

Conscience clause For Indians  
in Indian Education code.  
A reply to certain criticism.

# **A CONSCIENCE CLAUSE FOR INDIANS**

IN

INDIAN EDUCATION CODES

**A REPLY TO CERTAIN CRITICISMS**



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## NOTE

My original pamphlet on this subject has evoked a certain amount of criticism, which I gratefully acknowledge to have been helpful. *The Indian Social Reformer* in particular has examined my arguments with its usual vigour and dignity, but not, it seems to me, with its usual breadth of view or regard for basic principles. The Rev. Dr. Miller, the greatest living authority on South Indian education, has also done me the honour of answering me in a pamphlet of his own published by the Christian Literature Society for India. It shows on every page the large tolerance and the catholicity of outlook which have made him so shining an example to controversialists as well as to teachers of religion. I have endeavoured in this pamphlet to meet the important criticisms that have been made. Little, however, is new, and I have not repeated much from my original pamphlet. To understand the position fully, it will be necessary to read the two pamphlets together.

V. S. SRINIVASAN.

# A CONSCIENCE CLAUSE FOR INDIANS

## IN INDIAN EDUCATION CODES

### A Reply to Certain Criticisms

Every controversy inevitably tends to widen out as it proceeds. Large issues arise from it and seem to demand a settlement, although they may not be strictly relevant to the point in dispute. The disputants label each other somewhat gratuitously, thinking that to do so is to silence the adversary effectively. Whether I am an advocate of pure secular education or approve of religious instruction being imparted in schools and colleges is not a question that needs to be determined in appraising my arguments in favour of a conscience clause in the Indian system of education. Many who hold that sound education must be based on religion are stout champions of a conscience clause, and one could name amongst these several ardent Christian missionaries engaged in the work of dispelling the ignorance of the Indian people and bringing Christ into their lives.\*

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\* The Lord Bishop of Madras, writing on this subject in the *Madras Diocesan Magazine* for December 1915, remarks that he does not know how some religious bodies reconcile the position they take up in England with that which they take up in India, and proceeds: "If the question of the conscience clause is pressed by Indian politicians, the Government of India will have to give way to the demand."

The Rev. Bernard Lucas in a book entitled 'Our Task in India' has the following passages: "It is a standing reproach to Christianity that while in European schools in India parents have the right to send or withhold their children from religious teaching of which they do not approve, Hindu parents are deprived of any such just or reasonable provision."

"The time has surely come when we should recognise that to compel people to receive religious instruction is the surest way to prejudice the mind against its reception."

The pure secularist cannot make much headway in India at present. He must console himself with the reflection that his principle receives vindication so far as institutions under public management are concerned. Recognised and aided institutions, which form the bulk of the Indian system, are free to give instruction in whatever religion they like and to give it compulsorily without any interference from the State. The secularist must be content to safeguard, if he can, the rights of parental conscience—in other words, to get this freedom of the manager to give religious instruction tempered by recognition of the freedom of the parent to withdraw his child from it on conscientious grounds. His propaganda in its fullness has no chance when a Hindu University has just received statutory recognition and a Moslem University is on the eve of incorporation.

The discussion does not gain in clearness by another issue that has been opened up, namely, the general superiority in respect of moral character of the scholars in missionary schools over those that have received only secular education. I do not believe in the existence of any such superiority. Those see it who wish to see it. The claim that instruction in the Bible evolves a higher type of character in the young has always been advanced by friends of missionary education. If the claim were allowed, it would justify the fullest possible support being given to this class of institutions. Few impartial and competent observers, however, will allow it. At one time it was pressed with such vigour and earnestness that both Government and the public were alarmed and put to the necessity of defending the few State colleges and schools then in existence. A former Maharajah of Travancore, whose ripe culture and eminent statesmanship are still remembered, was dragged into the lists and wrote, 'I do not comprehend the truth of the remark that the education at present given in

Government schools and colleges has reared a race of atheists. Surely it has been powerfully instrumental in sweeping away the dross and scum of every religion. Good and sound secular education can never harm this religious instinct; but on the other hand, it makes a man better fitted to think correctly and to seek the truth diligently. There is no dearth of religious teaching in India. It can be had for the asking and often without the asking. I can with confidence affirm that there is an honest yearning in the minds of most educated natives after a religion. They have all the materials before them, and they may be left to make their choice. The question whether the graduates of the Madras Christian College have turned out better men and better citizens than those, for example, of the Presidency College is insoluble. It is an idle speculation and will only befog our discussion of the need of a conscience clause.

The popular bias in favour of religious education is turned to illegitimate account when it is urged to defend the indoctrination of Hindu and Muhammadan youths in Christianity. If Hindu and Muhammadan parents desire their children to be brought up in the practices and principles of religion, do these desire them to be brought up in the practices and principles of their own religions or in those of Christianity? The blessings of one's ancestral faith cannot be claimed on behalf of an alien faith taught under compulsion. The desire to have religious instruction as part of the training in our educational institutions could only be satisfactorily fulfilled if every boy were taught the fundamentals of *his* religion. This is what is done in institutions managed by the Theosophical Educational Trust and what certain Local Governments in India permit to be done in the hostels attached to their schools. The Christian missionary naturally and pardonably

feels that Christianity is universal and good for every human being. But he has no right to assume that every Hindu and Muhammadan parent thinks likewise. The teaching of Christianity is tolerated by him as a necessary condition of obtaining the secular education which he prizes so highly. It is true mission schools are crowded with non-Christian pupils, and it is true that in many cases this happens even when no fee-concessions are offered and when there are indigenous schools in the neighbourhood. Let no missionary, however, flatter himself that this preference has any connection whatever with the Christian teaching he gives. It is due entirely to other, that is, secular causes. Occasionally it is superior organization and efficiency, occasionally it is better location, occasionally it is an attractive personality. Of recent years mission schools in the districts of the Madras Presidency have lost the advantages with which they started, and in many places the indigenous schools enjoy the greater popularity and prestige. And to-day if mission schools are crowded, it is because the demand for school accommodation has outstripped the supply, and most recognised schools are filled to their utmost capacity.

What then is the attitude of non-Christian parents towards the enforced Christian prayer and teaching in mission institutions? One in a thousand, drawn to the life and teachings of Christ, may look upon it as a desirable part of his son's education. A considerable number submit to it as a necessary evil, while the rest, forming the great majority, scarcely bestow a thought on it. It is to them so much a matter of course that they do not pause to examine its nature or implications. It is therefore necessary to open their eyes to the fact that the compulsory teaching of Christianity to their children involves a humiliation from which the State may shield them, and in

fact, ought to shield them, if it is to maintain the principle of religious neutrality and follow the example of the State in England, Scotland and Ireland. Wrong cannot become right by prescription. That missions have long enjoyed an undue favour is no reason for continuing it for all time. It is idle to speculate whether, if Government had made the acceptance of the conscience clause a necessary condition when the grant-in-aid system was first introduced in India, mission bodies would have withheld their co-operation. The policy adopted at that time is liable to alteration in response to the needs of a later day. Does the Government any longer guarantee private railway companies against loss, as it used to do in the first days of railway construction in India? The price that was willingly paid for missionary education when there was hardly any other education in the land appears excessive when education is no longer the monopoly of any particular agency. A nation cannot afford, any more than an individual, to remain under perpetual tutelage. And now that the vision of a national system of education is beginning to appear before men's eyes, they may be pardoned if they ask themselves the question, 'how shall mission education be made to fit in?' For let it be clearly understood that the advocates of the conscience clause are anxious to keep missionary education in the land, not, as an extreme section of people desire, to drive it out. It appears to them that, in recognition of the immense debt that India owes to the enterprise, humanity and self-sacrifice of Christian missionaries, the people of the country should welcome the continuance of missionary educational institutions, provided only their religious scruples and their sense of national self-respect were respected. What if these religious scruples and this sense of national self-respect are newly felt? As a boy grows into the full dignity of manhood, he will repudiate and reject



many things to which he originally submitted without thought, and even his parents gradually readjust their conduct towards him. In our social polity, in the sphere of our religion and morals, reconstruction on a vast scale is silently going on. The mutual relations of caste and caste, of husband and wife, of ruler and ruled, of preceptor and pupil, the laws of the land, rituals, and in fact, all life-values are continually shifting. Shall the privileged position of the missionary teacher alone remain inviolate, proof against the changing time ?

It is a cheap taunt to fling at any innovator that he is insufferably arrogant to see evil where the world has for ages not seen it. The social and the religious reformer are peculiarly the victims of this kind of criticism. But the political and the educational reformer are nowise immune. 'If your father and grandfather have joined in the Christian prayer and learnt the Bible in mission schools, is it not unfilial on your part to consider that a like course of action violates your sense of self-respect and your conscience ? What was good for them ought to be good for you.' If there be any force in this argument, let no Hindu wife hesitate to eat the refuse of her husband's plate, let no daughter-in-law speak articulate words before her mother-in-law, let no non-Brahmin guest in Madras complain if he is made to wait for his food till all the men, women and children and even the cooks in his host's household have had their fill, and let no Indian resent any insult that he may receive from a European on railways, in office or in social intercourse.

I have been accused of inconsistency by some readers of my original pamphlet in praising the work of the missionaries in India. Others, believing me to be an enemy of all missionary effort, have charged me with insincerity in hoping that the missionary might not withdraw from the field of education if a conscience clause should be enacted. I do not plead guilty on either count. My idea of advocacy does

not preclude an admission of truth and equity in the adversary's case, or a wish for his long life and prosperity. I am not tired of paying a tribute of gratitude and admiration to the Christian missionary for his philanthropic and humanitarian work among our people. But which human agency under the sun has done good without a certain admixture of evil? And it appears to me in the highest degree improbable that a conscience clause will put an end to the efforts of missionaries in the field of education. The considerations that lead me to this opinion are set forth in my original pamphlet. But what if the improbable happened? I have been told that I must face the problem. I answer, if it happened, it would be but one of the many difficulties that India should have to overcome before she realised her destiny. Nor would it be the greatest of those difficulties.

A radical difference of view exists between the two sides to this controversy on the question of the religious neutrality of Government. The missionary case is that the present attitude of Government towards the question of religious instruction in aided schools is one of strict neutrality. We contend, on the contrary, that it is a clear violation of that principle. Mr. K. T. Telang called it "participation in the strife, and even more—in fact a rushing into the *melee*, so to say." Let us take the three great religions in the land to-day. Notwithstanding the brilliant thesis of Sir Alfred Lyall, Hinduism does not proselytise. Whatever Muhammadanism might have done in the past, it has long ceased from organized attempts at conversion, and would certainly not use the education of the young as a means of adding to its numerical strength. It is only Christian missionaries whose fervour impels them to seize every possible opportunity of propagating the Gospel. For the State to say, 'We will aid all alike, the professors of any religion may teach it compulsorily even

to children of other faiths in their schools and to call this impartiality is to play with language and trifle with fact. Not less opposed to common sense is the plea that the working of a conscience clause would necessitate on the part of departmental officers an inquiry whether religion is taught or not taught, and that this inquiry would be a violation of religious neutrality. How about England, Scotland and Ireland, where the conscience clause is in full operation in all grades of education, and where, notwithstanding the existence of an Established Church, the State holds itself neutral as regards religious instruction, or, in the words of Mr. Gladstone, 'the duty of the state is to hold itself entirely and absolutely detached from all responsibility with regard to their (of the voluntary schools) religious teaching'? The conditions being alike, what is not an inconsistency in Great Britain cannot become an inconsistency in India. Besides, would a mere inquiry as to whether religion is taught or not constitute interference with the freedom of a manager to teach religion? The words of the Despatch of 1854 which are relevant to the issue are these: 'an entire abstinence from interference with the religious instruction conveyed in the schools assisted', and 'in their periodical inspections *no notice whatsoever* should be taken by them of the religious doctrines which may be taught in any school.' These words were meant to preclude what was a great evil at the time in England, namely, denominational inspection. The officers of the State were forbidden to make inquiries as to the books used, the doctrines taught, the teachers employed and so on.\* If a conscience clause

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\* To put the matter beyond doubt, I will quote clause (c) of art. 6 of the Madras Code for European Schools which gives the conscience clause. It is found also in the Bengal Code and in the Burma Code. "The school shall be open at all times and in all its departments to the Inspector, but it shall be no part of his duties to enquire into any instruction in religious subjects given at such school, or to examine any scholar therein in religious knowledge, or in any religious subject or book."

be introduced into our Educational Code, an inspecting officer who wishes to ascertain whether it is duly worked in a school will certainly have to inquire whether religion is taught or not taught. Further than this he need not go and should not go. Will this simple inquiry constitute interference with the religious instruction conveyed or the religious doctrines which may be taught in a school? It is difficult to take this interpretation seriously. It is put forward because otherwise the missionary case has no leg to stand upon. I characterised it mildly when I called it in my original pamphlet 'an extraordinary feat of exegetical ingenuity.

It is a familiar experience for one who attacks an abuse to be told of other abuses more or less similar, as though he had no right to seek a remedy for one of them without seeking remedies for all the rest. I am taunted with having been for many years connected with schools which admit only Hindus and exclude other classes of the Indian population. It by no means follows that I applaud the principle of separate institutions for separate communities. In this world one has to live and work under conditions some of which one does not approve. In point of fact, I tried more than once, though in vain, to get non-Hindu pupils admitted into the school where I was employed. I should certainly favour the recognition of the right of all classes to the benefits of any State-aided institution. This would, of course, strike at the existence of separate schools for Europeans and Anglo-Indians, for Chiefs and Rajkumars and for Muhammadans. But because I have not taken up arms against this, how am I precluded from pleading for the conscience clause? In a school meant for Hindus the religious scruples of Muhammadan and Christian parents are not disregarded; refusal to admit cannot be construed as denial of the rights of parental conscience.

Besides, I am in favour of a conscience clause being introduced for the benefit of dissenting Hindu parents even in schools where Hinduism is taught to the pupils.

Some critics argue that, whatever the rights and wrongs of the case may be, it is inexpedient to take away a privilege long enjoyed by the followers of one religion, just as it is inexpedient for the leaders of the Hindu community to question the separate and excessive representation that has been granted to the Muhammadans in the Legislatures of the land. This would be a powerful consideration if it had any bearing on the question. It cannot be seriously contended that the introduction of a conscience clause would cause offence to the Anglo-Indian or Indian Christian community. It is not to please them that Christianity is compulsorily taught to Hindu and Muhammadan pupils in mission schools. There is not the smallest proof that they cherish this compulsory teaching of Christianity to others as a concession shown to them or that they would resent its prohibition as an affront to their community or their religion. Those who oppose the conscience clause are a certain section of European Protestant missionaries in India, of great influence without doubt, but not entitled by their numbers or the interests represented by them to the consideration to which one of the great communities or religions of India is entitled. This objection is a mere bogey.

It is remarkable that the Indian opponents of the conscience clause are more uncompromising than the European opponents. These latter, mindful of the liberal principles that govern their educational system at home, are willing to offer us once more the modified conscience clause which was recommended by the Hunter Commission of 1882 but dis-

allowed by the Secretary of State. This was to the effect that in localities where the only schools were Protestant mission schools, exemptions from attendance at the Bible classes should be freely granted at the request of the parents; in other places parents might save their consciences by sending their children to non-mission schools and the conscience clause would be unnecessary. Assuming, what is by no means the case, that the modified conscience clause was in an effective form, what would happen to those Hindu and Muhammadan children for whom there was no room in the non-mission schools? They would be on the same footing as those in single school areas, and must seek admission into the mission schools. But apart from such hard cases there is the right of the parent to have his child educated in any State-aided school, if he is otherwise fit for admission. Mr. Forster thus enunciated the principle underlying the conscience clause: "We wished to give every parent *the most complete power to withdraw his child from any religious education of which he might disapprove, and at the same time we desired to provide that his child should not lose the secular instruction to which he has a right and for which the rates are paid.*" Mr. Gladstone, in the same debate said: "We therefore propose a time-table conscience clause, founded upon the double principle of an entire freedom, so far as the interposition of the clause goes, in the matter of religious instruction,—although the time for that instruction must necessarily be circumscribed—and an entire freedom on the part of the parents corresponding with the freedom of the teacher to teach. We propose that a time-table conscience clause shall cover all schools whatever, receiving any description of aid, whether from rates or from the Privy Council." The compromise would grant the principle to the ear, but defeat it to the hope. The right to secular education given

in an aided school without liability to receive the religious instruction given in it must be conceded entire and unqualified, and in a form that will not leave the parent in dependence on the manager's favour or generosity. For this purpose the Irish form of the conscience clause is the best. 'No payment is made to any school unless the rule is *strictly* observed that no pupil attending is *permitted to remain in attendance* during the time of any religious instruction which the parents or guardians of such pupil *shall not have sanctioned*, and that the time for giving such religious instruction is so fixed that no pupil not remaining in attendance is excluded *directly or indirectly* from the advantages of the secular education given in the school' (The italics are ours.)

Changed circumstances change the parts that men play and the sides that they take. What an irony of fate it is which makes the friends of religious freedom in one land its enemies in another! To the student of Indian affairs however, this should be no wonder. It is a common thing for Englishmen, all but the noblest and the wisest among them, to yield to the temptations of their situation here, to deny inconvenient analogies and to forswear the most fundamental and progressive ideas of their own polity. When a proposal is made to break through the monopoly of the Indian Civil Service, we hear of nothing but British ideas of administration, British standards of progress, British principles of equality and the British tone and character of the public service. But talk of representative institutions, they are not suited to the genius of the East; of freedom of speech and of the Press, it would ruin India; of competitive examinations, they would keep down the best and bring up the worst elements in Indian society; of the State limiting its demand upon land, the poor agriculturist would drink the balance

away; of compulsory elementary instruction, it is an expensive luxury and a dangerous inroad on parental responsibility; of the separation of executive from judicial functions, it will destroy the personal influence of the Collector and impair the vigour of the administration; of Milton and Burke and Mill, they are heady potations for Indian youth; of the Habeas Corpus and a man's right to be heard in a court of law before he is deprived of his liberty, it is a mere shibboleth, we are changing it all now in England. The advocates of the conscience clause have no reason to be surprised or unduly depressed, if they are met with the reply, unspoken, it may be, but persisting behind all the spoken replies: it is all right for us and our children, whether at home or in India; but you are different, your religions are different, and we must save your children in spite of you.

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