it currently operates, it was also decided to provide an introductory overview of the Sri Lankan education system. It was hoped that the compilation of this bibliography would help highlight gaps in research and thus help in the formulation of an education research policy.

The scope and limitations of the work

The collection of data for this study was begun in January 1985. The investigators spent considerable time in each of the major libraries having collections on education, chiefly those of the University of Peradeniya, the University of Colombo, the Marga Institute, the Curriculum Development Centre, the Ministry of Education, Kotte and the Staff College of Educational Administration, Maharagama. It was soon apparent that there was an evident need for a work of this kind. None of the institutions directly affiliated to the Ministry of Education had even a check list of the theses on education presented to the Universities in Sri Lanka though they occasionally had copies of these presented to them by foreign scholars. On the other hand, the libraries of each University not only had no information on the research

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of those submitted to foreign Universities) are well worth examination. The decision was taken with some reluctance.

What has emerged from our effort is thus not a comprehensive list of writings on education in Sri Lanka but a select survey of the literature. It should also be noted that several excellent theoretical works written by Sri Lankan educationists which have no direct relevance to Sri Lanka have been left out of our bibliography due to the very definition of its scope.

Before concluding this survey of the scope and limitations of this study, reference needs to be made to certain difficulties which arose during the course of the project; difficulties which led to a modification of its objectives. In the first place, the security position in Jaffna made it unwise for either of the principal researchers to visit the University during the course of 1985. Despite many efforts it was also not possible to identify a collaborator/researcher/assistant to work in Jaffna to collect material in Tamil. Therefore it was eventually decided, somewhat reluctantly, to exclude works in Tamil from the scope of this study. Thus, the only entry written in Tamil that is found in this bibliography is a thesis presented to the University of Colombo.

However, this is not as great a disadvantage as it might appear to be at first glance. Most writings by Tamil academics (like those by Sinhalese academics) have been in English and thus these items are found in plenty in the bibliography. Due to the lack of any Tamil scholarly journal in this field and the fact that the University of Jaffna did not possess a Department of Education until 1980, literature in Tamil on education in Sri Lanka is bound to be more scanty than it otherwise might have been. Inquiries revealed that even in 1984 the University of Jaffna did not have any students registered for a Masters or Ph.D. degree.

Secondly, the availability of literature has given a certain bias to new study. Literature is most abundant in relation to formal courses of study available in established state institutes or institutes recognised by the state. While some literature does exist on non-formal education and such items have been included in our survey, we are strongly conscious that the emergence of certain areas of study in Sri Lanka have not been sufficiently reflected in the available literature. Such areas include the study of accountancy (for which some material is available in the *Journal of the Association of Chartered Accountants*, Colombo) the study of Librarianship (well surveyed by M.S.U. Amarasiri, *Library education and Training in Sri Lanka*, M.Sc. thesis, Loughborough University, 1980) and computer studies.

Then again, the literature relating to health education outside the University system had to be excluded due to constraints of time and resources. Health education in Sri Lanka is provided from an extensive network ranging from the Institute of Health Education at Kalutara which provides postgraduate diplomas to medical officers of health to a number of Schools of Nursing and provision of training for midwives and village health workers. We decided to exclude this area rather than provide partial and misleading coverage.

The Organisation of the Work

This guide to education is designed in two parts. The second and longer part consists of an annotated classified guide to the literature. The format of the classification has been guided largely by the needs of the researcher and administrator and the nature of the subject material.

The first section consists of general and theoretical works. This heading has been interpreted in a restricted sense. Only theoretical works having some relation to education in Sri Lanka and written by Sri Lankans have been included here. It was also decided not to include general works on various aspects of Sri Lanka which incidentally have references to education. For example publications such as the *Statistical Abstracts of Sri Lanka* (published annually), the *Hansard* (Reports of proceedings of Parliament), *Budget Estimates* and *Performance Reports* (periodically published by the state) have not been listed due to reasons of space. Thus, this section concentrates on providing a guide to general surveys of the entire education system and theoretical works relating to the system or parts of it.

The second major section deals with primary and secondary education. It consists of more than a third of the entire listing of literature and is divided into five parts for convenience. The first part dealing with state policy towards education contains government policy statements and the relevant acts and regulations as well as evaluations of state policy by schools and administrators. Literature on a few controversial measures adopted by the state - such as the take over of private schools and training colleges in 1960/61 and the change in the system of undergraduate admissions to the University system in the 1970s form a considerable part of the literature. The second sub-section dealing with the structure of the school system is replete with studies reflecting concern with equality of opportunity, the provision of educational facilities and the organisation of the school. However, it is clear that the wealth of statistics collected by the

Statistics Branch of the Ministry in the annual school census remains woefully underutilized. The area of education planning and administration which forms the next sub-section also reveals large gaps in the literature. There is for instance no evaluation of the extensive changes in administrative organisation that have occurred in the last two decades. The final sub-section on educational measurement also reveals a paucity of literature. Public Examinations in Sri Lanka occupy the attention of hundreds of thousands of pupils annually and it seems apparent that more attention needs to be paid to the reliability and validity of the types of educational measurement used. At the time of compilation of this bibliography there was at least one on-going study of the data available on the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) Examination through computer analysis but scope for many other studies remain.

Teacher and teacher training appears to have received less attention than might have been expected. The social and economic position of the teacher and his role in society as well as methods of enhancing the prestige and attractiveness of the teaching profession have received scant attention by writers. It is hoped, however, that information in the few studies listed in this guide would stimulate interest in this area especially with the re-organisation of teacher training following the establishment of the National Institute of Education.

Many more studies were found in the next major category which is termed, Educational society and psychology. This section actually brings together studies on social, economic, psychological factors which mould student attitudes, aspirations and achievements. It also deals with parental aspirations for their children. The popularity of this area of study among postgraduate students is shown by the fact that over 45 theses have been completed in this area during the last twenty five years. Although some of the material unearthed by these studies have been published in journals in Sinhala such as *Adhyapanaya* many of these studies have remained buried in University libraries. While it is true that some of them report fairly obvious conclusions such as the close relationship between the socio-economic background and the attitudes, aspirations and achievements of students there are several studies which are of value to the administrator, planner and school teacher.

The next major section concerns, Higher Education. After some reflection it was decided to keep all aspects of higher education (including state policy structure, administration and curriculum) together. Once again the collection of the literature revealed a dearth of studies on teaching

methodology, curriculum and measurement. Nevertheless, the literature on Higher Education is much more extensive than that on Agricultural and Technical Education. These latter areas have obviously been neglected in the past but it must be borne in mind that the paucity of writings on these areas as reflected by the bibliography is somewhat exaggerated due to two reasons. In the first place, writings on those aspects of agriculture and technical education that are pursued in Universities are listed under the section on Higher Education. Secondly, some literature on agricultural extension (as opposed to formal courses on agriculture) have not been included in the bibliography. Nevertheless, in view of development priorities in Sri Lanka this area appears to justify greater attention.

The seventh major section deals with several disparate elements - Adult and Non formal Education, Special Education and the Education of Women, all of which have a limited literature. The section dealing with the Teaching of English on the other hand, has more extensive coverage though in this case the number of entries has been enhanced by the inclusion of several items that seemed marginally important from the point of view of information and analysis. What is lacking in this area is a contemporary study giving an overview of the many on-going efforts to promote the study of English language in Sri Lanka.

The bibliography ends with two sections - one on Educational Finance and one on the Impact of Education on Society. Both of them have been restricted to studies that specifically deal with education and exclude general surveys of the economy and society which may have information of interest. Nevertheless, especially in the case of educational finance there is an obvious need for further investigation. The sectoral distribution of educational expenditure by the state, the share of expenses of education borne by parents and the cost-effectiveness of educational expenditure in various spheres are areas well worth examination.

The bibliography itself is prefaced by an introductory overview. This has been designed as a basic survey of the education structure in Sri Lanka for the non-specialist and details the evolution of the education structure in Sri Lanka, its social, political, demographic and economic background and the major subject areas within the educational sphere. The work is supplemented by an author index and a list of periodicals.

EVOLUTION OF THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION UP TO 1948¹

Formal instruction and learning has had a long history in Sri Lanka. Religious instruction was given to novices in Buddhist temples well before the Christian era and interested laymen were able to learn reading, writing and religion at temples from about the same time. Statistical data on literacy in ancient times is not available but literate persons could not have been scarce because some Sinhalese literary works were written specifically for laymen and kings recorded their benefactions and decrees in stone inscriptions.

The traditional educational system tended to foster respect for the 'educated' man. This was not simply because a literate person could read and explain religious texts but also because such persons could aspire to become government functionaries who maintained revenue and other records. In theory, the system of temple education was open to all, though in practice, the rigidities of the caste system restricted administrative positions to certain groups and thus might well have reduced the incentive to learn basic literary skills among others. However, it is important to recall that a parallel 'craft' system of instruction also continued side by side with temple education. Technical skills such as the knowledge of engineering and hydraulics needed to construct reservoirs and canals were transmitted from generation to generation either by instruction from father to son or by craft apprenticeship.

The conquest of lowlands by the western colonial powers did not, at first, markedly change the pattern of instruction. Religion continued to dominate education though in some areas and in some periods the dominant creed became Roman Catholicism and Presbyterianism rather than Buddhism or Hinduism. The few printed texts available did not change the method of learning which depended largely on memorising and the study of selected texts.

Nor did the early stages of British rule in Sri Lanka (1796-1948)

1. This section is based on C.R. de Silva (item no. 13) S. Jayaweera (item no. 26) and the sources cited in those works.

usher in great changes. Even as late as 1870 there were only 156 government schools with a total enrolment of 8736 and 229 private schools with a further 8201 pupils. Buddhist temple schools not 'recognised' by the British government taught many more in the age-old fashion.

However, change was on its way. Christian missionary organisations had campaigned long and hard for state assistance in maintaining and expanding their school system. The educational reforms in England in 1870 paved the way for changes in the colonies and more important, the continued success of coffee cultivation provided the funds necessary for educational expansion. In 1869, a Department of Public Instruction was established and the next year the government decided to provide grants-in-aid to private schools that conformed to certain minimum requirements. The results were spectacular. By 1879 pupil enrolment had risen to 75,064. Twenty years later it reached 218,479.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century thus laid the foundation of the 'modern' educational system in Sri Lanka. The old traditional schools in temples and mosques began to decline and the imported British model became the accepted norm. However, the new system was open to a considerable amount of criticism. In the first place despite the impressive growth in enrolment, the educational system seems to have provided very limited coverage until well into the twentieth century. Even in 1901 barely one fourth of the children of school-going age were attending school and out of a total population of 3,565,904 as many as 2,790,255 were considered illiterate. What the grants-in-aid system seems to have accomplished therefore - at least in the nineteenth century was to establish an extensive system of private (largely Christian) schools, to effectively replace the traditional system of education. Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims did try to counteract Christian efforts by setting up their own systems of schools, but Christian missionaries who often enjoyed a sympathetic hearing from British officials easily maintained their lead in education. This brings us to another feature of the new system. Not only was religion a significant factor in access to educational facilities but those who had the advantage were the Christians - a religious minority. As late as 1921 the female literacy rate among the Christians was 50.1 per cent while the Buddhists had 16.8 per cent, the Hindus 10.2 percent and the Muslims only 6.3 per cent. With the growth of nationalist sentiment there was growing resentment against the grant of extensive state funds to support a school system which facilitated proselytising activity by minority religious organisations. Nevertheless, the policy of allowing private schools to expand and of keeping limits on the state school system persisted until Sri Lankans began to attain political influence

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in the 1920s.

The third decade of the twentieth century saw a steady expansion in school enrolment. It rose to 441,372 in 1925 and 539,755 in 1930. This expansion tended to reduce the inequalities seen in educational development in different areas in the country. Educational facilities were most developed in the Jaffna Peninsula and in the south-western sea-board; both areas with considerable Christian minorities. While the expansion of state schools in the 1920s did reduce some of the inequalities in the geographical distribution of schools, considerable imbalances remained. Even in 1930 while one out of six inhabitants of the Northern Province and one out of seven in the Western Province attended school, the proportion in Sabaragamuwa Province was 1:13 and that in Uva Province 1:20.

Perhaps the most glaring inequality, however, was between opportunities available for those who studied through the English language and the students who learnt through Sinhala or Tamil. Schools of the first category were few in number - only 179 in 1912 rising to 197 in 1915 and 2162 in 1928. They levied fees and were thus barred to a majority of the people. This explains why literacy in English was limited to 6.3 per cent of the population as late as 1946. Furthermore, secondary education was provided almost exclusively in schools that taught in English and recognised secondary educational institutions proved to be an even more exclusive group - only thirteen in 1915 and forty seven in 1928. Secondary education in English led students to the legal and medical professions or to lucrative positions in government service. In contrast, the Sinhala and Tamil schools taught little beyond basic literary skills. Thus, the education system created a privileged minority and a disadvantaged minority divided largely on the basis of the language of education. The conflicts and resentments that this situation aroused were to influence education policy in the era after independence. However, restricted though it was, English education open to middle class and wealthy families enabled education to be regarded as a path of upward mobility. Caste and other social barriers could be overcome by individuals who excelled in studies and this situation reinforced the respect for academic learning in Sri Lanka.

Indeed, a strong literary and academic bias in the content of education was another characteristic of the colonial education system. British educational practice had favoured the separation of institutions concerned with general education from those which provided vocational training. Moreover, the English secondary schools in Sri Lanka were regarded as models for the rest and when they began to prepare their

students for entrance examinations of British universities, the academic curriculum they adopted had great influence over the whole school system. This tradition was reinforced when University College, established in 1921, began to prepare students for external degrees of the University of London. Perhaps the most important factor, however, was the question of employment opportunities. Industrial development in Sri Lanka was virtually non-existent, and the demand for trained personnel in the industrial sector was minimal. In contrast the policy of 'Ceylonisation' of the administration pursued vigorously in the second quarter of the twentieth century provided many openings for those who had been fortunate enough to obtain an education in English.

A few institutions providing agricultural and technical education were successfully established. For example the School of Tropical Agriculture established in 1916 (and reorganised as two farm schools in Peradeniya and Jaffna in 1922) provided courses in English, Sinhalese and Tamil. The Technical School (later Ceylon Technical College) established in 1894 in Colombo trained students in engineering and surveying. However, virtually all efforts to integrate agricultural and technical training into the school curriculum failed totally. For example, the scheme to establish Central Schools in rural areas included a proposal to give students practical training in agriculture, commerce, handicrafts and domestic science as well as a training in more academic subjects. Instruction was to be in English and by 1944, fifty four Central Schools had been established. However, tremendous pressure from parents and politicians resulted in a remodelling of these schools on the lines of existing urban English schools and by 1947 practical departments were distinctly subordinated to academic and literary education in these schools. The Central Schools, in time, became major avenues of advancements for the rural child but as an experiment in modifying the existing academic bias in education, they were a failure.

Finally, it is necessary to note that the system of education in Sri Lanka under British rule was one that was centrally controlled. Although many schools were managed by private organisations, their dependence on the state for financial grants and the emergence of national examinations, success in which became a prerequisite for recruitment for middle and higher levels of state employment, enabled the government to exert considerable influence over the curriculum and management of non-government schools. This influence was enhanced in the period after the 1920s. In part, this was due to the more active role assumed by the state. Even in 1931 only 1498 out of 4119 schools and only two of the twenty one teacher training colleges had been directly under the state. By 1947, 2880

out of 4980 schools were state schools. So were most of the Training Colleges. The period of expansion for Christian missionary schools had ended. The government had emerged as the senior partner in the school system, though in terms of high quality English medium secondary schools, the private sector still held sway.

In the second place, there was the introduction of 'free education' - that is, free tuition from the primary grades, up to the University. This measure, gradually implemented in the 1940s, was less revolutionary than it appeared to be at first sight because all schools teaching in local languages had always imparted education without charging fees. What happened after 1945 was that the English secondary schools which had levied fees were given the option of abolishing fees and receiving state grants or continuing as unaided schools levying fees. Most schools opted to abolish fees and while this extended educational opportunity it also increased the leverage available to the government at the centre.

Thus, at independence, Sri Lanka inherited a system of education which was a centralised one, with a complex mixture of private and government schools. A few *elite* English secondary schools at the top dominated the structure and tended to introduce an academic bias in the entire school curriculum. Agricultural and technical education was relatively undeveloped and despite the establishment of the University of Ceylon in 1942 and the existence of Law and Medical Colleges since the 1870s, higher education was restricted to a very small minority.