

APPENDICES

A WHITEWASHING COMMISSION

FOREWORD

This criticism, dealing with a report on the condition of Indian Labourers on the Estates in Ceylon by N.E. Marjoribanks Esq., I.C.S., and the Hon'ble Khan Bahadur A.K.G. Ahamad Tambi Maraikkayar Sahib Bahadur, has already appeared in the Indian and the Ceylon Press. The “Madras Mail”, the “Times of Ceylon” and the “Ceylon Observer”, who resented my independent inquiry, have neither published this criticism nor have they remarked on it. I am afraid that in this case it is not true that ‘silence gives consent’.

Karumuttu Thiagarajan.

I. SUPPRESSION OF FACTS

1. **Introductory:** The commission to inquire into the methods of recruiting and conditions of Indian labour on the estates in Ceylon and Malaya sent in its report last February. Few perhaps have taken care to study it. In doing so, these can hardly have not felt the painful impression that the Commission has palliated defects rather than pointed them out.

2. **Notes of Evidence Absent :** A report, such as this is expected to be, ought to furnish us with notes of evidence taken on the spot, which form the basis of conclusions arrived at by the trusted Commissioners. But such notes of evidence as one finds in carefully drawn up reports, are not forthcoming. A striking contrast is that whereas we have many pages of statistics drawn from a variety of sources, there is no record of evidence drawn from the lips of coolies - no questions put by the Commissioners to the

poor labourers, and no answers to them - to bear out the general statements set down in this report.

3. **Ceylon Section:** I am dealing only with this portion of the report.

4. **Only Six Estates Visited:** We should have expected the deputed enquirers to visit a large number of estates in order to pass a fair and true judgement upon them; it is dangerous to generalize from a few particular cases. But these commissioners confess (paragraph 1) to having examined but a few estates. There are about 2,000 estates in all in Ceylon; but they have visited only 6! To visit 6 estates, perhaps the 17 days spent in Ceylon by one Commissioner and 22 days by the other Commissioner might have sufficed; but they were content to give no more time than this when the hard and important task was committed to them by the Madras Government of scrutinizing the condition of things in an island containing about 2,000 estates.

5. **Recruiting:** Only one Commissioner, the Hon'ble Khan Bahadur Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar was deputed to consider (par.1) how the recruiting was done; while the other Mr. Marjoribanks, remained in Colombo "getting statistical and other information." To do fair justice to the task entrusted to them, we should not have supposed that the commissioners would have thought of saving time by inadequate work, but would have conjointly instituted enquiries regarding the methods of professional recruiters, and allotted sufficient time to it. It was very necessary that in such an important question as recruiting, both Commissioners should have made special enquiries. Let us see how Mr. Marakkayar has done his work. Here the report, we should have imagined, would be at its very best. It tells us (para.18) that the Kangany defrauds the labourer recruited, by paying him less than he is entitled to, say Rs.10 instead of Rs.30. This is a very great evil indeed. But is it all? Is it likely that the rogue who thus defrauds the labourers recruited, does not also recruit them under false pretences? Now, there was a very general complaint in the press that workmen were seduced from India to Ceylon under false pretences. But the Commissioners, who ought to have known what the general complaint and grievance was, should have made a point of investigating the matter. In this respect

one looked forward to a more faithful accomplishment of duty. They do not tell us whether the charge brought against the recruitment is true or false.

6. **Wages:** We may next take up the question of wages and see how far the Commissioners have acquitted themselves of their charge. Compare their report with my own observation:

Wages of	According to	
	Commission's Report (para.36)	My Observation (para.4)
1. Pruners	40 to 45 cents	40 cents
2. Pluckers	25 to 30 cents	25 cents
3. Factory labourers	50 to 60 cents	40 cents

The difference between the figures is striking. Nor is this all. Pruners have higher wages, it is true, but only at certain seasons of the year when there is work for them, and not all through the year. The rates I have set down are the standard wages given all over Ceylon estates. Apart from the fact that the wages given to pruners and factory labourers are not nearly so high as those stated by the Commission, and that pruners are given higher wages only when there is pruning possible at certain seasons of the year — pruners and factory labourers are The number refers to a paragraph in my report dated February last 100 cents make one rupee.

the few, and the non-pruners and non-factory labourers are the many, and these get only 33 cents a day. This important fact finds no place in the Commission's Report. Can we overlook this serious omission? If we are to consider whether the pay is sufficient, we must consider not the few but the many, not what goes on only a few months of the year, but what is general all through the year.

7. **Cost of Living:** Is the cost of living cheaper in Ceylon than in India? If we are to rely upon the Commissioners (v. para.39) as they have relied upon one Superintendent of '25 years' experience' it is as cheap to live in Ceylon as in India, given that money bears the same value in both countries. But living is much cheaper in India than in Ceylon. So that if one had the same pay it would be better for him to live in India. Well then, are we to base ourselves upon the statement of one Superintendent who tells us that 6 rupees a month is enough to live in Ceylon? My investigation, made not before one Superintendent (Superintendents are not able to tell of the expenses of a coolie's kitchen) but before coolies who have to buy provisions week after week from the shopkeeper, leads me to the conclusion (v. my report para.5) that a man needs not less than Rs.8 and Rs.10 a month to enjoy the bare necessities of life. Kanganies themselves, who are better able to speak of this matter than a Superintendent, bear out my statement. Mr.A.L. Crossmann, Police Magistrate, Ratnapura, when giving evidence before a Commission appointed in 1916 by the Ceylon Government to inquire into the condition of Indian labourers in the Province of Sabaragamuwa, states that his own investigation shows that a coolie ordinarily requires a little over Rs.4 in addition to the rice allowance which amounts to about Rs.5 — making the total more than 9 rupees a month.

8. **Coolies to Be Fed Like Prisoners!** — A curious remark is made in the report (para.39) after the statement about Rs.6 as the amount required for a coolie to live decently in Ceylon. Is it not strange to speak of prisoners in jail being fed on 73 rupees per head per annum, i.e., 6.1.4 a month? Are coolies to be fed like prisoners? They may as well go and get fed in jail where they will not be deliberately overworked as they are on the estate, which we shall show later on.

9. **Should the Coolie Emigrate?** — It thus appears at least that the wages in India and in Ceylon are nearly the same, but as the cost of living is dearer in Ceylon than in India, it is better for the provident coolie to stay at home. But what makes it still more advantageous for him is that though the wages per day in theory is the same in both fields of labour, the emigrant can practically earn less in Ceylon than in India, as the

evidence recorded by the Sabaragamuwa Commission shows. The state of affairs in one province is not very different from that in the others. This is by the way. Mr.R.N. Thaine, Government Agent, Sabaragamuwa, in a report to the Ceylon Government on the hardships of coolies writes:

“As regards the complaint that the coolies never had enough money or wages to enable them to purchase sundries, & c., it is a fact that in the majority of cases coolies only receive as their wages at the end of the month small sums varying between 75 cents and Rs.3.”

Moreover, some opinions incidentally expressed in the present report, too, strengthen our case; such as (para.39):-

“Our impression is that while the average labourer and his family make enough to feed and clothe themselves quite as well, if not better, than in India, they ordinarily do not accumulate appreciable sums as savings.”

Now then, does not the coolie leave his home because he expects something better than he can find by staying in India? If it is not so, why should the coolie emigrate at all?

10. Slavery: There is another important fact that has to be considered immediately after the point just mentioned. It is impossible for a coolie to start life on Ceylon estates without a debt. The report very honestly admits this evil. It says (para.11):-

“This sum [money advanced when recruiting] together with the amount of the emigrants’s traveling expenses and food till he reaches the estate in Ceylon forms the debt with which each labourer starts life in Ceylon”.

Not only does “the state of indebtedness” act “as a deterrent to thrift and industry” as the Commission says, but it soon reduces the coolie to a state of veritable slavery. The report indirectly admits this fact. For it tells us in all fairness (para 27):-

“Many estates early realised that the labourers were at the mercy of the Kanganies in the matter of their indebtedness”.

And in another (para.34):-

"The labourer thus is free to leave his employer at a month’s notice, or at any time for reasonable cause. But under the kangany system described above, whereunder the labourer

is a kangany's debtor, and the latter in his turn indebted to the estate, taken in conjunction with the conservation of the Tamil labourer, it is not surprising that the labourer does not realize his legal position. That the kangany considers that he has some sort of proprietary right in the labourer and that the labourer accepts this position is abundantly clear from the manner in which the labourer is, and allows himself to be, taken from employer to employer by his kangany and accepts the increasing load of debt thrust on him in the process".

The report continues to give truthful testimony (para.35):-

"Thus a labourer who has not the capacity or opportunity to rise to the position of a kangany or subkangany, remains on an estate under a debt which rarely diminishes but often increases."

For the poorly paid coolie, frightfully defrauded by the Kangany and finding it difficult to keep soul and body together, to repay the heavy "debt" is certainly out of the question; and to resort to law to seek freedom, he is too ignorant, nor has he got the means and facilities. So some try to escape the heavy burden of debt and slavery by "bolting". The Commission readily admits that "In 1915 the number of 'bolters' from federated estates was 8,894", a fact that certainly does not speak highly of the contentment of coolies. As a result, most, if not all, die like slaves.

And yet Ceylon emigrant is 'free', not 'indentured'!

11. **Coolies Are Overworked:** The report says nothing of the 10 continuous hours of work a day from 6 A.M. to 4 P.M., without break. The Superintendents honestly admit this condition of affairs. The evidence recorded in the Sabaragamuwa Report too bears out this fact. Coolies in India do not work for more than 7 or 8 hours at the utmost a day, and that not without a break of 2 hours. Important as this matter is, the Commission does not appear to have considered the question.

12. **Starvation of Coolies:** The law binds the estate to treat and nurse the coolies during illness. But the estates neglect them. "The first point which I would emphasize is the scandalous neglect with which the sick coolies have been treated" are the pathetic

words of the judgement in P.C. 28, 196 of 1914 of Ratnapura. Mr.A.P. Boon, District Judge, writes (January 1914):-

“40 coolies started prostrating themselves in front of us and saying they were starving ... The coolies were obviously being starved. Many of them were fit only for hospital.. He (Dr. Perera), too, told me that from all sides he was hearing similar reports that they were unable to resist such diseases (hookworm) owing to being under-fed.. I was also told that 4 deaths had occurred .. from starvation from what I saw I can believe it“.

Dr. Lunn, Inspecting Medical Officer, refers to a number of half-starved coolies, in his report dated January 1914. The Sabaragamuwa Commission finds such allegations wholly true; not to speak of my appalling experience. I must here reiterate that the conditions are not very different comparing one province with another. Startling as this revelation of the existing state of things is, the commission ignores the question and passes over the matter in silence.

13. Judicial and Extra judicial Administration: Acts of Injustice and Atrocity: We expected the Commission to strongly condemn the so-called law which sentences to rigorous imprisonment those coolies who fail to work or who leave the estate without the permission of the Superintendents; why it even sentences those who harbour the coolies merely out of compassion. But the commission is, unfortunately, silent upon this point.

Nevertheless, the report truly admits (para.44):-

“Most estates appear to inflict small fines for petty neglects or bad work. Such fines seem however to be illegal having regard to the provision of section 6 of Ordinance 13 of 1889”.

Acknowledging as the Commission does, on the one hand, that the small fines imposed upon coolies are frequent, and on the other, that they are illegal, it does not, however, lay much stress upon the point, or suggest any remedies against an evil which may appear small to the master but is very hard on the coolie. If most estates are acknowledged to have committed positive acts of injustice of this kind in small matters,

one may not claim that they are not immune from the propensity to commit acts of greater injustice.

The report says (para.31):-

“Large increase in a laborer’s account in the past were noticeable on account of the relatives who had died or absconded, the amounts of their debts being added to that of the family or sometimes, even of the gang”.

Note the apologetic expression “in the past”! Probably this evil was not noticed at the time the Commission visited the estates. Hence the expression “in the past.” This grave illegality not only existed “in the past” but exists even at present. A debt of this nature is certainly not recoverable in any Court of Law in Ceylon or in India. Alas! The illiterate coolie does not understand his legal position.

The Commission states in passing (para.44):-

“Corporal punishment is recognised to be illegal and is certainly not common or usual though of course there are bad masters in the island as well as bad servants”.

The Commissioners, however, do not set in relief the fact that there are atrocities of a serious nature committed on the estates from time to time. There is, at all events, need of emphasizing the point if the object of the Commission is to bring help to the poor coolie from high quarters, seeing that he cannot do anything himself, while his rich and influential master can take the law into his own hands and has the means to escape the punishment of the Court.

I cite three instances from the well-known Ceylonese:

- (i) *“According to Muniyamma, an eye witness, the accused [an estate watchman] came up with a gun to the coolie lines, and asked the deceased, among others, why she was not at work. The woman replied she would go to work the next day. The accused then shot her dead, and ran off, but was soon secured by some coolies and handed over to the authorities. Karupai, Soccala Naran and Mariamma, all of them eye witnesses, told much the same story ... The jury*

brought in a verdict of not guilty of murder, but guilty of a rash and negligent act. His Lordship pointed out ... that the act could not have been both rash and negligent, and.. the panel submitted a verdict of guilty of a rash act. His Lordship... imposed a penalty of one hundred rupees” (7 January 30th, 1917).

(ii) *“A planter was convicted of having caused grievous hurt to a coolie in his employ. That was a very serious offence according to our Law. But the Magistrate who convicted the planter shocked the public conscience by fining him ten rupees and detaining him at the Bar till the rising of the Court”.*

(iii) *“The accused [a planter] is reported to have said that he told the complainant, the Kangany on his estate ‘to go on his hands and knees. ‘And by way of speeding the parting guest the accused called him a ‘nalla madu’. The accused ordered the complainant to kneel down. If he had refused... accused is reported to have stated that ‘he would have killed him’ ... The Magistrate considered the accused ‘technically guilty’ of wrongful restraint, and fined him ten rupees. (April 25th , 1917).*

May cases of such revolting natures be passed over in silence? The report tells us (para 41):-

‘An employer has no power of arrest in respect to a servant who absconds or rather offends”.

But the estates employ watchmen and supply them with arms to prevent coolies from leaving the estate. Say more, the estates advertise, offering rewards for the arrest of “bolted” coolies, and males and females are arrested without Court warrants by private individuals.

Instances like these are not to be quietly ignored by an impartial Commission, but rather to be commented upon.

The Commission remarks with reference to the year 1915(para 43):-

“The total number of cases against labourers (4,409) and against employers (26) is very small in comparison with the size of the labour force (about 4, 00,000 workers) and the number of employers (over 2,000).”

If the Commission had considered the question whether coolies enjoy sufficient facility for proceeding to Court to lodge complaints, it would not have come to such a satisfactory conclusion.

14. Hardships at Mandapam: The report says nothing of the complaint in the Quarantine Camp at Mandapam Whether the Coolies are well-fed, properly housed or not. The Commissioners instead of investigating and reporting on the complaints give us (para. 20) a bare description of the official version.

15. Some Contrast: A remarkable contrast with the grave omissions is the space-given (para 4 to 12) to the strength and distribution of the labour force and its sufficiency to meet the demand; as if the poor slaves could take advantage of the competition for labour. Three pages are devoted to it out of 22 pages, not counting the statistics. Again one page is allotted (*para.55*) to the description of hook-worm disease besides an extract of 3 pages (pp.76 to 78) in the appendix. Had Lord Pentland’s Government wanted information of this nature it would have easily got it from one of the Doctors in Madras. It surely has not sent out Commissioners to get information available in Madras.

It is to be concluded, from a consideration of the foregoing, that the Commissioners have taken a hasty view of things in Ceylon and that a more mature Judgement would have altered greatly not a small number of their statements; or is this report to be taken in the light of an apology for the planting interest as opposed to labour interest?

So much for *suppression veri*. Tomorrow we shall consider some statements made in the official account.

II. MISTAKEN IN PORTRAYING FACTS

Today I undertake to show that even such facts as are recorded in Messrs. Marakkayar and Marjori-bank's Report are not quite correct.

16. Federation : The report says (para.28):- "Only some 75 per cent of the estates in Ceylon joined this Federation"; whereas up to April, 1915 only 853 estates had joined it — it must be, I reckon, about 42 per cent. Since 1915, the number must be on the decrease. For it worked so badly that it has of late been abolished

The report states (para.31):- "Tile debts of deceased labourers are now written off by all federated estates" This is by no means a matter of course. Compare the rule of the Federation, which I quote:

"Rule 28. On the certified death of any registered coolie (not Kangany) his or her individual debt not exceeding Rs.50/- shall be written off against the Estate and the remainder of the debt shall be debited to the Kangany or written off at the discretion of the agents or Proprietors on the recommendation of the Superintendent".

Needless to say that seldom is a recommendation of this nature made or accepted. It is rarely that a coolie owes the estate anything less than Rs.75, and the balance which the kangany has to meet is without exception recovered from the cooly's family.

Do not the above statements of the Commission disclose some lack of seriousness in the writing?

17. Island Free from Foul Diseases:

The report says (para.62)

"Cases of plague, cholera and small-pox are rare amongst the estate population. In fact, these diseases are not prevalent in the island".

But if it is true "these diseases are not prevalent in the island" how could the

Chairman at the meeting of the Colombo Municipal Council on the 25th May last, announce 169 cases of plague in the year as compared to 69 in 1916 and to 33 in 1915?

18. Housing and Sanitary Conditions: The report says (para.45) that housing and sanitary conditions are quite satisfactory. My experience is that it is not so. Ventilation has not been specially cared for. More than four persons occupy a room of 12 feet by 10 feet. Dr. Lunn, Inspecting Medical Officer in the Civil Department, refers in his report to the insanitary state of certain lines he visited. The Sabaragamuwa Commission says that it visited a large number of estates in the Ratnapura District and “many did not come up to the standard of sanitation.” Dr. T.S. Nair, Assistant District Medical Officer, when giving evidence before the same Commission says the coolies “are kept too overcrowded.” Look at this picture and on that!

19. Gifts after Childbirth: The law requires the estate to bear all expenses during the month after confinement. The report, therefore, says (para 57):- “The general practice is to give the mother Rs.2, and half a bushel of rice.” In my investigation, however, I found that this Rs.2 is debited to her account; and the Sabaragamuwa Report corroborates this fact. It says:

“This practice of debiting the woman or her husband with the cash advance given to her after confinement appears to us to be contrary to the Law.”

20. Gifts to Children: The law also urges on the estate to see that children under the age of one year receive proper care and nourishment. So, the report says (para.57):-

“Some estates give all non-working (i.e. non-earning) children one meal a day free at four in the afternoon. On other estates children not yet of an age to do any work are mustered once a month and each mother is given 1/8 bushel of rice. On some estates, a mother is given a bonus (Rs.5 or more) if her child lives to be one year old”.

When speaking of “some estates”. “other estates” and again “some estates” in the above quotation, it is not very clear whether the Commissioners mean to give an account of all the estates, or a few. I do not think even a few estates do what the Commission

says. I did not hear of any of these facts during my investigation. Nor is there any record of any of them in the Sabaragamuwa Report. Is this the practice? Or is it a regulation that remains a dead letter?

21. Statistics Misleading: The Commission says (para.6):-

‘A large proportion (about 40 per cent) of the labourers going to Ceylon through the Labour Commission during the last few years is composed of persons who have been in the island before’.

Now what would be the reader’s impression after his perusal of this statement? He would be tempted to smile at those speaking of the ill-treatment of the coolies. For how could the coolies think of returning if they are ill-treated? What is the fact? Do they return willingly? This is what we should consider. Circumstances force them to return. They place a substantial security before leaving, without which they cannot go from the estate. Mr. A.L. Crossman, when giving evidence before the Sabaragamuwa Commission says”

“In the case of Tamils, when one is allowed to go someone else of the family is detained. I remember one case, 28, 705 in which Mr. Berry of Delwella, stated with regard to a small gang, consisting of a husband, wife and two children, that he would not allow all the gang to go to India together” .

When a man goes back to India, leaving a wife and children behind, is it surprising that he returns? Can we conclude that he is drawn back to Ceylon by love of the estate and the Kangany? From the statement quoted above, made by the Commission Report, it will appear that the Commissioners have been misled into the insinuation that the labourer returns to Ceylon because he loves to do so. And the reader is apt to conclude the same, whereas the labourer returns because he is morally compelled.

22. Repatriation:

“Some labourers, no doubt, return to India permanently after ... finding the condition unsuitable”.

So says the Commission (para.6). But can those who are said to find the conditions unsuitable return to India permanently. Compare that remark with what the report says by the way (*para.65*) and see whether it is easy for the coolie to return to India:

“The debt which practically every labourer owes his kangany or his estate prevents him leaving except for short visits to India with the leave of his employer or except by ‘bolting;.’”

Now, not some, as the Commission says, but the vast majority of the coolies find the condition unsuitable, as the unscrupulous Kangany recruits them only under false pretences. Can they all or even some of them return to settle down in India? It is impossible except in very rare cases, as they cannot repay their debts to the estate. Quite recently, as late as February 28th last, “Devadas” bore testimony, not without proofs, in the columns of the popular “Hindu” how a mechanic was enticed away to Ceylon and forced to do coolie work; how and with what difficulty he managed to get home after his relatives in India had paid Rs.50-12-0 to the Labour Commission at Trichinopoly for his passage. Again, all the coolies examined by the Sabaragamuwa Commission complained that the conditions are absolutely different from what they expected them to be and begged the Commission to send them home. The writers of the report are not cognizant of this.

The Commission reports (para.65):-

“Labourers who break down in health and become unfit for work on the estate are usually sent back to India at the expense of the estate, but there is no law on the subject and no special organisation to control the matter”.

Note the benevolent tone “are usually sent back”. When the planters do not do what they should do according to law. (see paras. 12, 13 and 20 of the present article) is it at all likely that they practise philanthropy when there is no law or special organization to control the matter?

Mr. Fritz Kunz, Principal of Ananda College Colombo, in the course of a heartrending description of “A victim to our labour system” tells us (see Ceylonese, February 4, 1917):-

“On account of his frequent illness he was asked by the Kangany to leave the estate. It should be noted that he was regarded as a chattel because he owed the estate nothing. He left the estate a sickly man and the possessor of 25 cents in Ceylon money ... What state is Ceylon in when sick men can be cast out like dogs when their usefulness is at an end, and turned away from the natural asylum of the sick?”

23. Sex Ratio: - The percentage of men and women among the arrivals for 61 years is 73.45, and 16.75 respectively (and children 9.80) — a fact which the Commission tries to explain away. It argues (para. 6): -

Comparing this with the proportion of males and females among the Tamil labour force in 1911(234, 594 males and 205, 708 females) it is evident that a low proportion of women among each year's immigrants does not necessarily mean a low proportion of women in the resident immigrant population”.

If the proportion was somewhat fair in 1911 does it necessarily mean that it will be so in the following years as well, especially, too, when the percentage of women in the subsequent years is very poor.

The Commission observes (para.6):-

“The men return after a time and go back again with their women folk in many cases thus getting counted twice over”.

But compare this with what the same Commission says (para.65):-

“Leave from the employer [to go to India] can be readily obtained by those settled down to family life on the state, but probably not easily by others.” How then can the unmarried men return to India and get back to Ceylon with their womenfolk “thus getting counted twice over”? Again do men alone return and go back “getting counted twice

over”? If we compare the percentage of women who arrive in Ceylon to that of women who depart from the island, we find the latter to be greater than the former. Comparatively a greater percentage of women depart than arrive. So whereas 30,000 men and 5,000 women arrived in 1900 in Ceylon, 10,000 men and 2,500 women departed in 1901. So, if a certain number of men is counted twice over, a comparatively larger number of women is also counted twice over. Why overlook the latter fact, which is obviously more conspicuous, and observe only the former which is comparatively less remarkable?

“The women more often settle in their new homes and their daughters grow up, many and settle there too. Thus in course of time the inequality in numbers between the sexes tends to disappear”.

plead the Commission (para.6). That the inequality has not disappeared in the course of 61 years has also not struck them nor the fact that the percentage of women arriving every year continues to be very low. The Commission do not discuss the present proportion of the sexes in the manner of the critical historian.

“...The sexes are fairly evenly matched in the Tamil labour population” declare the Commission (para.68). According to the census of 1911, the Commission says, “there were 239,111 males and 209,038 females”. Even if we accept this to be quite correct for our special purpose, every seventh or eighth man has no wife. Can we then say that “the sexes are fairly evenly matched”? In face of the fact that the proportion of women in the world is greater than that of men it is very significant and regrettable that on the Ceylon estates the proportion of men to women is roughly 7 to 6—a very large and unsatisfactory proportion, indeed — the significance of which the Commissioners rather underrate.

“Excepting new arrivals, the labourers live in families on the estate and there are no undesirable features due to a lack of women,” the Commission reports (para.68). But what about the “new arrivals”? Are those “new arrivals” above ordinary

human weakness? Had the Commissioners used more discretion, they would not have committed themselves to such discordant and dangerously broad statements.

24. To Sum Up the Work of the Commission: The notes of evidence required to clinch statements are conspicuous by their absence. General conclusions may be arrived at only by the examination of fairly good proportion of particulars; but the Commission has visited only a few estates. Important as the system itself of recruiting is, it does not tell us whether it is an evil or not, in its method of working. It sets down rates of wages which on verification prove to be incorrect. Easy as it is to find out the cost of living, the Commissioners, however, have underestimated it. Does the coolie gain by going to Ceylon from India? This question is unanswered. Again we are not told whether the emigrant retains his liberty or becomes a slave. One might think after reading the report that he is not overworked, whereas facts point quite the other way. The Commissioners speak of the law that the coolie must be fed during the illness, and are silent regarding its frequent infringement with impunity. The law in Ceylon is extremely hard on the coolie and benevolent towards the master, and yet the Commission maintains silence on the subject. Many are the hardships of the quarantine camp, they are not dwelt upon, nor referred to. Relevant points are skipped over, and irrelevant points, such as, the supply of coolies meeting the demand are dilated upon. The debts of deceased labourers are not entirely written off by Federated estates. The Federation has unfortunately, been abolished since. Rare though plague is supposed to be in the report under review, there were according to the Municipal Chairman's statement 169 victims to it in 1917. Its notion of sanitation must be narrow, if a house 12 feet by 10 feet for four coolies with their children, is considered a satisfactory condition. Whatever it may say of gifts to women after childbirth and to children, there is no evidence that they are given to children and that that the practice as regards women is contrary to law. The statistics are presented to us in such a manner that one is apt to conclude that the coolie returns to Ceylon after his visit to India because he likes to return, which impression the Commission itself creates; whereas a close study of the figures leads us to quite a different inference. Again it magnifies the situation of the suitableness of the conditions

to the coolie, and minimizes the difficulty of his being repatriated. The fact is few, if any, return, it being next to impossible for the coolie to get back to India when once he has bound himself to the Kangany and the estate. It does not blush to say that the proportion of the sexes, which is a very important question — is “fairly evenly matched”, when a scrutiny of the figures reveals to us the alarming truth that there are only 39 women to every 61 men! Can I not, therefore, be excused for calling it “A Whitewashing Commission”?

Now to turn to the good side, little though it be, of the report, the Commission is very liberal in exposing the ‘unscrupulous’ Kangany and his worse methods. Another praiseworthy feature is that it refers to the “suicidal policy of issuing tundu” (a kind of leaving certificate mentioning the debt on payment of which he will be relieved from that jail — estate) — which is the cause of the chronic debt of the forsaken coolie.

25. Conclusion: I have dealt with a number of the flaws in the report, though not with all nor in complete detail. Even those I have indicated show, I am afraid, that Mr. Marjoribanks, who may be supposed to have written the report, has however unintentionally, used the whitewashing brush freely, and the Honourable Khan Bahadur has, with energy, seconded his innocent efforts. The report, indeed, is meagre and not very creditable.

The public, we may conclude, was right when it anticipated from the men chosen to be Commissioners that the burden of work committed to them was above their strength. Nor has it been disappointed. Who is to blame? The Commissioners are to blame if they accepted a task to which they felt themselves unequal. The selection of gentlemen was not a happy one. Had the Government chosen more qualified men we should now be in possession of more historical facts; the sufferings of the coolies would have been made public, and called for redress from the British Government which is chivalrously striving to right wrongs.

The *Madras Mail*, the *Ceylon Times*, and especially the *Ceylon Observer* have censured me for the offence I had committed in privately investigating and reporting on

the condition of the poor coolies on Ceylon estates. I consider that their remarks spring not from self-interest but from a Commission report, hastily drawn up, and rather uncritical. The Ceylon Government also seems to have suspected my motives, and instituted enquires regarding my person and character. I have naturally incurred the displeasure of the Planting interests of Ceylon. But I regret this less than the attitude of the Government and the Editors who are expected to judge impartially and to give both sides a hearing, and especially me who am quite disinterested in the matter and but wish wrongs to be righted. I, therefore, indulge the hope that the present review may throw light on the subject and draw the impartial Government and the Editors of those papers to the side of human suffering, and play the Samaritan to the forlorn coolie.

Athikadu Thekkur,
Ramnad District,
August 23rd, 1917.

Karumuttu Thiagarajan

APPENDIX - 2

EVIDENCE-IN-CHIEF OF KARUMUTTU THIAGARAJA

CHETTIAR BEFORE THE IMMIGRANT LABOUR

COMMITTEE

QUALIFICATIONS:

I was a member of the Subject Committee of the 32nd Indian National Congress. I am the Secretary of the Madras Presidency Association, Madura-Ramnad branch. I have proposed resolutions affecting the lower classes at several public conferences. I have published three pamphlets on “Indian Emigrants on Ceylon Estates”, and one on “Ceylon Quarantine Regulation Difficulties”. I have also spent three years in studying the present question and made sure of the facts by personal investigation.

INTRODUCTORY

The present system of recruiting Indian labour and its management on the estates is based on fraud and maintained by force. It has caused enormous suffering; it has broken up families; it has driven men to crime and women into lives of shame; it has resulted in frightful mortality. It is virtual slavery.

I shall consider the subject under four heads — the Recruiter, the Planter, the Government and the Labourer.

I. RECRUITER

Fraud is the Recruiter's strongest weapon. He is paid 10, 20 or even 45 rupees (vide page 40 of Sabaragamuwa Commission Report) for a single labourer. Therefore, he tries by hook or by crook to get into his clutches as many labourers as he can. The recruiter does not represent the true lot of the labourer on the estate, but entirely misrepresents it, by holding out to him golden prospects - false, of course. I say, therefore, that the stream is poisoned at the source.

(All the labourers, without any exception at all, examined by the Sabaragamuwa Commission bitterly complained that they were all absolutely misled. Further, this charge is admitted by 30 out of 35 planters examined by the same commission).

II. PLANTER

Not a few planters neglect and ill treat their labourers. The death rate and particularly child mortality are abnormally high. In 1913, the death rate on a certain estate was 238 per thousand. In 1914, the average for all estates was 42.3 per thousand, while it was only 27.4 per thousand in Colombo. In 1916, the rate of infant mortality on estates varied from 182 to so much as 450 per thousand in some districts, and the general average was 256. The rate in the whole colony was 194 per thousand. When we consider the fact that epidemics on the estates are unknown, these figures are striking, and point conclusively to insanitary conditions of labour and lack of satisfactory medical aid.

The planters seem to have the right of private arrest, as if the labourers were actual slaves. They also reserve the right of punishing, fining, caning etc., and they use it with impunity. They make use of corporal punishment-which is sometimes very severe, going so far as to cause grievous hurt and bleeding, for such trivial reasons of disobedience, absence from the estates without leave, etc.

III. GOVERNMENT

The Courts attach no weight to the statement of the labourer. If the labourer reports to the Court the ill-treatment of himself by his master it punishes him for having made a “frivolous” complaint (vide “Ceylon Observer” — 31-1-1918), justifying the ill-treatment of the labourer on the ground that it is necessary to maintain discipline. If the victim appeals to the Supreme Court his case is thrown out as “very suspicious” (vide “Times of Ceylon” 10-3-1917). Perhaps the Court wonders how a labourer manages to approach it! The Law sentences the labourer to imprisonment with hard work for such trivial offences as negligence, impertinence, and drunkenness. If the intending emigrant were only aware of this law he would not come here at all, however ignorant and resourceless he might be.

IV. LABOURER

The labourer is absolutely misled. He does not at all realise the conditions of the new life before him. Nor does he start with the deliberate intention of making for himself a home in the new country. He goes because he is uncomfortable at home. He may have quarrelled with his parent and left home in pursuit of work. Many are not recruited in their villages. The recruiter picks up the loiterer and induces him to emigrate by relieving his immediate wants, and setting splendid prospects before him.

The labourer, however, realises the difficulties by and by. He is first unnecessarily detained at Mandapam. What is worse, as long as he is kept there, he is ill-fed.

When he reaches the estate, he finds things absolutely different to what the Kangany has portrayed them to be. He is compelled to live in a very small room 10x12 feet with three others. He is forced to work 10 hours continuously, without break for a mid-day meal. Very poor wages are paid, only 33 to 40 cents to men, and 25 to 30 cents to women. The wages paid on rubber estates are somewhat better. Even when the labourer is ill he is driven by the Kangany to the field for work, as otherwise the Kangany will lose the commission of 6 cents which he gets for every day a labourer works. When he is too ill to work he is often neglected. His children are generally deprived of all education; they are all fated to live and die as ignorant coolies. The men who come to Ceylon are more numerous than the women — a disproportion not calculated to improve the morals of the labourer.

The labourer may be shifted from one estate to another, but he cannot return to India. The Kangany has put on him a heavy debt which binds him with chains from which he cannot free himself. The average debt of a labourer is said to be Rs.700, and sometimes from 200 to 300 rupees. Time only increases the debt. It cannot be repaid or even reduced. The debt of the deceased or the run-away relation is added to it. The debt puts him in a hopeless condition. It converts him into an actual slave under the tyranny of the Kangany. The law is very favourable to the labourer in this respect. A debt of this character is not recoverable in any Court of law in Ceylon or in India, so says the Labour

Commission that sat in 1908. But aside from the fact that this leniency of the law is not usually known to them, “the high standard of honour which generally prevails amongst these people” as that Commission rightly observes, does not allow them to repudiate the debt.

On account of personal suffering, however, every year thousands of labourers try to get back to India, sometimes perishing with cold and hunger on the way, if they were not caught and taken back to the life from which they are fleeing. In 1915 the number of “bolters” from Federated Estates alone was 8,894. Labourers do not run away for mere pleasure, or out of wickedness. This is standing witness against the system for all time.

In a word, a will-o’- the-wisp created by the Kangany lures the labourer out of India, and sets him where he is illfed, hard-worked, under-paid, laden with a heavy debt, and practically bound as a slave for life.

OTHER SIDE

I will now turn to the argument which is usually adduced in favour of the present system, namely, if the system is so bad how is it thousands of labourers go back to India and then return to the estate? The reason for this is, that they have been compelled to leave in Ceylon part of their family as security, for the heavy debt contracted, before leaving and naturally they return to recover them (vide page 155 Sabaragamuwa Commission Report).

REMEDIES

It is rather difficult for one person to suggest suitable remedies for abuses on such a large scale. I, therefore, propose arbitration, consisting of a committee of two representatives for the labourers and two for the planters with a neutral member as judge, who shall be accepted by both parties, to decide the question. My own present views are, however, as follows:

ROOT OF THE EVIL

As the real remedy lies in bettering the condition here, I shall first treat this before going to recruiting.

I. WAGES

“Cheap labour is dear.” The present wages are insufficient to attract labourers emigrate. Therefore, the wages should be increased to 60 to 75 cents for men and 40 to 50 cents for women. These would be fair wages for those who leave their country and go abroad to better their economic condition. Further, to make labourers stick to one estate for sometime without constantly changing, they may be given a bonus. In the first year, they will have received freepassage. In the second year, the bonus may be 20 rupees, with an increase of 5 rupees for each successive year of service up to a maximum of 35 rupees.

The commission of 6 cents paid to the Kangany for every day a labour works should be abolished. Instead of the Kangany, have Supervisors who will be paid a monthly salary.

II. TASKS

Labourers should not be worked for more than eight hours a day, not including two hours interval. No child should begin work until his fourteenth year.

III. LIVING

Each family should occupy a separate room. A certain proportion in sex ratio should be maintained. The restriction on the quantity of rice should be done away with. The labourer should be given the quantity he requires, since he pays for it.

The law about sanitation, medical aid, education and the like should be strictly observed.

IV. PROTECTORS

There should be an Indian Protector in each district to see to the interests of the

labourers. There should be also Indian representatives in the Legislative Council for safeguarding labour interests.

V. RECRUITING

The Kangany and the commission system should be totally abolished. Instead, labour bureaus may be formed in important centres in India. They should have salaried men to recruit labourers. The labourers should be persuaded to emigrate only by the offer of terms. A booklet giving all possible details, including exact figures of wages should be handed over to the intending emigrant before he emigrates. The labourer recruited should get a pass from the Headman of the village, counter-signed by the Magistrate of the Taluk. The labourer should be given free passage. If he leaves his estate within one year the cost of passage might be recovered from him.

ABOLITION OF “SLAVERY”

Before things are put on a new basis, the present labourers should be assisted by Government to wipe off their debts. It is manifestly unfair to both planter and labourer to expect the latter to pay his debt under prevailing conditions.

APPENDIX – 3

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHRI KARUMUTTU THIAGARAJA CHETTIAR

By

Shri S.Y. NANAL,

Editor, “The Textile Digest”

Shri Thiagarajan Karumuttu, Managing Director of the well-known Meenakshi Group of Mills in South India, was born in 1893. He was educated in St. Thomas College, Colombo, and then joined *Morning Leader* as an apprentice journalist. He reported extensively on the poor conditions of the labour employed on tea plantations in Ceylon. He founded a Labour Union for plantation workers and was its Secretary and was responsible for improving their working conditions. In 1914, he plunged into the Nationalist Movement in India; became Secretary of Provincial Congress in 1916 was elected to All India Congress Committee in 1917.

Starting with Sree Meenakshi Mills in 1924, Shri Thiagarajan has established now 18 Mills, spread in Madras and Kerala. His mills are one of the most modern, well planned and well maintained in this country. He has constructed cheap and good housing for labour near the mills. He has also many other interests.

An eminent educationist, he has founded Engineering Colleges and Polytechnics in Madurai, Salem and Alagappa Nagar and runs them.

He is a connoisseur of art and sculpture.

[The *Textile Digest* is grateful to Shri Thiagarajan for permitting this interview]

Interviewed by SHRI. S. Y. NANAL

Q. Good Evening, Sir. Let me start with the burning topic of the day. You would agree that the cotton textile industry is currently passing through one of the worst crises in recent times. In your opinion, what could be the reasons for the same?

A. Yes. There is a serious crisis, and Spinning and Weaving Mills, producing coarse and medium count yarns and cloth from Indian Cotton, have been the worst hit. The reasons are:

- (i) Non-availability of the required quantity of cotton at the ceiling prices, due to successive droughts and poor crops;
- (ii) Credit squeeze by the Reserve Bank;
- (iii) Heavy excise duty on coarse and medium fabrics;
- (iv) Rising labour costs; fall in the purchasing power of common consumers due to steep rise in the cost of living;
- (v) Border troubles;
- (vi) Power-cut (in South India).

Q. What remedies do you suggest so that the industry can turn the corner?

A. First and foremost, cotton must be made available by directing all energies to improving the low yield. If the yield is increased,

- (i) the grower gets better returns;
 - (ii) the Mills, cheaper cotton;
 - (iii) the consumer, cheaper cloth;
 - (iv) artificial restraints and controls become unnecessary;
 - (v) foreign exchange on import of cotton is saved; and
 - (vi) it will help to earn more foreign exchange from exports.
- Even a 25% increase (which is not difficult to achieve) will work this miracle. Secondly, the Government should remove all controls; abolish excise duty on the

poor man's coarse and medium cloth; give substantial tax-holiday to sick mills and help modernisation and rehabilitation by long-term loans at concessional rates.

Thirdly, the industry must put its own house in order, by rehabilitation and modernization of machinery, by efficient and economic working, and by adoption of healthy administration and sound business organisation.

Fourthly, the labour must realise the difficulties of the industry and accept rationalised workloads and scientific methods of wage fixation.

Unless everyone - from Government, to management and labour - is prepared to make sacrifices and put forth his best effort, the industry cannot survive.

Q. *You just mentioned about the low yield of cotton in this country.*

A. Yes. Our average yield per acre is only 112 lbs. as against 665 lbs. in Egypt, 650 lbs. in Russia, 517 lbs. in U.S.A., 239 lbs. in China and 229 lbs. in Pakistan. We are the lowest here in the world.

Q. *The cotton textile industry's first concern naturally is to improve this yield, and the only way to do is to use better seeds, have irrigation, spray pesticides and use fertilisers. All this needs money and technical know-how. How can our poor farmers get the money for this?*

A. Are you suggesting that the mill industry should finance the farmers? I am afraid the financial position of the industry will not permit this at the present time.

Q: *I would even then suggest mills entering cotton cultivation in a big way. In the sugar industry — to quote and example — loans are given to farmers through banks for a period of 3 to 4 months for cultivation. Why should not a similar system be adopted for cotton farmers? Recently the banks have agreed to make easy loans available for agriculturists. If these loans are routed to farmers through mills, who would guarantee*

to buy the cotton at a certain price and if the mills offer technical assistance for securing better seed, etc., will 1101 cotton yields improve?

A: What you say is well worth trying. The banks must approach well-reputed mills for this experiment; and these mills should open up an agricultural department for helping the farmers. This experience, if conducted with full seriousness, may lead to success.

Q: Allow me to change the subject to the textile machinery manufacturing industry. Almost all machines for spinning and weaving, except a few like combers, automatic cone and pirn winders and multi-color automatic looms are now being made in the country. As a customer of this industry, are you happy with the products of this industry?

A: No. I am not at all satisfied. The Cotton textile industry has suffered because our manufacturers, until recently, have not come out with the latest machinery. The world is having HP cards; we have to be content with a semi- HP card and that too without the latest accompaniments. The spindle speed in the West and in Japan is as high as 15,000 r.p.m. Our Ring frames, made hitherto, work so poorly that with the increase of speed to 11,000 r.p.m. spinning becomes bad. Few indigenous manufacturers make satisfactory high-speed rings. How can our industry survive in the world market working such machinery?

Q: What way do you suggest so (hat the cotton industry always gets modern machinery?

A: I am in favor of foreign collaborations for manufacture of machinery and in allowing certain amount of machinery to be imported, where the local manufacturer does not come up to the expected standard. There should be an organization jointly of Government, Indian Cotton Mills' Federation and Textile **Machinery Manufacturers' Association**, who should go into the complaints against indigenous machinery, and where it is proved that the complaints are genuine and the mills have been put to loss, the machinery

manufacturer should be suitably penalized and the mills compensated. I have instances in our Group where Japanese and British manufacturers have either replaced their machines free of cost or paid compensation for their unsatisfactory performance. But, our manufacturers, with some exceptions, turn a deaf ear to complaints.

Q: I feel the only good the present slump will do is to weed out those firms who do not make quality machines; but such of the mills who have bought machines from them will of course suffer. Let me come to another burning question — that of the weaker units. Should these be re-started? If so, who should run them — the Government or private parties? What minimum concessions should such units claim from Government

A: If the conditions I give below are satisfied, most of the weaker mills, at least in Madras State, can be run efficiently:

The prime condition is that the Government, management and labour all must agree to sacrifice; for once a mill closes, none of them will benefit and all stand to lose.

The Government must exempt such units — for a period of five years — from payment of excise duty and sales tax; provide working capital and capital for urgent rehabilitation on easy terms where there is some security, supply cotton at ceiling prices, and offer concession in electric charges. The management should forego remuneration until the mill turns the corner. The labour should agree to accept 50% of dearness allowance till such time as the mill is financially sound; agree to rationalized workloads and put forth their best efforts.

Then coming to this question about who should run such mills, I am of the firm opinion, that the Government should not enter business; managing textile mills is not as easy as it apparently looks and I believe the Government is learning this from their recent experiences. Only reputed private parties, with managerial experience, may be invited to work such mills in association with the Government.

Q: These are the most practical conditions I believe there could be, but, I believe neither the labour nor the Government want to sacrifice. If my information is correct, the re-started mills have to pay excise duty and wages at the same rate as any other mill. Could I change the subject? As an eminent educationist, how close should be the liaison between mills and textile colleges? I am particularly asking this question because I am not very happy with this relationship as it exists in Bombay.

A. I feel there should be the closest possible liaison; then the staff of the Institute will gain rich experience; the same can then be passed on to the students, finally resulting in providing better technicians to the industry. We are beginning such a relationship with the VJ.T. Institute in Bombay and I am sure it will be mutually profitable.

Q: Do you have any specific suggestions w make for the textile colleges?

A: Yes I think if we can have a textile Engineering Course, run on a sandwich basis with mills' co-operation, it would be advantageous for training good maintenance engineers. A BE (Mechanical) should spend half the day in a mill and half the day in a textile mill processing. May be in a year or so he would pick up enough of textile processing.

Q. Last but one question before I stop. The Textile Association down South does not appear to be as active as in Bombay or Ahmedabad.

A. I am prepared to give whatever help we can to organize Seminars, Lectures, etc. We can even think of a Madurai Branch. I welcome all technical activities.

Q. *Last question, could I have a message from you for our members?*

A. My message is for hard and sincere work, up-to-date scientific knowledge, modern ideas, and technical efficiency in the interest of industry and the country.

Q. *Thank you, Sir. May I express my sincere thanks for sparing so much of your time and sharing your thoughts with us? Thank you.*

A. Thank you.

Madurai, July '67

APPENDIX - 4

INAUGURATION OF THIAGARAJAR COLLEGE

Welcome Address

By

Sri Karumuttu Thiagaraja Chettiar

Founder - President

Your Excellency,

Welcoming to our College such a distinguished personage as Your Excellency is to me a proud privilege. It is, indeed, very kind of Your Excellency to have graciously consented to inaugurate the new temple of learning, a favour for which we offer our heartfelt thanks.

Madurai, a historic city of the Pandyan Kingdom, is a seat of learning, noted for its ancient culture, whose Tamil literature as a fine art has thrived with the existence of three Sangams from 9940 BC to 50 AD. The object of learning in those early ages was not merely to help one to win his bread, but more to acquire culture and knowledge to love God and men. To revive that great tradition of culture in a pure, spiritual, and academic atmosphere, and as a realization of a long pent-up dream of a Tamil University, this shrine of culture has been erected, on a picturesque site on the banks of the sacred river Vaigai, and opposite to the famous Teppakulam, which is of great historical and religious importance.

As a second step to achieve this coveted object, eminent men of high qualifications and long experience have been appointed as Principal and Professors. Thirdly, another fillip is that this Temple is to be inaugurated formally and with due Solemnity, not only by a distinguished head of the Government and the University, but also of a great royal house noted for its patronage of letters.

The formal ceremony of inauguration of the College, now, at the commencement of the second term was due rather to secure the honour of such a dignitary to inaugurate it than to complete the get-up of the buildings. Even now the accommodation is poor and does not satisfy our earnest desire to make it more comfortable to our dear students but we hope to increase it gradually with the help and co-operation of your Government. Needless to say, any laudable object of this kind is well worthy of State help and support, as India's first and foremost need is true learning — to produce good citizens of culture. This gives wealth to the poor, honor to the rich, aid to the young and support to the aged.

It is commonly admitted that the present system of education is flagrantly defective, and the reforms proposed by politicians appear to be even worse. I shall not here enter into the vexed question of enforcing Hindi as our national language and thus making our poor children study three languages, in addition to different crafts like carpentry and smithy. While material constructions are safely entrusted to experts, spiritual and intellectual constructions, such as study and language, are lightly entrusted to and laid on laymen's shoulders, instead of educationists of experience and eminence. That this danger will be averted and the change will be for the better is the fond hope of all educationists and parents.

Madras with a population of over fifty millions has only three Universities. This is very inadequate. The establishment of another University in Madurai, the heart of Tamil Nadu with its four Colleges — and within a radius of 100 miles, with 12 more colleges in Trichinopoly, Ramnad and Tirnelveli Districts — will considerably help and enhance higher education in Tamil Nadu.

This scheme I have already proposed to the government and even offered my little contribution, believing as I do, that the highest form of service to one's country is the provision for its youth of proper educational facilities. This Institution is but a small and humble endeavour in that direction.

The pleasant task of welcoming Your Excellency and briefly showing the purpose of this new institution is done. So I invite Your Excellency to convey to our expectant ears your kindly message and pour into the heart of this new College the blessed stream of your encouragement and consolation.

APPENDIX - 5

A LETTER TO C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

To

The Hon'ble Sree C. RAJAGOPALACHARIAR,
Prime Minister to the Government of Madras,
Madras.

Dear Sir,

May I introduce myself as an old and loyal Congressman who though without publicity, has worked and sacrificed not a little? To mention only a few instances, which occurred after I withdrew from the political field in 1921, to take to industry— when officials of Madura came to The Sree Meenakshi Mills Ltd., which is under my management, in 1929 after Gandhiji's Dande March, to distribute pamphlets among the labourers of our Mills, - prompted by patriotism, and pride that Gandhiji first wore his loin cloth as my guest I made bold to say that no facilities would be afforded the Government to carry on counter propaganda against a great national movement inside our Mills. Mr.J.F. Hall, I.C.S., then Collector of Madura, with a threat of imprisonment under the Arms Act for not depositing my revolver in time in the absence of renewal of license, took a letter of undertaking from me that I should dissociate myself from the Congress and refrain from financing it. Again when Sir R.K. Shanumgam, kt., then President of the Assembly, wrote to me in 1934 to support his candidature, I curtly replied to the illustrious Justicite that I could not do so owing to my sympathies with the Congress. As I had two votes, there was great pressure from all quarters. I disobeyed the "order" of the late Mr. E.M. Viswanathan Chettiar who held 1/16 share of the Company and was besides financing the mills to the extent of five lakhs. Next an "injunction" from Dewan Bahadur A.M. Murugappa Chettiar then a Director of the Mills, and Sir

P.T.Rajan, then Development Minister, to cast at least the vote of the Company in favour of Sir Shanmugam, met the same fate. Your esteemed colleague, Dr. Subbaroyan was present on the latter occasion. My sufferings for such little things were greater than even courting imprisonment. Mr.N.M.R. Subbaraman will speak to the part I played, silently, in the last general election to support the Congress. These unhappy incidents I have the unpleasant task of recounting if I am to merit your sympathy as a staunch Congressite. In the sincere hope that you may, therefore, have some consideration for the words of a true Congressman, and that you as Prime Minister, will be open-minded, sympathetic and conciliatory, I approach you in a friendly spirit to write about the burning topic of the day in our Presidency.

I have read carefully all that has been said for and against compulsory Hindi. I am still unconvinced by the arguments advanced in favour of it. When the matter has been discussed for the last fifteen months in the Press and on the platform at the expense of a great deal of eloquence and energy in arguing the pros and cons of compulsory Hindi, it may indeed seem to be superfluous to raise the point again here. However, as the matter is so important, kindly permit me to touch it, presenting a view with no bias against the well-meant measure.

In the first place if Hindi had been made an optional subject there would have been no opposition against it, at least on the part of unprejudiced intelligentsia. What has given a momentum to the widespread agitation is that the language was made compulsory. Therefore, we shall first examine this preliminary issue.

Is it always right to make a good thing compulsory? True, we do want primary education to be made compulsory. This is already a hard and laudable task that the Congress intends to undertake. This does not, therefore, need to be made harder still, by compelling the study of Hindi in the Secondary School, among the children of a generation, which is hostile to it. Even when primary education has not yet been made compulsory in this poor miserable land, where 96% cannot speak their thoughts fairly in

their own mother tongue, can an alien language be made compulsory in a Secondary School?

When one is put under compulsion to do a thing, he looks upon it with suspicion, and Hindi, though a widely spoken dialect of great India, will forfeit the natural love that it might otherwise engender.

If and when a need arises for a thing it will certainly overcome all obstacles and will secure and hold its own. Why then force it prematurely? Secondly, Hindi has been made compulsory to bring solidarity between province and province. Has it achieved this desired good effect? No! It has, on the other hand, produced a misunderstanding between us and our beloved North Indian brethren, who are suspected to have a design to dominate over us, and, what is worse, it has created a split in our own province itself. It has unfortunately revived communal feelings that were fast receding into the background. We have offered our opponents a first class political issue to fight us and are thereby making them great heroes. Are we not responsible for this? But for this unfortunate step they would have rested in peace. Having now given them new life to fight, we have had to make use of a much-condemned weapon, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, as a defence against them. To correct one error, one is apt to fall into a greater. Mistake follows mistake, which adds strength to the opposition. It would be another mistake to belittle or underrate the movement. If it had not strength we need not have had recourse to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, bitterly condemned by us. The use of this violent Act is a logical proof of the strength of the movement. If there was no case, however great and influential a leader might be, he could not have a sustained following. Outside our province the Hindi — Urdu controversy has also taken a communal turn. Bengal, Punjab and other provinces may add to this commotion when they are faced with this controversy.

Has language always united people? Are not the Hindus of the South and the North speaking *different* languages more united than the Hindus and Mohammedans of the North speaking one language? Religion has more influence to unite people. But we

cannot think of a national religion. One's mother-tongue is as dear as mother. Interference with language or religion may only lead to disruption. Repression we have seen, can only delay a people's triumph.

Coming to the merits of the question, has India the common characteristics of a distinct nation, for us to think of a national language? India is a little continent, embracing different races and communities. Europe without Russia is about as large as India, and yet does not boast of one language — great as it is, it does not derive its greatness from one language. Canada, South Africa and Switzerland each uses different languages, and yet each is united itself, - nor does History shows that the solidarity of any nation or empire grew out of oneness of language? The British Empire, too, embraces a great medley of languages, which have not for centuries broken its unity. All the provinces and states too, have not come to an agreement on this important point. And the chance of all the provinces and states coming to an agreement is yet very slight and remote. The Congress also has come to no conclusion on this point and has given us no mandate. Yet in this province, there is much ado about this, mixing up politics with education, and adding to our complications, when there is no urgent need for it.

Even when Federated India decides upon Hindi as the language of the Central Government, still there will be no need to make Hindi *compulsory* in the Secondary Schools in all provinces. It can then be introduced as an optional subject in the College. It can be specialized in two years during Arts Course or any other special course in Politics, Journalism etc., just as French and classical languages are studied as a second language for higher studies. There would be no opposition to the study of Hindi as an optional subject in the College classes. The leaders will learn Hindi out of necessity.

The study of an alien language in secondary schools will do not good. It will only be a waste of time, unless it is pursued during the college course and also afterwards put in practice.

It is vainly argued that in England, Latin and Greek are taught compulsorily and that they have not spoiled the English language. It is not correct to say that they are

compulsory subjects in England now. And there is no parallelism between these ancient dead languages with their marvellously rich literature, and Hindi, which scarcely has any literature at all. The suggestion of a comparison between the two would give offence to a classical scholar. It would be like comparing an eagle and a poor crow. Latin and Greek are closely allied to English and they are taught in order to enrich it. Greek and Latin are also read to unearth and to enjoy the hidden treasures buried in those ancient rich classical literature. Hindi is not a language allied to Tamil and it is also not a classical language like Greek or Latin or Sanskrit that can enrich our Tamil with its literature.

Whether Hindustani or Hindi is sought to be made the national language is not clear as yet, for Hindustani is different from Hindi. The worst part of it is that Hindi has no script of its own and we have yet to decide on this point, which bristles with difficulties. If Hindi is permitted to be learnt in three different scripts namely, Devanagari, Urdu and Roman, so far as writing is concerned, the three scripts would be like three languages which one would have to learn to read a script which may be any one of the three! Thus we sink lower and lower in difficulties. Besides, when a language is learnt in different scripts it will soon turn into different dialects that will not be easily understood. A uniform pronunciation in speech will require a practical knowledge of phonetics. Again, Hindi, it is authoritatively stated, has already several dialects, and none of them has yet been cultivated.

A word about the explanation that Hindi will not endanger our rich language and its great culture. Has not English, that has spread very little, done irreparable harm to Tamil? Do we not write and speak in English even in our own homes? Have we not thought that if we did not speak in English it would be below our dignity? Has not English education broken through our customs and culture? Are we not shining in borrowed feathers? Where would we have been, if our great leader, Gandhiji, had not redeemed us and made us return to our own ancient culture and learning? And yet, can we, in fairness, say that the learning of Hindi will not interfere with Tamil and its

culture? It is needless to dilate upon ancient Tamil and its unique culture as they are not disputed.

On the one hand, we want a national language to make this continent of great India into one nation, and on the other hand, we also want to divide the existing provinces into smaller ones on a linguistic basis. Is this not inconsistent? Can we not at least postpone controversial questions such as that of a national language, until we have made India a real nation? Then it will be time to think of a universal language.

At first, it was said that Hindi would be the *lingua franca* of India. But a mixed jargon can never become a state language. Gandhiji now prefers to say that Hindi would be the Rashtrabasha of India. The leaders have not yet placed all their (linguistic) cards on the table. As the Congress is against secret diplomacy they should soon tell the public in detail what position they want Hindustani to occupy under Congress rule.

Article XIX (a) of the Congress constitution only says that the proceedings of the Congress and its Committees shall ordinarily be in Hindustani and (b) that the proceedings of the Provincial Congress Committee shall ordinarily be in the language of the Province. This in itself is clear and allowable. And if the Congress Election Manifesto had only stated that Hindi would be made a compulsory subject, the voters, in their great enthusiasm for Swaraj, might not have noticed or even minded the consequences of such 'gifts', and it would have then stood the Congress Ministry in good stead, to introduce this measure as approved by the people. It would have relieved the Ministry of this very important constitutional issue, as the electorate would not now say that the Ministry had no mandate from them to make Hindi a compulsory study. But instead of this frank avowal, which would have gained by truthfulness and sincerity, the Manifesto openly and emphatically declared that the Congress would not interfere with religion or language.

It has been further argued that according to the Congress constitution, Hindi is the national language. It is not (vide Article 19). On the other hand, the A.I.C.C. has at its last meeting rejected the question of a common language.

No foreign language, however good or elastic, can ever become the language of hundreds of millions speaking some hundreds of languages or dialects, and perhaps not sprung from the same stock. The fruit sought from oneness of language cannot be gathered till all these hundreds of languages or dialects offer a victim at the altar of Hindi. For the sake of an uncertain, if not utopian ideal, shall we run the risk of prizing so little the rich inheritance of language bequeathed to us by our venerable ancestors, that we are prepared to make a sacrifice, even the least, of that certain ancient pledge on behalf of a would be national Hindi. Hindi, in any event, is an alien language to Tamilians, and should never be made the subject of compulsory study.

It is said that English is compulsory in schools and colleges, and that no objection is taken to it. English schools and colleges were started by the British Government, Missionaries and other philanthropists to satisfy the need felt by the people to learn the King's English to take service under a foreign Government. Others learnt it for business. English is a highly cultivated language, made international. It affords every facility, and urges all nations to learn it out of necessity. We wanted Swaraj in order to be masters of our own affairs and to retain the culture of our languages, and not again to have to use a language like Hindi, which is as foreign to us as English. We do not want to substitute one foreign language for another, even if Indian. For we want Poorna Swaraj, for our Province also, with our own culture in our languages.

True, students have recently passed a resolution in their Conference in Madras favouring the study of Hindi as a compulsory subject. They are said to be the future citizens of India. Hence it is argued plausibly that it should be taught compulsorily. If it is a wise measure to consult the young generation that will make the citizens of tomorrow, on this political question, for a similar reason, we might consult their inexperience and romantic tendencies on other political questions as well, and take their answers as our decisions in the conduct of Government. So too, since students, now have caught the infection of strike, we shall also commend strikes, and do away with all laws that are not acceptable to immature minds! Would this be sound wisdom or logic?

One more point and this letter is concluded. Our educational system is very defective. Existing curricula are so heavy that they paralyze the energy of the students and make too many of them unfit for any useful purpose after they leave the schools and colleges. They cannot even earn their living. Their illiterate brothers fare far better in this respect. It will be cruel to add to the syllabus and burden of our children with an additional language that will not help them either temporally or spiritually. The worthy object of the Congress Government to adopt the mother tongue as medium of instruction is unhappily less appreciated than it deserves, precisely because it is obscured by the controversy about Hindi.

Our ancient system of education can be profitably introduced. Religion, absolutely necessary for spiritual development, finds no place in our present curriculum: nor music either. We should move in this right direction to help our young children who are not born merely to live and die.

Millions are starving. This issue and other important ones are shelved. We are accused by those in distress of fiddling while Rome is burning.

It is indeed unfortunate that the popular Ministry, so early in its life, should be forced into this unpleasant controversy. Language is so sacred that dallying with it will have fatal consequences. Should we not end this internal strife before the gulf is too widened? Can we afford to have fresh quarrels within when we have greater battles to face without?

The intensity of my love for Tamil makes me hope sincerely that this letter, coming as it does from a lover of the country, may effect what hundreds of resolutions passed at public meetings have failed to do.

If you are pleased to discuss the matter personally, I shall be glad to wait on you. If the interview converts me to your opinion I shall certainly bear your message to Tamil Nadu.

As you are an esteemed countryman of mine, I have ventured thus far to address

you with frankness which kindly excuse in one who, though familiar, means to be respectful.

With an apology for being so insistent in my earnest appeal to you I conclude, resting on my unbounded love for my mother tongue and my mother country, and feeling confident in your happy possession of the power and the goodness needed for generosity to end this unhappy episode by a stroke of the pen.

I remain,

Yours truly,

Karumuttu Thiagarajan

Madurai

1st May 1939

APPENDIX - 6

A LETTER TO MAHATMA GANDHI

26th June 1946.

Dear Mahatma,

May I congratulate you on having attained Independence for India in your lifetime by long suffering? Who will not be proud of it?

As the chief architect who planned Independent India, you have large responsibilities for setting various details of great complexity regarding religion, language, finance etc.

There is little to quarrel about with you on your happy attitude of strict neutrality to religion — a sacred possession.

I wish you took the same tolerant view about language, which also is a matter of supreme importance. But unfortunately it is not so, owing to your anxiety to have a united India. Your views about a national language, which are undoubtedly well meant though idealistic, need to be clarified, and, if necessary even modified so as to avoid trouble and fatal consequences. Let us not make fresh quarrels.

When you were in Madura I wrote you a letter dated the 1st February 1946 (copy enclosed herein) requesting you kindly to define “Rashtrabasha”. It still remains unanswered, either directly, or indirectly through your “Harijan”. It is unanswerable says my learned friend, Dr. Sir. Lakshmanaswamy Mudaliar, the popular Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras. The very same remark was made concerning my letter to Rajaji on the same subject by my friend the great lawyer, the late Mr.S. Srinivasa Iyengar, who envisaged the Independence of India which you have now won, after a long bloodless battle.

Recently you advised Indians to read the Cabinet Mission’s report in Hindustani (not in their own vernacular) saying that even you were not quite familiar with English. True, it is very hard to master a foreign tongue. The text of the Cabinet Mission’s statement is not in Hindustani, but in English, and one should read the original if possible instead of translation, which is rarely quite true and accurate. Surely if it is to be read in the vernacular by those who do not know English sufficiently it should be read by them, each in his own language. Now what about the poor people who cannot read Hindustani? You will readily answer that they should all learn Hindustani. It is again, a foreign language to many people, and here the quarrel starts. I would, therefore, beg of you to define “Rashtrabasha” before the matter can be further discussed.

As stated in my last letter, if you want Hindustani to be the Lingua Franca or the common language of India or even the Court language of the Central Government, there may be no objection. But if you want to force it as the State or Court and official language of all the provinces there will be bloodshed, as no one will offer his mother tongue — his richest inheritance — as a victim on the altar of Hindustani.

As Hindustani has not character of its own, a common character is talked of. If Devanagari is not suitable, another character for Hindustani has to be evolved or adopted. But it does not follow from that, that a common character or script should be adopted for all the ancient languages that have an adequate and scientific script of their own. Advocates of common script seem to think that the only difficulty is to learn the characters of a language and that once the characters are learnt, the rich literature of the language can at once be enjoyed. This view may be dismissed as puerile.

With reference to another problem that must be met in the new regime, that of finance, kindly permit me to touch upon another of your favourite topics, that of total prohibition. Looking at it from a practical point of view, I have no hesitation in saying that such a policy will cripple India's finance without, however, conferring any commensurate benefit.

It is difficult for students of history and literature to believe in total prohibition by a statute. They can believe only in temperance through propaganda. The United States of America and Canada tried in vain to enforce total prohibition for about ten years. So total prohibition has been tried and given up in other countries. Why should we not take a lesson from these experiments?

“What existed will always exist, and What did not exist will never come into existence”.

so says Bhagwat Gita. Are we not attempting the impossible?

The sacred Kural, which is unparalleled in the whole world, very strongly condemns drink as deadly poison, but it says,

fspj;jhidf; fhuzq; fhl;Ljy; fPo;ePHf;

Fspj;jhidj; jPj;JhP, aw;W

“Like him who, torch in hand, would seek one sunk beneath the wave

Is he who strives to sober drunken man with reason ings grave “.

Furthermore the evil of drinking is compared with and ranked next to love.

The Divine Book (Kural) says;

cs;sf; fspj;jYq; fhz kfpo;jYq;

fs;Sf;fpy; fhkj;jpw; Fz;L

*“Gladness at the thought, rejoicing at the sight
Not palm-tree wine, but love, yields such delight”.*

So we might as well make laws to turn all people into saints. Is this possible?

Do you not consider eating meat a great crime and sin, beside which the evil of drinking vanishes? Then why not pass legislation to prevent this?

After all, is drinking always, in whatever measure, so awfully bad as it is often painted? It is said that the labourer is relieved of his fatigue if he takes a little of it after his hard day’s work. It becomes bad only when it is abused. What indeed, is not bad when used immoderately? Even water, milk and food, so essential to life, become bad when the virtue of temperance is violated.

You condemn the revenue from excise. This income comes only from the control of the evil. The State makes drink costly and rare by imposing a heavy tax and great restrictions. Instead of allowing every coconut or palm tree in the country to be tapped, the State permits this only in a few places; nor are toddy shops allowed to be opened everywhere. The State can only go so far. If the State totally prohibits liquor, the result will be illicit liquor and breaking of the law.

Rationing of liquor can be tried as in Sweden, with fair hope of similar success. Owing to the previous attempt at prohibition the great Tungabadra Scheme seems to have been dropped, which would have saved the Madras Presidency from the present severe famine.

Far worthier and more judicious subjects for serious consideration are the following:

To introduce compulsory education — to remove illiteracy from the country, to develop irrigation and shipbuilding — to further the agriculture, industry and trade of the country. Instead of helping the homeless naked millions who are dying of starvation, instead of saving the revenue wasted upon total prohibition to spend it upon the urgent reform of separating the judiciary from the executive and upon the other great reforms besides, why should the State focus its concern upon comparatively few mad drunkards?

I am here only pleading for millions of my brethren — I, who have never tasted a drop of liquor in my life, nor have I any vested interest, in so pleading.

India earnestly and humbly entreats you to lead her forward with other progressive countries, and, far from dashing against the current, follow its direction.

Begging you to excuse this letter, coming as it does when you are in the midst of heavy planning and with kind regards,

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Karumuttu Thiagarajan

APPENDIX - 7

ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY
FOUNDER'S COMMEMORATION DAY ADDRESS

Delivered on October 17, 1960

By

SRI KARUMUTTU THIAGARAJA CHETTIAR

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Members of the Faculties,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first express my sincere thanks to the Vice- Chancellor for the honour of being asked to deliver the Founder's Commemorative Address.

On this memorable day, I deem it a privilege and a pleasure to join a learned body in paying homage to the revered memory of the illustrious Founder of the Temple of Learning in this ancient city hallowed by the cosmic dance of Lord Natarajar.

After 30 years of successive tributes and encomiums showered on him by eminent men, including Chief Ministers and High Court Judges, it may look a repetition for me to extol the great and noble qualities of the Father of this University.

I have had, fortunately, unique opportunities of knowing the late Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar for four decades. He was noted for his piety, simple ways of life, winning manners, remarkable courtesy and princely hospitality. He was fortunate in his domestic life, being blessed with a pious, devoted partner and loving children. I have admired his rare capacity for hard work, business acumen and wise statesmanship.

Annamalai University itself is an abiding proof of his creative genius and patriotic inspiration. It is the first University in our country to be founded by private benefaction. Unitary, Residential and Teaching, it is a synthesis of the old and the new, the East and the West, providing facilities for Research in all subjects, particularly Oriental culture.

The Founder's farsightedness and vision have helped to revive not only Tamil literature, but also Music and Arts. The Tamil Isai movement owes its revival entirely to the late Rajah. He has laid the country particularly Tamil Nadu, under a deep obligation by his unexampled munificence, generous philanthropy and cultural achievement.

We are bound to repay this beneficence.

It is the duty of the learned teachers of this self-contained academic center, by their devotion and example, to produce generations of alumni, noted for knowledge and culture, for skill and efficiency, for discipline and character and for loyal service of God and country.

Students, emerging hence thus endowed into the amphitheatre of life, can add lustre to their *Alma Mater* by so utilizing their talents and opportunities as to be worthy citizens of the land.

The parents and the public, by appreciating the varied activities here, may co-operate, in every possible way, towards the development of this University.

It is indeed heartening to see that this Centre of Learning, so nobly and firmly founded, has grown steadily under the fostering care and personal attention of the present Pro-Chancellor, Dr. Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar who spares no pains for its expansion. He is thus proving himself to be the worthy son of a great father who continues to live in his University. It has been fortunate also in its successive Vice-Chancellors, a galaxy of brilliant men down to Sri T.M. Narayanaswamy Pillai, who is now ably presiding over its destinies. Everything thus augurs well for the future of Annamalai University.

True to the Founder's wish to make this Centre of Tamil Studies, the role of the Annamalai University is becoming increasingly conspicuous with the elevation of Tamil to the status of Official Language of the State.

Of all the original languages, Tamil can claim to be the oldest and the richest. Even what survives of our ancient learning, despite the ravages of water, fire and white ants, remains a treasure that can excel the best in any country.

No language can take such pride as Tamil in her wealth of devotional songs like *Thevaram* and *Tiruvacakam*.

The *Tirukkural*, offering unrivalled counsels, is a masterpiece on stagecraft. Planning, Taxation and Budgeting, which engage our attention today, are beautifully condensed in one and three quarter lines:

,aw;wYk; <l;lYk; fhj;jYk; fhj;j

tFj;jYk; ty;y juR

*"A king is he who treasure gains, stores up, defends,
And duly for his Kingdom 's weal expends."*

The qualities pre-requisite in an Ambassador, embodied in 10 stanzas are applicable to present-day requirements. One of them refers to personality:

mwpTU Muha;e;j fy;tp,k; %d;wd;

nrwpTilahd; nry;f tpidf;F

*"Sense, goodly grace, and Knowledge exquisite,
who hath these, three for envoy's task is fit."*

That the Government should be based on the will of the people is aptly stressed in the following:

Ntyd;W ntd;wp jUtJ kd;dtd;

NfhYJ}ck; Nfhlhnjdpd;.

*“Not lance gives kings the victory,
But sceptre swayed with equity.”*

It denounces official begging:

NtnyhL epd;whd; ,Lvd;wJ NghYk;

NfhnyhL epd;whd; ,uT.

“As ‘give’ the robber cries with lance uplift,
So kings with sceptred hand implore a gift.”

Are there parallels in other languages to such noble, practical, moral counsels?

As literature, *Pathu Pattu*, *Ettu Thokai* and *Aymperum Kaviyam* reign supreme.

The references to the administration of justice in *Silappathikaram* are remarkable. As soon as King Pandian realized the injustice of his hasty decision, his life became extinct.

Cholan imposed unsparing punishment upon his only son for a fault of negligence.

Are not these instances of the high sense of justice that once prevailed in Tamil Nadu?

The eminence of Tolkappiam as a treatise on grammar is undisputed. Not only does it provide rules for letters and words, but also for human conduct.

Such is the beauty and variety of our dear mother tongue. It was unfortunately neglected so long as a foreign flag flew over us. With the dawn of freedom, however, Tamil was expected to come to the fore, not only in the scheme of studies in our Educational Institutions, but also in the Government. After twelve years of independence, the Mother tongue is still struggling for its due place.

And the reason is not far to seek. Hindi is competing with English for the honour of becoming the Official Language of the Union. How one regional language, spoken by only 36% of the population, can serve as the Official Language of the entire country baffles all understanding. The union government, which is expected to treat all languages alike, is partial to Hindi and discriminatory in spending large amounts on its development and propaganda. The ostensible excuses for favoring Hindi are that it is spoken by a majority and that a common language is necessary for the unity and solidarity of the country. Linguistic troubles all over India clearly prove that this policy is suicidal. When a medicine reacts badly on a patient, the wise Doctor changes the treatment. Why should not men at the helm of affairs, with some respect for languages other than their own, endeavor to establish friendly linguistic relations between the North and the South and between State and State?

It should be possible for them to imitate Switzerland which, with a population of 4¼ millions, 73% of whom speak German, 21% French, 5% Italian and 1% Romansh, recognizes all the four tongues as official languages without forcing the language of the majority, namely, German, upon the minorities. By such manifestation of justice, statesmanship and deference to the feelings of others, Switzerland flourishes to-day as a closely-knit home of freedom and liberty. Other examples of the same enlightened policy are Canada, Belgium, South Africa and even Russia, where more than one official language finds recognition.

The proper course, therefore, would be to accept each regional language in India as the respective State Language, while honoring all the State Languages as the Official Languages of the Federation. If four Official Languages can serve for 4 1/4 millions, fourteen Official languages would not be too many for 400 million people. Are not all

the languages of Member nations recognized for official use in the United Nations' Assembly?

Yet, one language, Hindi, in which literacy is lowest, is being thrust on the whole country. This language is comparatively poor in literature, and has no adequate grammar or vocabulary. One single word, “surka”, is pressed into service to express four different ideas — tax, duty, customs and assessment; whereas in Tamil we have different words for each; viz., for tax, for duty, for customs and for assessment.

It is difficult to visualize the possibility of this infant language, Hindi, ever becoming the language of our Law Courts, when even such a cultivated language as English, has to borrow phrases and expressions from a foreign language for the sake of precision, e.g., will and testament, *res judicata*, *de jure*, *de facto*, etc.

A language should be capable of stirring the human soul, filling the memory, stimulating the mind and inspiring the imagination, with great truths, noble ideas and beautiful imagery. Hindi cannot accomplish this, until poets, saints, artists and scientists are born to enrich it.

The exaltation and imposition of Hindi has arisen out of a single casting vote of the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly! As one interested in Hindi, it would have been fair and proper if he had abstained from voting in an equally divided House. Nor is it seemly, for those that seek to force their own language down unwilling throats, to raise the cry of parochialism and provincialism.

As we do need a means of inter-State communication, we cannot possibly think of a more suitable medium than English. It will also help us in our international contacts. English is the World Language today, rich in literature, immortalized by Shakespeare, Milton and others. It is the only vehicle of scientific knowledge for us. English has been the language of Indian unity, whereas the very mention of Hindi spells disunity. Andhra, Gujarat and Maharashtra have had to shed blood for their linguistic rights. English, therefore, should not be replaced by Hindi, but should be retained as our second language, occupying an honoured position next only to the Mother tongue.

The younger generation owe it to their country to study topical problems, such as these, intensely but dispassionately, striving to understand and appreciate them in their true bearings.

It is incumbent on us to realize that our culture and civilization is more important than any temporal matters, being deeply rooted in religion.

Continuance of individual religious practices, of prayers and meditations, moral instruction of a general nature, should find a place in our Schools and Colleges, and also in our Universities. In Oxford, Cambridge and other Western Universities, which grew up under religious auspices, there are chapels where services are regularly held for the benefit of their staff and students. It should not be difficult for separate religious practices of the different faiths of our land to be permitted in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of our Centres of Learning. I am happy that a sacred place of worship exists within this University campus.

Our literature echoes, our architecture reflects, our music inspires the devout Love of God that is the beginning of Wisdom:

*“No fruit have men of all their studied lore,
Save they the Purely Wise One’s feet adore.”*

APPENDIX - 8

EXCERPTS FROM KALAITHANTHAI'S LETTERS TO C.S.R.

Between 1932 and 1935 Kalaithanthai mostly stayed in Bombay as he was engaged in forward trading in cotton. At that time he kept up a regular correspondence with C.S.Ramachari who was looking after Sree Meenakshi mills. Following are some excerpts from the letters.

Somehow we have to run the mills efficiently. God should sustain us till we are able to make some arrangement. I am praying to Him day and night and hope He will not let us down. You go to all the temples daily and pray for His succour. The believer never comes to harm.

Without God's benediction, no man's help will be of any avail. Only He can save us. Let us put our trust in Him.

How profound are the words of Thayumanavar when he speaks of the transience of life. What is this life? We are here today and are gone tomorrow. We should consider every day as perhaps the last day of our life and act accordingly.

.....

.....

All my desires have come to nothing. I have now ceased to entertain any desire. I am praying to God to get me out of the situation I am now in.

If after all this, the book shows loss, disallow my salary and commission and somehow show that there is no loss.

By now the machinery might have arrived. They must be promptly installed and run before June 30. At all costs, we must make Rs 1000 per day from July 1st.

The buildings must be completed before December 1935. Another 10000 spindles must be commissioned before January 1936. Take steps for this.

We have to raise Rs. 100000 before the end of this month. What is to be done?

If somehow cotton prices come down and we are able to procure cotton, we can raise the money from some source. Otherwise we will be in trouble. May Goddess Meenakshi help us.

Our troubles will last only up to June 23. Then everything will come out all right. I have no doubt about it. Goddess Meenakshi will help us. We will make all efforts and persevere. Perseverance pays.

But I often fear unforeseen obstacles. I am worried. But God is great. Things will turn for the better. "There is providence in the fall of a sparrow. Readiness is all." We shall accept suffering. I have been facing only troubles all these eighteen years. I do not know how long this will go on. I shall be happy if I can manage the mill without trouble.

I go on living in the hope that God will help me and will not let me down.

We had overreached ourselves and that has got us into trouble. But who can control fate? There is no point in regretting. We shall be careful hereafter...

Go round the mills in the morning and in the evening. Economize. Look after the production. See that cotton is not wasted. We must have 45 bales every week. We must exercise great care in procuring cotton and selling yarn. Follow the reports on cotton...

We are not inferior to the Japanese.

Be careful about income and expenditure. See that there is no shortage of funds. Integrity is more important than profit. It is the soul of business. With integrity, we can earn money later. We should not allow ourselves to suffer for short gains.

We are procuring 1000 bales of cotton every month. If we got it for five rupees less than Harvey mills, we could save Rs 5000. We can get cotton for less price at Coimbatore we can sell the yarn at a higher rate, and we can make extra money. It will come to Rs 5000 for 40000 bales.

There is no better place than Madurai for spinning mills. If, with 25000 spindles here working day and night, we cannot make at least Rs 25000 after allowing for depreciation, we will incur losses in other places...

We should not compromise on quality. Use only good grade cotton.

It is very hot now in Bombay and Calcutta. Infectious diseases like smallpox and cholera seem to be prevalent. Still I go there, hoping to collect share capital...

We had the help of Harvey mills and a chance of good relations with them, but it did not last...

We had the luck to buy cotton, silver, copper and rubber freely, but that too we lost...

The mills had a liquidity of up to Rs. 400000. Now we seem unable to raise even Rs. 10000.

What hard luck! I do not know how God is going to help us. Nothing is in our hands. Let us do all we can without losing heart. "God helps those who help themselves."

We must be careful not to let others see our sufferings.

When we have to find money for cotton, the machinery also has arrived. We have to make up Rs 100000.

How are we to pay the taxes now? Write to Ramasamy Iyer to refer to the High Court.

If we pay the chit instalments regularly and get the money, we can adjust later.

You might have read the story of the newspaper magnate, Pears. He fell several times before he rose to his high position. Almost all the rich people have gone through hard times. So we must not lose heart. If we did, we might never recover.

Here even the smallest cotton merchants are well versed in the market conditions. We must be thorough in our knowledge of cotton business. There is no harm in our spending half our time on this. For this, we must get all the concerned journals and reports, read them carefully and take notes. We must manage the mills economically.

The mill premises should be clean. Goddess Lakshmi prefers only clean places. The mill should have a majestic appearance too.

To demand from us a tax of Rs 30000 now is unjust. I don't intend to pay it. If we paid the government now, other creditors would start pressing on us. Where are we to go for money?

People will admire my guts when the mill affairs are in order.

Once the affairs of the mills are brought into some kind of order, I intend meeting the governor and the viceroy about the tax. If I can't get justice from them, I am resolved to court imprisonment to expose the unjust attitude of a tyrannical government. God's will be done. It would be a good service to the country I am looking forward to the settlement of the affairs of the mills.