

## **2. Inaugural Address by His Excellency J. R. Jayewardene, *President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka***

I am very happy to open this Conference and to deliver the Inaugural Address. The Commonwealth is a body which we have the honour and privilege to be a member of. Sri Lanka has grown with the Commonwealth. It was a colony in the British Empire. It had representative institutions, became a dominion, and helped later to form the Commonwealth of Nations of which we are a distinguished and happy partner. The Commonwealth has many similar institutions. Ministers of Justice meet often. Ministers of Agriculture and Heads of State also meet. We exchange ideas, pool resources, and work for the common good.

I am proud to be the leader of a democratic country and I am proud to welcome the delegates who represent the Education Ministers in their countries. I mention democracy because when you consider education it is not only the question of teaching the young that has to be considered. Education does not belong only to the human race. Long before humans began to speak, when they were in the hunting stage, both animals and humans educated their young. Animals do it still. Parents teach their offspring how to hunt by signs, by sound, by instinctive behaviour. Man in the hunter stage of development did the same thing; for to educate, primarily, whatever words you may clothe it with, is teaching people to be able to look after themselves, to earn their living and to buy their necessities. As man stepped out from the animal stage to the human stage, as he began to live in settled communities, as he began not only to hunt but to grow his food, and as he began to speak and write in various languages, a new dimension happened in the history of the world. The ordered community in which he lived had to have rules. Discipline became important. Language gave the method of communication, and the three R's - Reading, Writing and Arithmetic - became part and parcel of education. In the sixth century B.C., which has been called the period of the adolescence of the human race, we find in India Gauthama the Buddha crystallising and co-ordinating the philosophies of the Hindu savants. We find in China, Confucius; in Persia, Zoroaster; and in Greece the great philosophers, Aristotle and Socrates and Plato. Thus began a new period of human history. Human life began to have values, when the humanities began to be encouraged, when family life became part and parcel of human existence. It is from the teaching of the Greek philosophers that western civilisation developed, and in this mainstream of civilisation Sri Lanka had its beginning. In the sixth century B.C. the Sinhala people founded the Sinhala race in this small island. There were monasteries which taught the Buddha doctrine. There were monasteries in India which had similar purposes and we still find their remains in Taxila and Nalanda.

This system developed and other nations began to take an interest in our country. The Roman galleons came to our harbours and left behind some of their goods and coins. We had ambassadors in the Court of Rome in the time of Claudius Caesar, and in Pliny's letters we find reference to them when he refers to the eruptions of Vesuvius. We had Arabs visiting our land; Sindbad the sailor and Ibn Batuta. We had Marco Polo coming here. But once the Western powers discovered the route to India

around the Cape of Good Hope, they came here not with peaceful intentions but with other ideas.

The Portuguese landed in Sri Lanka in 1503. Then came the Dutch, then the English. In 1815 the whole country came under the domain of foreign rule. During those 400 years, and especially during the last 100 years, the civilisation we had built up was almost destroyed. Our language was put into a corner, our religious institutions almost disappeared. However, great patriots revived our culture and civilisation, and ultimately in 1947/48 we regained our freedom.

During the latter period of British rule, schools were developed - two types of schools. There were English schools teaching English in the main towns where the parents who could afford it sent their children to study through the medium of English. But 90 per cent of the schools taught in Sinhala and Tamil and their pupils became village teachers or village doctors, Ayurvedic physicians or notaries in the villages. The sons of the rich went to the fee-paying schools, learnt the English language and became lawyers, doctors, and clerks in government institutions. That was the purpose of education in those days.

In 1931, we obtained universal franchise, and for the first time we elected ministers though we were not a free country. One of them, Dr. C. W. W. Kannangara, and several others appointed a committee which looked into our educational structure. I became a member in 1943, and in 1945 we adopted revolutionary proposals. We decided that the media of instruction should be the mother tongue: Sinhala for Sinhalese pupils, Tamil for Tamil pupils, with English as an extra language. We decided that there should be free education. We decided that opportunities should be provided not only for primary but for secondary education and higher education wherever possible. The system of education which we see now has developed since 1945. There have been many changes off and on - the age of admission to schools has been changed, the curriculum has been altered, examinations have been changed by name and by subject, universities have undergone various changes. There is nothing static or fixed in education.

Many of the changes have been caused by the need to respond to our economic surroundings. What is good for the economy of Britain does not suit the economy of Sri Lanka and thus the education of Sri Lanka. Today we have an economy where 40 per cent of our people live below an income level of Rs. 300 a month, almost on the borderline of starvation. We have 1½ million unemployed youth. We have 200,000 leaving our schools every year with little chance of employment. Therefore, one of the main purposes of our Government has been to activate our economic structure so that people who leave schools and universities may be able to find employment as quickly as possible. About 70 per cent of our students leave school at the age of 14 plus because they cannot afford it. That is why I said that education must be geared to the economy that surrounds it, that is to its environment. Today we have a low level of income. We have a low death-rate. We have an economy that is gradually coming out of its slumber. We have, on the other hand, a high birth-rate, and a high level of literacy - 70 to 75 per cent.

Therefore, as I said at the very beginning, education is mainly for giving opportunities to find employment. However great you may be as a scientist, academician, author or poet, without the means of existence you cannot go far. I am reminded of Samuel Johnson waiting for the crumbs that fell from the table of a distinguished lord so that

he could go back and write his great literary works. One should read what he said about that lord, about the letter he wrote to that lord because he was neglected. Income is vital if a man and his family are to exist. Education therefore - whatever theory you may have - is primarily directed to employment opportunities. Apart from that, I know that the humanities are important. Today, a man can live by writing poetry; he can live by painting; he can live by many other professions dealing with culture, art and civilisation. Education has stepped into those fields. There are schools with art classes, agricultural classes, literary classes, giving everybody an opportunity to find a way of living by the arts so that they can practice and be perfect.

We have in addition to teach our people discipline, for no democracy can exist without discipline; discipline among those who have been chosen to rule their country, among those officials who carry out the policies of the Government, both high and low in every sphere of life. No ordered community, no civilised people, can progress unless there is discipline: that is the foundation of all democracy. Ladies and gentlemen, in this little land, 25,000 square miles in extent, a microcosm of a civilised democracy, we are trying to attune our education to that environment. May I hope that, as I have always stressed, not only this Commonwealth but all peoples will seek to attain the Parliament of Man and the Federation of the World.