

EDUCATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*

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Education has been perceived widely to have played an important role in the social changes that took place in Sri Lanka in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its centrality in development issues is reflected in the 'education bashing' that surfaces at every national crisis as in 1971 and in the current situation. In the wider context of changes in economically developing countries in the last five decades, Sri Lanka's educational development has been unique in the South Asian Region.

Sri Lanka's experience is interesting also in the light of theories that relate to education and social change. In the polarization between 'developed' and 'developing' countries in the post-war years in the nineteen fifties, education was prioritized as a major agent of development. Development theories that have sought to explain changes in economically developing societies have used models of societal development drawn from several 'disciplines' such as from sociology (Parsons, 1971), social psychology (Mc Clelland, 1953), and economics (Rostow, 1960). Education has been claimed to be a key factor in modernization in so-called traditional societies, the modernizing norm being western society (Inkeles and Smith, 1974). Human capital theorists have underscored the contribution of education to economic growth through the development of human resources (Schultz, 1963, Denison, 1967). The crucial role of education has been recognized in promoting social stability, stratification, equalization and socio-economic mobility (Turner, 1958; Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980), and more critically, in reproducing and legitimating social inequalities (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

This paper examines the changes that have taken place in education policy and development in the last five decades in Sri Lanka in the context of a changing scenario and dependent development since political independence. It is contended that education promotes socio-economic development and change in some degree, as well as reproduces socio-economic inequalities through its selective and legitimating functions, and that it is ineffective per se in achieving economic growth and radical social change in view of its vulnerability to the impact of external structural factors. This analysis will therefore attempt to explore the configuration of forces within which education has operated in relation to socio-economic development, such as perceptions of the role of education on the part of local policy-makers and pressure groups, the relative influence of imported development 'models', structural constraints in the economic, social and political environment and the internal dynamics of the education system, in order to determine the contribution of education to the direction and extent of development and change.

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The Colonial Legacy

Major determinants of education in ex-colonial societies have been colonization and decolonization. In Sri Lanka, the genesis of the relationship between education and socio-economic development is rooted in the colonial experience.

The modern education system was fashioned by the British colonial administration in the nineteenth century as an agent of political socialization and social control. Metropolitan educational institutions that reflected cultural imperialism, British social class bias and selectivity in education were replicated in order to train personnel to assist in the development of the infrastructure of the modern state, and to create a social elite that would be purveyors of the colonial culture and upholders of a stable social order. The Christian control of education in a predominantly non-Christian country was a mechanism that enabled the allies of the colonial administration, the missionaries, to disseminate Christianity and Western culture as an agent, again, of social control. The search for new materials, markets and investment fields on the part of the administration stimulated the emergence of a colonial economy that was dependent on the export-oriented plantation agriculture sector developed with British personnel and immigrant Indian labour and made, therefore, few demands on local skills and labour.

Colonial policies thus created the conditions in which education was to function in the post-colonial environment. The consequences of uneven socio-economic development, focus on the plantation sector and neglect of domestic agriculture, the marginalization of the rural population, the absence of industrialization, and cultural colonization were inequalities which the colonial education system in turn reinforced. The entrepreneur and professional elite and the middle class from English medium schools modelled on British schools and the large and impoverished masses of the population educated in elementary 'vernacular' or local language schools lived in disparate and unequal cultural and economic worlds which even the Buddhist and Hindu revival of the late nineteenth century could not bridge. Regional disparities, and particularly the concentration of education facilities in the south-west and northern sectors of the island, resulted in ethnic and religious imbalances in educational participation. The economic demand for the products of English academic schools ensured the failure of vocational education.

English education and its apex, the examinations of British universities, and the Medical and Law Colleges of the late nineteenth century and the University College established towards the end of direct colonial rule in 1921, operated in this situation as agents of socio-economic mobility. The attempt by the British administration to restrict English education to a 'manageable' elite was thwarted, however, by the social demand for English academic education generated by colonial policy.

Social Forces and Educational Expansion

Inasmuch as colonial education was an instrument of colonial policy, the momentum for change in education policy came with the introduction of universal franchise and semi-representative government in 1931 and the response of local policy makers to emerging social needs in the early years of decolonization. The members of the national elite who agitated for change in the last three decades of colonial rule spearheaded these changes in response also to pressures from the disadvantaged 'vernacular' educated majority. The conflict between this section of the elite and the increasingly articulate majority on the one hand, and privileged segments of the population nurtured by colonial policy on the other hand, dominated the educational and the national scene for two decades. In more recent times, class and ethnic issues have underpinned educational development and ethnic conflicts have been exacerbated by education policies. The effects of the swing of the political pendulum between the two major political parties since independence have been compounded, therefore, by the socio-cultural pressures surfacing from the post-colonial environment and macro economic forces from within and outside the country.

In the early years, in the nineteen thirties and forties, the education decision makers in the State Council used education policy consciously to reduce the socio-economic inequalities created by the colonial education system. The new Education Ordinance (Education Ordinance No. 31, 1939) transferred power from the colonial bureaucracy and denominational interests to the legislature. Central Schools opened between 1940 and 1947 island wide in rural locations, provided access to secondary education beyond the narrow urban limits to which it had been hitherto confined. A scheme of twenty scholarships to each Central School, with residence facilities, to bright boys and, for the first time, girls from village primary schools extended educational opportunity and offered a 'ladder' to secondary and higher education and remunerative employment. The University of Ceylon established in 1942 with the amalgamation of the Medical and University Colleges provided a local apex to the education system, albeit an elitist superstructure.

The recommendations of the Kannangara Report (Special Committee, 1943), made a frontal attack on colonial policies in determining future policy directions. The policy of free primary, secondary and tertiary, including university, education recommended by the Committee and implemented from 1945 was based on two policies which have remained ever since the core of public expectations of education:

- (a) "every individual must have equal opportunity so that, provided he has the necessary innate ability, he can lift himself from the humblest to the highest position in the social, economic and political life of the nation",
- (b) "education in a democratic society should be free at all stages". (Special Committee, 1943)

Education was thus considered to be a fundamental birthright and an agent of socio-economic mobility. Free education was a component of a welfare package which also included free health services, food subsidies, mid day meals to needy children and scholarships which aimed at distributive justice and equity. Sri Lanka, however, also looked beyond a basic needs strategy such as that promoted by international agencies in the seventies towards a meritocratic goal of educational opportunity on the basis of aptitude at all levels of education.

Perceptions at international levels of the role of education in 'modernizing' societies and in reducing the gap between developed and developing societies undoubtedly influenced policy makers. The socio-cultural imperatives that determined major education policies till the sixties came, however, from pressures to dismantle the barriers created by colonial policies, such as the differential rewards of English and 'vernacular' education and the allocation of resources that favoured Christian denominational schools. The strength of defensive interests limited changes to the introduction of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction to primary schools in 1945 and to the enforcement of a positive conscience clause in denominational schools and the teaching of religion in all schools.

In 1956 and 1960, however, resurgent Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism and the pent up frustrations and aspirations of a majority that perceived itself to have been disadvantaged for over a century brought to the political power structure policy makers committed to the removal of privilege carried over from colonial rule. Consequently the medium of instruction was changed to the mother tongue progressively in the secondary school from 1953 to 1959; two *pirivenas* or centres of religious education were elevated in 1959 to universities functioning in Sinhala to extend higher education opportunities; and the denominational system was dismantled in 1960/61.

The reversal of major colonial policies was almost complete but in the process the importance of national integration and harmony in a multi-ethnic society was overlooked. The English-local languages debate was therefore supplemented by increasingly acrimonious ethnic conflict with the passage of legislation enforcing Sinhalese as the only official language, which created in the perceptions of the Tamil minority, a new barrier of privilege in society. Divisive trends that lay dormant under colonial rule now surfaced and were aggravated as the cleavage between ethnic groups deepened.

An important consequence of distributive policies was the expansion of the education system and rise in educational expenditure from 2.7% of the GNP in 1952 to 4.6% in 1960 and to 16% of the national budget in the sixties. In the two decades following the introduction of free education, education participation rates increased and gender and urban-rural disparities declined rapidly in a country which, in common with other countries in South Asia, had a low national income and high population growth rates.

Educational statistics pertaining to these years reflect changes in the distribution of educational opportunity and concomitantly social development. The number of schools increased from 4537 in 1945 to 8937 in 1963 and 9494 in 1971, and the teaching force from 45,470 in 1953 to 81,206 in 1963. The percentage of co-educational schools increased from 77.6% in 1945 to 94.6% in 1963. The age-specific participation rate of the 5-14 age group rose from 57.1% in 1946 to 71.7% in 1953 and more slowly to 74.7% (76.7% for boys and 72.6% for girls) in 1963 (Table 1). It should be noted that in the 5-14 age group, population increased by 12.8% and school enrolment by 40.1% between 1946 and 1953, and by 53.04% and 60.4% respectively between 1953 and 1963.

Table 1a: Participation Rates in Education by Sex and Age Groups, 1963 and 1971

Age Group	1963			1971		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
5 - 11	77.6	74.6	76.2	66.8	64.7	65.8
5 - 14	76.7	72.0	74.4	66.8	63.7	65.3
15 - 19	43.3	36.6	40.0	37.1	32.9	35.0
11 - 19	56.8	48.9	53.0	49.6	44.5	57.1
20 - 24	5.3	4.0	4.6	8.1	7.0	7.4
5 - 19	67.7	62.5	65.2	58.4	54.9	56.7
5 - 24	56.2	51.3	53.8	47.6	44.0	46.0

Source : Based on Census of Ceylon, 1963 and 1971, Department of Census and Statistics.

Table 1b: Participation Rates - Urban, Rural 1981

Age	(1981)								
	Total			Urban			Rural		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
5 - 9	84.4	84.5	84.2	86.6	86.4	86.9	83.8	84.1	83.6
10 - 14	82.4	82.9	81.8	85.2	86.4	84.4	81.6	82.1	81.1
5 - 14	83.7	83.7	83.6	85.9	86.4	85.6	82.7	83.1	82.4
15 - 19	41.9	41.2	42.7	46.4	44.9	48.0	40.6	40.0	41.3
19 - 24	8.9	8.7	9.0	9.7	9.4	10.2	8.7	9.1	8.7
5 - 24	55.8	56.0	55.6	56.2	55.3	57.3	55.7	56.7	55.2

Source: Census of Ceylon 1981.

More significant is the steep rise in participation in secondary education, particularly in Grades 11 and 12 which provides access to university education, as a cumulative result of free education and changes in the medium of instruction in senior secondary grades. Enrolment in Grades 9-10 more than doubled from 69,233 in 1952 to 151,265 in 1957 and doubled again to 294,253 in 1965. The number of candidates appearing for the GCE (OL) examination increased from 52,992 in 1952 to 222,522 in 1965. The change was more dramatic in Grades 11-12 where instruction was exclusively in the English medium before 1958 - 5,342 in 1952, 6,946 in 1957, 23,000 in 1961, 34,679 in 1963 and 46,353 in 1965. The number of candidates appearing for the GCE (AL) increased from 2026 in 1956 to 31,199 in 1965 (Table 2). Participation rates of the 15-19 age groups increased from 11.1% in 1953 to 36.1% in 1963.

The pressure from secondary schools for admission to universities compelled the University of Ceylon - which had hitherto restricted admission to English medium schools and had therefore an enrolment of 902 at its inception in 1942 and 2950 in 1958 - to admit students educated in Sinhala and Tamil to its Arts faculty from 1960. Its enrolment trebled therefore from 3648 in 1960 to 10,723 in 1965 and the campuses at Peradeniya and Colombo became the Universities of Peradeniya and Colombo in 1966. The total enrolment in the University of Ceylon and in the two Pirivena Universities increased from 4039 in 1959 to 14,210 in 1965 (Table 3). As the expansion in senior secondary schools was largely in Arts streams, the percentage of students in Arts faculties of the Universities increased disproportionately from 42% of the total enrolment in 1958 to 76% in 1965.

The impact of this expansion in terms of social development can be illustrated at two levels. Male literacy rates of the population over 10 years rose from 76.5% in 1946 to 85.6% in 1963 and subsequently to 90.5% in 1981. Female literacy rates rose more steeply from 46.2% in 1946 to 67.1% in 1963 and 86.5% in 1981 and the gender gap narrowed appreciably, particularly as male and female literacy rates of the school age population reached near parity by the end of the sixties (Table 4). Rising literacy and education levels have improved the quality of life of the population and increasing female literacy and educational attainment have not only improved the situation of women but are also associated with greater utilization of health services and consequently better health indicators and declining family size, and with rising levels of female labour force participation rates.

The change in the social composition of universities from its elitist ethos in the fifties to a more egalitarian distribution of the student population is an indicator of the potential of education in accelerating social change. By 1967, the percentage of rural students had increased to 73%, those from professional and white collar families had declined from 81% in 1950 to 34% in 1967 and those from urban working class and rural peasant families had increased from 11% to 60% (Strauss, 1950; Uswatte Arachchi, 1974). The percentage of women students increased from 10.1% in 1942 at the inception

Table 2: School Enrolment (1952 - 1965)

Year	Enrolment Grades 1-8	Enrolment Grades 9-10	Enrolment Grade 11	Enrolment Grade 12	No. of candidates G.C.E. (O/L)	No. of candidates UE/ G.C.E (A/L)
1952	1,415,664	69,233	2,955	2,387	52,992	2,026
1955	1,530,500	114,900	4,500	2,900	60,052	2,096
1957	1,615,117	151,265	4,184	2,762	101,337	2,289
1959	1,933,740	191,760	9,899	6,173	114,504	3,938
1961	2,062,000	232,700	13,400	9,600	154,813	6,547
1963	2,180,552	245,457	21,185	13,494	191,698	11,542
1965	2,215,585	294,253	20,103	26,250	222,522	31,199 (A/L)

Source: Administration Report, Director of Education, Colombo.

Table 3: Student Enrolment in Universities

Year	Total	Male	Female	% Female
1942	904	813	91	10.1
1945	1065	932	133	12.5
1950	2036	1655	381	18.7
1955	2431	1781	650	26.7
1960	4723	3587	1136	24.1
1965	14,210	9631	4579	32.2
1970	11,813	6570	5243	44.4
1975	12,648	7496	5152	40.7
1980	17,494	10,544	6950	39.7
1985	18,913	10,753	8160	43.1

Source: University Council Reports, Reports of the Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara Universities, Reports of the NCHE, University of Sri Lanka and University Grants Commission.

of the University to 40.3% in 1967. As the goal of all aspiring families, the universities thus reflected a considerable degree of upward socio-economic mobility in response to education policies. It is significant that neither the social nor gender composition of universities has changed markedly since 1967 (Jayaweera, 1984) (Table 5).

A concomitant development since the fifties was the elimination of the ethnic and religious disparities in Arts faculties that had made the University of Ceylon in its early years, a mirror of the colonial elite (Table 6). It has to be remembered that the university graduates who took the route from village primary schools and Central Schools in the fifties have reached the highest levels in the professions and in administration. The slower pace of upward social mobility since the late sixties was the result of external factors over which the universities had no control. The continuing link between secondary and higher education and social mobility in an economic environment that placed a premium on the products of these institutions had implications for the underdevelopment of vocational education.

The operation of education as an agent of social mobility was circumscribed also by the socio-economic and regional disparities that have persisted as a result of the failure of development policies to improve the resources and the living conditions of all segments of the population. School facilities have been apt to be congruent with the socio-economic background of parents particularly as privileged schools continued to receive an inequitable share of resources (Jayasuriya, 1969). Poverty has kept a proportion of the school age population out of school or has contributed to their dropping out

Table 4 : Literacy by sector and sex

	Census 1946	Census 1953	Census 1963	Census 1971	CF * ¹ SE Survey 1978/79	CF * SE Survey 1981/82	Census 1981	LF & SE Survey 1985/86
All Island								
Total	62.8	69.0	76.8	78.5	86.2	85.4	86.5	84.2
Male	76.5	80.7	85.6	86.6	90.0	89.9	90.5	88.6
Female	46.2	55.5	67.1	70.9	81.9	81.1	82.8	80.0
Urban								
Total	76.2	82.6	87.7	86.2	90.7	89.7	93.3	89.1
Male	84.5	88.5	91.8	90.3	92.9	92.9	95.3	92.4
Female	65.7	74.1	82.7	81.5	88.7	89.8	91.0	86.1
Rural ²								
Total	60.1	66.4	70.1	76.2	87.8	86.0	84.5	84.6
Male	74.7	79.0	83.9	84.1	91.6	90.1	89.0	88.5
Female	43.0	52.4	63.6	67.9	83.2	82.1	79.9	80.7
Estate								
Total					65.6	64.8		59.4
Male					79.3	78.0		74.5
female					52.1	52.6		45.9

* ¹ Population 5 + years. ² Estate sector included in rural in Census.

CF & SE survey - Consumer Finances and Socio-economic survey, Central Bank of Ceylon.

LF & SE survey - Labour Finance and Socio-economic Survey, Department of Census and Statistics.

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Bank of Ceylon.

Table 5 : University Entrants by Parents' Occupation

Occupation	1950		1967	1977	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Professional and Management ..	55.5	69.5	12.0	9.9	11.3
Teaching ..	12.6	7.2	8.0	9.8	10.5
Middle level-eg electrical ..	20.3	20.3	16.0	15.3	14.3
Small farmers and Rural workers ..	6.3	1.4	31.0	31.5	27.9
Urban Workers ..	4.2	1.4	11.0	15.2	15.0
Unemployed ..	-	-	8.0	8.3	8.5
Unspecified ..	-	-	14.0	10.0	10.2
Total ..	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: (1) Murray Strauss, "Family Characteristics and Occupational Choice of University Entrants". *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. IX No. 2 April, 1951.

(2) G. Uswatte-Arachchi, "University admissions in Ceylon: their economic and social background and employment expectation" *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 8, No. 3 1974. Great Britain.

(3) Swarna Jayaweera, "Access to University Education. The Social Composition of University Entrants". *University of Colombo Review* 1984.

of the education system and has thus deprived them of access to secondary and higher education as several studies have shown (Sessional Paper 3 of 1960; Haputantri, 1979). The proportion of Grade 1 entrants in 1962 and 1974 reaching Grade 6 was 46.8% and 61.5% and that reaching Grade 11 was 4.7% and 25%. The most disadvantaged have been children and youths of South Indian origin in the plantation enclave created by the British colonial administration, where education was subordinated to economic interests and vertical and even horizontal mobility controlled by the demands of the plantation economy. Education in the context of such social and economic structural factors reinforced or even widened disparities.

Regional disparities, particularly in the provision of science education facilities in secondary schools, had their implications for social class and ethnic wise distribution of educational opportunity and for mobility. Of the total enrolment in the GCE Advanced Level classes in the country, 33.3% were in schools in Colombo district and 20.1% in schools in the Jaffna district in 1969, and 37.8% and 20.2% respectively in 1978, while only around a quarter of the population and total school enrolment lived in these two districts (Table 7). There has been, therefore, differential access to prestigious and

Table 6 a: Percentage Distribution of University Students and Population in Census Years by Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Group	1946		1953		1963		1971		1981	
	Popula- tion	Univer- sity students	Popula- tion	Univer- sity students	Popula- tion	Univer- sity students	Popula- tion	Univer- sity students	Popula- tion	Univer- sity Entrants 1983 ¹
Sinhalese	69.4	61.7	69.3	60.2	71.0	81.8	72.0	79.0	73.9	74.9
Sri Lanka Tamil	10.0	29.4	11.0	33.7	11.1	16.2	11.1	18.2	12.6	19.3
Moors and Malays	5.6	2.8	6.0	1.7	6.7	1.2	7.1	2.4	7.4	5.5
Indian Tamil ²	11.7		12.0		10.6		9.4		5.6	
Burgher	0.6	4.9	0.6	3.2	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.6	(0.2)
Others	1.7	1.2	1.0	1.2	0.2	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.2	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total No.	4,657,339	1302	8,097,895	2392	10,582,064	7816	12,689,897	12,084	14,848,346	5468

¹ Statistics relating to University entrants are given as it has not been possible to obtain recent data relating to the total University student composition.

² Indian Tamil students have not been counted separately in official data, presumably as their numbers were infinitesimal.

Source: Census Reports, University Council Reports, University Grants Commission.

Table 6b: Percentage Distribution of University Entrants by Ethnic Groups and Faculties (1969 - 1983)

Ethnic Groups	Medicine	Dent. surgery	Vet. sc.	Agri culture	Eng-ineering	Sc. & archi-ture	Arts based (inc. Law)	Total	Total No.
Sinhalese									
1969	48.9	52.4	27.7	44.7	51.7	69.7	88.4	80.6	2979
1973	58.8	51.0	87.0	46.6	73.1	73.1	91.5	83.2	2846
1977	68.0	76.0	55.2	74.5	79.5	73.0	85.8	81.1	3228
1980	75.9	70.7	72.0	74.7	67.9	72.4	82.1	78.2	3665
1983	72.8	79.3	68.2	77.4	66.4	63.5	77.5	72.9	4099
1986/87	77.9	80.0	85.01	90.7	77.8	81.03	81.4	81.5	
Tamil									
1969	48.9	38.1	47.4	66.7	48.3	27.6	7.5	15.7	491
1973	36.9	46.9	13.0	51.1	24.4	23.6	6.1	14.1	483
1977	27.8	34.0	44.8	23.5	19.1	23.1	9.2	14.6	579
1980	21.3	27.6	28.0	22.6	27.7	23.6	13.1	17.6	826
1983	22.1	19.0	29.5	18.4	28.1	23.3	15.9	19.3	1056
1986/87	15.03	17.3	12.5	7.8	16.5	18.1	9.1	11.5	
Malays & Moors									
1969	0.9	9.5	-	5.3	-	2.1	4.0	3.4	107
1973	2.3	2.1	-	2.3	1.8	2.1	2.0	2.1	70
1977	3.7	-	-	2.0	1.4	3.4	4.5	3.8	153
1980	2.2	1.7	-	2.7	3.9	3.7	4.2	3.8	179
1983	4.9	1.7	2.3	3.8	5.3	6.3	6.1	5.5	299
1986/87	4.6	2.7	2.5	1.5	5.7	5.7	8.8	6.7	
Burghers & Others									
1969	1.3	-	5.6	2.6	-	0.6	0.1	0.3	09
1973	2.0	-	-	-	0.7	1.2	0.4	0.6	21
1977	0.4	-	-	-	-	0.5	0.6	0.5	19
1980	0.5	-	-	-	-	0.4	0.3	0.4	18
1983	0.2	-	-	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0
1986/87	0.2	-	-	-	-	0.3	0.3	0.2	
Total									
1969	229	21	18	38	149	337	2337		3129
1973	255	49	23	88	275	487	2243		3420
1977	241	50	29	102	288	775	2494		3979
1980	403	58	25	146	476	779	2806		4688
1983	413	58	44	240	473	1184	3057		5468
1986/87	459	75	40	204	513	759	2920		4991

In 1981 the ethnic distribution of the population was Sinhalese 73.9%, Ceylon Tamils 12.6%; Moors & Malays 7.4%; Indian Tamil 5.6% Burghers 0.6%; Others 0.2%

Source: University Grants Commission.

Table 7a : Percentage Distribution of Enrolment in Arts/Science in G.C.E. (O/L) and (A/L) Classes 1969

Districts	Distribution of population %	No. of students in Sc. Streams in Gr. IX-X (G.C.E. O/L)	Distribution %	No. of students in Arts Streams Gr. IX-X (G.C.E. O/L)	Distribution %	No. of students in Sc. Streams in Gr. XI-XIII (G.C.E. A/L)	Distribution %	No. of students in Arts Streams in Gr. XI-XIII (G.C.E. A/L)	Distribution %
Colombo (N & S)	20.7	15,785	25.6	42,640	23.2	4,132	33.8	5,155	18.0
Kalutara	5.9	3,393	5.5	11,706	6.4	639	5.2	2,031	7.1
Kandy	9.8	4,684	7.6	18,019	9.8	1,098	8.9	2,902	10.1
Matale	2.4	1,203	2.0	3,789	2.1	207	1.7	547	1.9
Nuwara Eliya	3.8	1,822	3.0	5,617	3.1	69	0.6	728	2.6
Galle	6.0	4,539	7.4	15,809	8.6	1,153	9.4	3,149	11.0
Matara	4.9	2,579	4.2	11,808	6.4	414	3.4	2,502	8.7
Hambantota	2.6	1,696	2.8	3,776	2.1	119	1.0	1,083	3.8
Jaffna	5.7	10,141	16.5	8,802	4.8	2,455	20.1	986	3.5
Mannar	0.5	118	0.2	483	0.3	-	-	9	0.03
Vavuniya	0.6	303	0.5	585	0.3	-	-	45	0.2
Trincomalee	1.3	468	0.8	1,220	0.7	21	0.2	75	0.3
Batticaloa	1.9	1,404	2.4	1,533	0.9	264	2.2	94	0.32
Amparai	2.0	187	0.3	741	0.4	-	-	152	0.53
Kurunegala	8.1	3,382	5.6	14,963	8.2	762	6.2	3,343	11.7
Chilaw	2.8	1,339	2.3	6,125	3.4	50	0.4	779	2.7
Anuradhapura	2.7	1,320	2.2	4,745	2.6	137	1.1	857	3.0
Polonnaruwa	1.1	406	0.7	1,677	0.9	50	0.4	155	0.6
Bandarawela	5.0	1,477	2.4	5,317	2.9	69	0.6	430	1.5
Moneragala	1.2	263	0.4	1,291	0.7	-	-	93	0.32
Kegalle	5.9	2,679	4.4	13,721	7.5	437	3.6	2,235	7.8
Ratnapura	5.1	1,938	3.2	8,511	4.7	146	1.2	1,235	4.3
Ceylon		61,126		182,888		12,222		28,585	

economically rewarding university courses. In 1969, 73.1% of university admissions to science based university faculties were from the Colombo and Jaffna districts and this proportion was reduced to slightly less than half from the end of the seventies largely through intervention to change selection procedures (Table 8).

Table 7b : Regional Imbalances in Education Percentage Distribution - 1978

Educational Districts	Population Distribution	Student Enrolment Gr. I-XII	Student Enrolment Gr. XI-XII Science	Student Enrolment Gr. XI-XII Arts & Commerce	Univ. Admissions to Science-based Courses (1977-78)
1. Col. South	20.9	21.1	28.3	25.6	37.8
2. Homagama					
3. Col. North					
4. Minuwangoda					
5. Kalutara	5.7	5.5	5.4	6.7	4.5
6. Kandy	9.3	7.9	7.8	8.1	6.1
7. Matale	2.5	2.5	1.8	2.1	2.1
8. N'Eliya	3.5	2.6	0.9	1.3	1.2
9. Galle	5.7	6.2	6.4	8.3	4.7
10. Matara	4.6	5.1	4.8	6.9	2.5
11. Tangalle	2.7	3.1	1.8	5.1	1.4
12. Jaffna	5.6	6.3	17.5	3.4	20.2
13. Mannar	0.6	0.1	0.6	0.3	1.3
14. Vavuniya	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.4	1.3
15. Batticaloa	2.1	1.9	2.1	0.8	2.3
16. Amparai	2.2	0.9	0.3	0.7	1.1
17. Kalmunai		1.6	1.6	0.4	
18. Trincomalee	1.5	1.7	1.1	0.6	1.7
19. Kurunegale	8.1	4.3	3.9	5.6	2.9
20. Kuliyaipitiya		2.5	1.9	3.1	
21. Nikaweritiya		2.1	0.7	1.6	
22. Chilaw	3.0	3.2	1.9	2.5	1.6
23. Anuradhapura	3.1	3.8	1.0	2.5	1.2
24. Polonnaruwa	1.3	1.6	0.5	0.7	0.6
25. Bandarawela	4.9	3.1	1.8	2.4	1.5
26. Moneragala	1.6	1.6	0.4	0.7	0.6
27. Kegalle	5.2	5.2	4.9	6.9	2.1
28. Ratnapura	5.1	4.6	1.8	3.2	1.4

Source: Ministry of Education School Census and University of Sri Lanka, Senate House.

Table 8 : University Admissions by District

District	Population distribuion	1969		Population distribution	1984	
		Admission to Univer-sities (tot)	Admission to science based faculties		Admission to Univer-sities (tot)	Admission to science based faculties
Colombo	20.7	23.8	48.9	11.4	16.4	21.6
Gampaha				9.4	7.4	6.9
Kalutara	5.9	7.9	3.1	5.6	4.3	3.9
Kandy	9.8	8.2	6.5	7.6	6.1	5.8
Matale	2.4	1.8	1.3	2.7	1.6	1.6
Nuwara-Eliya	3.8	1.1	-	3.5	2.7	1.7
Galle	6.0	8.0	6.3	5.5	5.3	5.8
Matara	4.9	6.2	0.7	4.3	3.7	3.9
Hambantota	2.6	2.3	0.2	2.9	3.6	2.7
Jaffna	5.7	11.5	24.7	5.6	11.8	16.2
Mannar	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.9	0.6
Mullaitivu	-	-	-	0.5	0.7	0.3
Vavuniya	0.6	0.1	-	0.6	0.8	0.7
Trincomalee	1.3	0.9	0.1	0.7	1.6	1.3
Batticaloa	1.9	0.1	1.0	3.2	2.4	2.5
Ampara	2.0	0.2	-	2.6	3.1	2.9
Kurunegala	8.1	7.7	1.9	8.2	6.3	4.9
Chilaw/ Puttalam	2.8	1.9	0.2	3.3	3.3	2.8
Anuradhapura	2.7	1.5	0.1	4.0	4.1	3.1
Polonnaruwa	1.1	0.1	-	1.8	1.5	0.8
Bandarawela/ Badulla	5.0	1.4	0.1	4.3	4.3	3.7
Monaragala	1.2	0.2	-	1.9	1.6	0.6
Kegalle	5.9	4.3	0.7	4.6	3.0	2.9
Ratnapura	5.1	3.3	0.5	5.4	3.4	2.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Ministry of Education and University Grants Commission, Plannig and Research Division.

It has to be noted that the extension of educational opportunities that took place was in response initially to demand from those who had been excluded from educational institutions giving access to economically and socially rewarding employment, and subsequently to a self-generating social demand. The official stance at different times had contradictory norms that attempted to reconcile educational opportunity with selection and allocation to roles and employment. The British social class based education structure offered a model that attracted policy makers from upper levels in the socio-economic structure. The fact that it remained largely a theoretical model was primarily due to the strong social and cultural pressures that underpinned the demand for equality and mobility through education and to the lower priority given to economic issues till the late sixties.

The Kannangara Report first proposed the so-called diversification of secondary education through a tripartite or bifurcated structure, but free education and language policies received priority in enforcement. The proposals in the White Paper of 1950 for selection at 11 and 14 years were modified to selection at 14 years to senior secondary schools and "schools with a practical bias" in the Education Amendment Act of 1951 and selection tests were held annually from 1951 to 1956. What was reprehensible in the scheme was that there was provision for those rejected to re-enter senior secondary school on payment of fees - a clear concession to the affluent. Nor was there provision of alternative facilities for those who were rejected and had no resources to pay for senior secondary education (Jayasuriya, 1969).

The selection test was abandoned with the change of government in 1956 and egalitarianism was reflected in the recommendations of the Jayasuriya Commission (Sessional Papers, National Education Commission, 1960, 1961) and the White Paper (1964) for zoning of all schools and admission to four types of secondary schools without selection. In 1966, a renewed effort was made in the White Paper of 1966 to introduce a selection test at 14 years to channel students to four unequal secondary level educational institutions, only one of which was a senior secondary school. The furore created by a proposal that was seen to allocate the economically disadvantaged to lower levels of the employment structure caused its withdrawal and the abortive Bill of 1967 postponed selection to after Grade 10. The school system has remained theoretically 'open' since then, although very recently proposals have been made to introduce selection at 14 years (ADB, 1989).

It is interesting to note that public 'resistance' has surfaced in Sri Lanka to any strategy to deviate from free education policies and non-selective secondary education traditions even after the momentum of 'equalizing' education opportunity declined. Conflict in class and ethnic interests and between conservative and socialist perspectives have often obfuscated poverty and structural related issues in education, but have yet permitted the reduction of disparities to a degree unparalleled in the South Asian region. In 1960, Sri Lanka was among the few economically developing countries in Asia with relatively high participation rates and according to UNESCO forecasts, was projected

to universalize primary education by 1980. Socio-economic constraints, however, have prevented the achievement of this goal even in 1990.

Education and Economic development

In the late sixties the emotive and cultural issues that activated education and had been reflected even in the report of the National Education Commission receded from public attention. Equity and mobility concerns were overshadowed in the perceptions of policy makers by the economic issues that had surfaced during the decade. The stimulus for this change came from the external and internal environment - human capital theories and high unemployment rates in Sri Lanka.

In western centres of development and research, economists had 'discovered' the importance of education as an agent of economic growth (Schultz, 1963; Denison, 1967), and human capital theories dominated much of the educational thinking pertaining to economically developing societies for over two decades. Cost-benefit and rate of return analyses were purported to validate claims that human resources development or investment in education for the training of skilled manpower ensured economic growth and development, which was considered to be synonymous with a high GNP. Harbison (1973), in fact found a positive correlation between enrolment and economic growth.

Man power forecasting acquired vogue leading to numerical exercises that often hardly impinged on the reality of the economies of developing societies. Human capital theories tended to overlook the non-quantifiable and non-economic aspects of education and the vulnerability of these economies to the influence of structural factors within the country and to the pressures generated by the pattern of unequal international economic relations. Education policy makers in Sri Lanka sought solutions for problems from the application of these theories and evaluated education in economic terms, irrespective of the nature of the socio-economic environment in which education functioned. Education was blamed for a situation created largely by the economy, and arts graduates, for instance, were dispensed with as 'human resources' because the economy lacked the capacity to absorb them. This adoption of exogenous norms and concepts illustrates the dependency relationship of the policy-making elite in the centre-periphery relations underscored in dependency theories (Frank, 1971).

The reality in Sri Lanka was that while a surplus budget at independence and the Korean War boom had concealed the structural weakness of the economy, a confluence of forces from the fifties created an economic and unemployment crisis of great magnitude by the end of the sixties. In brief, the colonial economy had not undergone structural changes, the prices of export commodities on which the economy depended declined and the terms of trade deteriorated steadily from the late fifties.

Meanwhile, malaria control and health policies had reduced the death rate from 20.3/1000 in 1946 to 14.3/1000 in 1947 and 8/1000 in 1960 while the birth rate remained around 30 to 35/1000 resulting in high annual population growth rates that began to

decline only at the end of the sixties - 2.8% between 1946 and 1953, 2.7% between 1953 and 1963, and 2.2% between 1963 and 1971. Economic growth rates (GDP) therefore declined from 4.6% between 1959 and 1968 to 2.9% between 1968 and 1975. While the labour force increased by 2.7% to 3% from the sixties, employment opportunities grew at less than 2%. The economy could not therefore absorb the output of the expanding education system which swamped the labour market from the mid sixties.

The imbalance between the total supply of and demand for labour raised unemployment rates from 10.5% in 1959 (ILO, 1959) to 14% in 1969 (Labour Force and Socio-economic Survey 1969/70), and to 19.9% in 1975 (Land and Labour Utilization Survey, 1975). The most vulnerable group were the youth between 15 and 24 years, the entrants to the labour market - who formed 82.7% of the unemployed in 1969. With equal access to education, relatively higher female participation rates in secondary education and misperceptions of women as secondary or supplementary earners, the unemployment rates of women has been double that of men since the late sixties and the majority of unemployed graduates have been women (Jayaweera, 1985). Structural unemployment was caused largely by the incentive and reward structure and wide differentials in remuneration which channelled educated youth in search of income, stability and prestige to saturated sectors in the labour market.

A sluggish economy rather than education therefore created unemployment. Education raised aspirations which were in reality determined by the incentive structure. There is in fact a dual relationship between education and employment in Sri Lanka. Education provides access to the most remunerative and prestigious employment and the median income of those in the labour force with high education is well above those with secondary education (Consumer Finances and Socio-economic Survey 1973, 1978/79, 1981/82). At the same time the higher the level of educational attainment in the school system, the more difficult it appears to be to obtain employment as the unemployment rates of those with O/L and A/L qualifications in Table 9 indicates. The bulk of the unemployed however, are secondary school and primary school drop-outs and there is evidence that O/L qualified youth have taken to diverse forms of employment (Gunatileke, 1988).

Even the youth insurgency in 1971 was caused not merely by unemployment as assumed, but also by the depressed rural economy, political patronage and the alienation of Sinhala educated youth from a system in which the urban English educated still command the heights of the social and employment structure, forming an almost impenetrable barrier to socio-economic mobility. The university which had been an effective agent of mobility ceased to perform this function smoothly with the freezing of university admissions in the seventies, graduate unemployment and the absence of alternative opportunities of advancement.

Education policy makers and others in decision making positions have tended to ignore the reality of the Sri Lankan situation and have been influenced by human capital

Table 9: Unemployed Population and Education (As a Percentage of the Labour Force)

Level of Education		1973	1978/79	1981/82		
				Total	Male	Female
Non-schooled (illiterate)	..	8.4	3.5	2.4	2.6	2.6
Non-schooled (literate)	..	6.8	2.8	1.9	2.4	-
Primary Education	..	14.1	6.6	4.8	3.8	7.8
Incomplete Secondary education	..	37.1	21.3	14.6	9.6	33.5
G.C.E. (O/L)	..	47.4	27.6	24.5	14.5	42.0
G.C.E. (A/L)	..	44.4	36.5	34.8	22.0	52.2
Undergraduate	..	-	50.0	41.2	42.9	40.0
University degree	..	16.2	5.3	9.7	8.1	12.1
Others	..	-	4.5	-	-	-
Total	..	24.0	14.8	11.7	7.8	21.3

Source: Consumer Finances and Socio-economic Survey, Central Bank of Ceylon 1973, 1978/79, 1981/82.

theories in a country in which manpower surveys and cost-benefit analyses tend to be unrealistic. Official policy statements began to reflect concern regarding the relationship between education and employment after 1965. The 1966 White Paper stated that education was not a 'social service' but an 'essential investment in human resources' and suggested reducing numbers proceeding to senior secondary education. The need to change priorities to meet the 'critical manpower requirements of the country' (Planning Committee Report, 1967) and 'the new concept of education as an important factor in socio-economic policy' (Ministry of Education, 1965) were emphasized at policy making levels. The Seers Report popularized the concept of 'mismatch' between education and employment and oversupply of education in a country in which less than 2% received post-secondary education (ILO, 1971).

The Five Year Plan (1972-77), prepared soon after the youth insurgency of 1971, blamed the education system for the 1971 insurgency and prioritized education as 'an investment in human resources which will contribute to the productivity of the economic system'. The Medium Term Programme of the Ministry of Education (1973-77) proposed to give priority to 'orienting general education to accelerating socio-economic growth and achieving better fit between education and the needs of the country'. While vocational institutions such as technical and agricultural schools did not expand to meet emerging needs, efforts were made in the seventies to eliminate the 'mismatch' between education and employment by restructuring the curriculum of general secondary and university education.

It is apt, however, to be forgotten in crisis situations that in Sri Lanka since the forties efforts to adjust the curriculum to specific employment needs have failed to offer a viable alternative to the general curriculum which is widely perceived to be the avenue to prestigious employment. The Central Schools, for instance, were expected to develop a strong practical bias to meet local needs. Instead they became effective agents of socio-economic mobility by conforming to the model of urban English schools. The crafts introduced in secondary schools from the fifties received second class status in a society which rewarded craftsmen poorly and only around 2% of the candidates at the GCE (O/L) Examination from the sixties offered craft subjects.

Inevitably in the seventies the most ambitious attempt to 'vocalize' general education by introducing compulsory pre-vocational subjects, which would equip school leavers and drop-outs at least for labour intensive and small scale industries and for self employment, suffered eclipse. It is apparent that resource constraints affected the quality of these programmes and created inequalities that threatened to reinforce socio-economic disparities while the economy failed to absorb the output of the programmes in work that generated income, stability and upward mobility.

The experience in the seventies in restructuring the university arts courses illustrates even more vividly the inability of the education system to solve the unemployment problem. In 1971, 51% of the arts students were enrolled in specific job-oriented courses such as Estate Management and Valuation, Public Finance and Taxation and Development Studies, organized with the blessings of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. In 1974, the Ministry informed the University that there were no funds to provide employment for these graduates (Dias, 1976; Bastiampillai, 1983). The study of unemployed women graduates of 1972-77 by the Sri Lanka Federation of University Women (1979/80) found that 50% of the graduates with a general arts degree and only 25% of graduates in Development Studies had jobs. These Development Studies graduates were employed as teachers and clerks after pursuing a course of studies that was purported to be a viable alternative to the arts degree. The Marga Institute study of a sample of unemployed graduates of 1974-77 found that the highest number of 'special degree' graduates unemployed were those who had enrolled in the job-oriented courses.

It is evident that manpower projections contributed to training graduates for jobs that did not exist without equipping them to adjust to many jobs. The roots of graduate unemployment are, therefore, seen to be the inability of the economy to absorb graduates rather than the education system and its curriculum. It is interesting to note also that unemployment rates vary for individuals who have the same sort of education, but come from different social classes. The school curriculum therefore has not been an effective instrument to promote economic development without the support of other factors in the economy and in society. The Sri Lanka experience substantiates the findings of studies in other developing countries. Foster's studies in Ghana (1965) and Psacharopoulos' in Colombia and Tanzania (1988), have highlighted the 'vocational

fallacy in education' or the futility of changing the curriculum of the general education system to meet anticipated employment needs.

Recent trends in educational opportunity, employment and social conflict

Education appears to have contributed less to socio-economic development than in the earlier years. The thrust towards social equity through education has received less priority in the preoccupation with economic growth. Both within and outside Sri Lanka there has been disillusionment with the consequences of the 'great expectations' of the fifties and sixties. The 'basic needs' strategy sponsored by international agencies since 1974 and 'diploma disease' critique appear to limit the purposes of education in economically developing societies to the satisfaction of minimal needs while in the industrial world development is 'open-ended', irrespective of crises that surface in all countries. Most human capital theorists have not changed their perspectives but the new sociologists of education and development critics have focused attention on the role of education as an agent of reproduction and legitimation of inequalities in a context in which macro structures including the power structure determine education and its outcomes.

In Sri Lanka a massive exercise in democratizing education through the curriculum was undertaken in the seventies with partial success in terms of equity. In the eighties, however, educational opportunity has tended to be a non-issue. One of the State Directives of Policy in the 1978 Constitution is "the complete eradication of illiteracy and the assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels" [Art 27 (2)]. Free textbooks (Grades 1-10) have been distributed since 1980, Mahapola scholarships are provided for higher education, and free mid-day meals were introduced in 1989.

Nevertheless, the extension of educational opportunity was not a concern that was identified in the White Paper of 1981. Structural adjustment policies have reduced welfare-oriented subsidies since 1979 and educational expenditure reached the low level of around 2% of the GNP and 6.8% of the Budget. Resource constraints have been responsible for the poor quality of education, particularly in the schools in which disadvantaged children are concentrated (Baker, 1988). UNESCO has popularized the concept of non-formal education (Faure et al, 1971), but in the total context of education opportunity, non-formal education tends to be relegated to the disadvantaged and to second class status.

With global recession and inflation, living costs have spiralled and income disparities have widened, accounting perhaps for the 'mild reversal' in literacy and participation rates reported in recent surveys (Consumer Finances and Socio-economic Survey 1981/82; NATE study 1989/90), and for the incidence of dropping out in pockets of poverty (UNICEF and Ministry of Education, 1984). School enrolment has increased at a slower rate than population growth. Around 8% of the school entry age population

have never gone to school, and programmes for out-of-school children have received very low priority. Sri Lanka's performance in 'education for all', strategies has been lower than that of several other Asian countries, contrary to the expectations of the sixties. Congruence between social class, educational opportunity, school facilities and educational performance is as apparent today as it has been at any time in the last fifty years (Rupasinghe, 1986).

Mechanisms to reduce inequalities and to promote socio-economic mobility have taken new forms with quotas for admission to universities in order to compensate students in educationally disadvantaged districts for the deficiencies in their schools and home environment. What was intended to be a temporary mechanism has been continued for two decades without any commensurate efforts to reduce district-wise inequalities by significantly improving education facilities. The Central Schools that functioned earlier as agents of mobility have been impoverished through neglect. Quotas have not solved the problem of intra district disparities and have in fact limited higher education opportunity to a few schools in each district. The lack of viable and alternative tertiary level vocational-oriented institutions have intensified competition at university entrance and further limited mobility.

Admission quotas have been utilized also as interventions to reduce ethnic imbalances in prestigious science-based faculties in Universities. The social costs of this measure have been staggering, creating tensions and frustrations in advantaged districts such as Colombo and Jaffna, jettisoning national harmony, and causing ethnic unrest that erupted into open revolt led by youth who perceived this system of selection and allocation in higher education as a denial of educational opportunity and justice.

With the liberalization of the economy, unemployment was expected to decline rapidly. The initial absorption of the work force into labour intensive lead projects such as the Accelerated Mahaweli Programme, the Free Trade Zone and Housing reduced unemployment to 11.7% in 1981. With the declining momentum of such projects and resource constraints, total employment growth between 1981 and 1987 is reported to have been 74,000 per year, while 125,000 enter the labour force each year (Sirisena, 1988). Unemployment has therefore increased to 18.6% in 1986 and was 14% in 1990. It does not appear that education has had a significant role in the economy or in employment. Social conflict, youth unrest and violence in the south has been associated with education and employment despite the fact that as in 1971, this response has been to a total environment of privilege, political patronage and frustration. As in the seventies, restructuring the education system is seen as a major solution to the problems of unemployment and unrest, despite the unsuccessful experience in the seventies of changing education without transforming economic and social structures.

Conclusion and Issues

In retrospect, education has been an integral component of the development process. It has in the last five decades promoted change and social mobility, in response to both pressures generated by inequalities created by the colonial education system and to concepts of equity and progress. Socio-economic, gender, ethnic and religious disparities were reduced to a greater extent than in other South Asian countries and social mobility was promoted markedly till the sixties and more slowly subsequently, through mechanisms such as free education, change in the medium of instruction and extension of secondary and higher education opportunities. Primary education has benefited the poorest 40% of the population (Alailima, 1984). Higher education has led to high level employment and status.

It is clear from the overview of changes, however, that the provision of educational opportunity was controlled and mobility restricted by macro structural factors. Education was also used to reproduce the social structure and the social relations of production that favoured the political and social elite to which policy makers and administrators belonged.

Consequently, slow economic development and resource constraints affected the quality of educational provision, the quantum of university places and the employment prospects of the output of the education system. Poverty limited the utilization of available educational opportunities so that Sri Lanka has not yet universalized even primary education. The distribution of resources was determined by the power structure. Although attempts at selection that were likely to discriminate against disadvantaged segments of the population were aborted, allocation of resources favoured the more developed areas and prestigious schools. The inequitable distribution of school facilities led to the expansion of a poor education for the masses. Failure to recognize the multi-ethnic composition of Sri Lankan society led to social disintegration. Education has therefore reproduced socio-economic inequalities and hastened social conflict rather than promoted radical social change.

Sri Lanka's experience also indicates that investment in education does not necessarily ensure economic development as assumed by proponents of human capital theories. Structural weaknesses in the economy, global economic pressures and population dynamics have resulted in slow economic growth. The labour absorptive capacity of the economy has determined employment levels and the incentive structure and wage differentials have conditioned vocational aspirations. In this context vocational education has been the weakest sector in the education system, selection mechanisms have been rejected by social pressures for a general education leading to higher education and efforts to introduce curriculum changes in schools and universities to meet specific employment needs have tended to exacerbate rather than reduce unemployment.

Educational opportunity was extended and mobility promoted through political commitment in the immediate post-colonial years and social, cultural and sub-national pressures in an emergent society. Despite the macro economic and social framework, the internal dynamics of education operated, escalating social demand for education in the context of high levels of unemployment. National harmony and economic development were adversely affected by the lack of such purposeful and endogenous conceptualization of priorities.

It appears therefore that education is necessary for social change but is inadequate to achieve it, and that education can accelerate or delay change but cannot per se transform the economy or society.

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