

Home (1918) Department.
Education

Ordinary SERIES.

G.O. No. 1489

DATED 23-11-18

[Despatch Abstract.]

Elementary education.

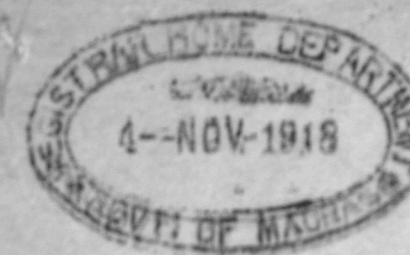
Recording letter from the Government of India forwarding copy
of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of Burma on the subject
of lapse of into illiteracy of students after leaving school.

BACK PAPERS.

G.O.	No.	Department.	Date.	G.O.	No.	Department.	Date.

FURTHER PAPERS.

G.O.	No.	Department.	Date.	G.O.	No.	Department.	Date.



No. 912

How (Ed-4) 2700 A
4-11-18

Government of India,
Department of Education.
(Education)

Simla, the 29th Oct 1918.

A copy of the undermentioned paper is forwarded to the

Government of Madras

for information, in continuation of this Department letter
no.437, dated the 29th May 1918.

*Printed off
1-2980 1098
29-8-18*

By order,

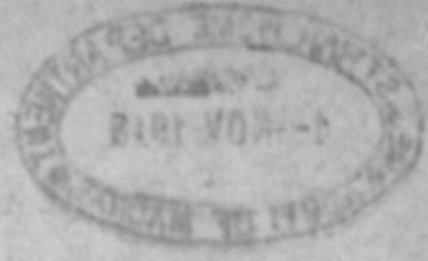
Secretary

Asstt. Secretary to the Govt. of India.

Letter from the Government of Burma no.364-5E-24, dated the
9th August 1918.

c.m.k.

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Handwritten note: "checked for transmission"

No. 364-5E.-24.

GOVERNMENT OF BURMA.
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

FROM

THE HON'BLE MR. C. M. WEBB, I.C.S.,
Secretary to the Government of Burma,

TO

THE SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA,
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

Dated Rangoon, the 9th August 1918.

SIR,

Handwritten notes in left margin: "201098" and "29-8-18" with a circled "D".

I am directed to acknowledge the receipt of Sir Edward MacLagan's letter No. 437, dated the 29th May 1918. The Government of India have not asked for a reply to this letter, but the Lieutenant-Governor would like to submit some observations upon the subject at this stage because it is one to which he has, during his Indian service, devoted considerable attention, and because he thinks that there is one important aspect of the case which does not seem to have obtained the attention which it deserves from the Government of India.

Sir Reginald Craddock, when in camp in the Central Provinces, has often tested the literacy of a large assembly of villagers in villages where there has been a primary school for perhaps 30 or 40 years. He found that very few persons were able to read and write, but that a very great number admitted that they had been under instruction at the village school but had entirely forgotten the art of reading and writing, except that a certain number of them were just able to sign their names.

2. The real reason, in the Lieutenant-Governor's opinion, why so large a number of persons forget what they learnt at school, is not any defect in their teaching at the time, but simply the fact that, after their school attendance ceases, they go back to their agricultural pursuits and never have any practice in reading or writing. In an ordinary agricultural village, a few of rather higher social status may keep up reading and writing after they leave school, as also those who belong to castes which have a hereditary calling towards reading and writing and look to make their living afterwards by employment in which literacy is essential. The majority of villagers, when they receive or send a letter, bespeak the services of school boys or of the few literate persons of the kind described that may be available in the village. It is much simpler for the cultivator to do this than to stumble painfully over an ill-written letter or to spend time in trying to compose one for himself with a hand which has practically never touched a pen for years.

It is, after all, not surprising that the cultivating and labouring classes should forget what they learnt at the village school when they were small boys of 12 or 13 years old. A great many ordinarily well-educated persons forget languages which they learnt in their childhood but have had no practice in speaking, reading or writing since. A great many of our British officers, who had mastered the Urdu script and could read and write the Persian character with reasonable facility at the time when they came out to this country, have almost entirely lost the ability to read and write Urdu; and they would certainly, if they had occasion to read or write an Urdu letter, employ someone familiar with the script to read and write for them.

3. The difference between a village in India and a village in England, for example, lies in the fact that, in any English village, the cottager will probably have the family Bible and a few books like "the Pilgrim's Progress," while in modern times the extraordinarily prolific character of the press ensures that some newspapers at all events will permeate even into the remotest village. Almost every small town has a small local paper of its own. There is always a village library of some kind, while advertisements meet the eye at every turn. There are the names over the shops, and printed matter of some kind in almost every window. So that the villager in England has constant opportunities of reading at all events himself, even if his facility of writing becomes somewhat rusty. Sir Reginald Craddock has, in the course of his service, noticed that among British soldiers in regiments there are some who must have gone through their primary courses, but yet whose writing is so ill-spelt and illegible as to be practically unintelligible. In the Indian agricultural village there are none of these aids so common in England, and there is absolutely nothing on which the villager can practise his reading and writing. He spends his time in his fields, in looking after cattle, and in village work generally. His companions are like himself, and it is easier to understand, therefore, how a large number of them must inevitably lapse into illiteracy. In the Central Provinces, efforts were begun in one or two districts to combat this tendency by instituting village libraries. The Lieutenant-Governor has no present information as to how far these experiments succeeded, or whether they have been continued or extended. There was an undoubted difficulty about providing suitable literature for these libraries. Such newspapers as might be available do not always contain wholesome matter, and the supply of suitable books for village reading in India is very much limited. Nevertheless, he thinks it is by spreading the general practice of reading and writing among villagers after they have left school, that this lapse into illiteracy can best be combated.

4. The opinions which he has formed on his Indian experience are borne out by the information given by officers who are most familiar with the Burman village and local conditions in Burma.

Thus, an officer of much experience in this subject writes:—

"I think the principal differences between conditions in Burma and India in this respect are:—

- (i) it is traditional in Burma for the ordinary villager to be able to read and write in an elementary manner, and somewhat of a reproach for him not to be able to do so;
- (ii) practically every child has a course at a monastery school and receives instruction in reading and writing;
- (iii) the Burman is a great traveller (in his own country) and his faculty of reading is kept alive by his frequent travels;
- (iv) although the Burman does not read anything in the nature of modern literature or newspapers, there is a fairly widely diffused taste for cheap volumes containing the traditional *pwé* stories and legendary and fabulous folk-lore."

An educational officer of long experience writes:—

"Burmans do retain their knowledge of reading and writing. I have invariably found that Burmese servants, durwans of bungalows in jungle places, even the bullock cartmen whom I employed on tour, were able to read and write well enough to make out bills. It is looked upon as the ordinary thing that a man should be able to read and write.

On account of his fondness for travel, the Burman tends less than the Indian to become a mere tiller of the soil, and he has, in Lower Burma at any rate, long periods of enforced leisure during which he can indulge his taste for travel. Apart from the mental stimulus afforded by travel, his knowledge of reading, if not writing, is continually called into use and not allowed to become rusty.

Again, the Burman has a fondness for reading light literature. This is shown by the annual return of books published in the province. The number and character of Burmese publications indicates a steady demand for religious works and stories from Burmese legend and the traditional *sat* or dramas performed at *pwés*. There has been a heavy slump in the latter since the war began. This is due not only to the increased cost of publication, but to greater vigilance on the part of the police who have, in late years, promptly suppressed any book described by the reviewer as unsuitable for publication. Undoubtedly a large number of books published in the past relied for their appeal to certain readers on prurient passages, and the authors of such books have been discouraged. Those classed as 'Drama' numbered 46 in 1911, 3 in 1914 and 4 in 1917. But there seems to be a steady

demand for fiction, which is met by the publication of love stories on lines similar to the old fashioned English novel of early Victorian days, but entirely Burmese in plot and characterization. The number of such stories published in the last four years were 11, 7, 11, and 10 respectively out of totals of 302, 275, 255 and 216. The maintenance of the average output, small though it is, in the face of a general decline in other classes of books, shows that there is vitality in the new product and a real demand for it. This is the more clearly seen in comparison with the decline in religious publications, which numbered 158 out of a total of 362 in 1911, 133 out of 302 in 1914 and 101 out of 216 in 1917. I believe that in England religious works were, for a long time, 'best sellers,' but the novel gradually ousted them as reading became a more common amusement for all classes and all ages. The Burman is more accessible to Western ideas than the Indian and a similar process appears to be going on in Burma. It is curious that nobody has thought of giving the Burman the *sat*, of which he is so fond and which he buys freely, in a form that would escape the ban of the Censor."

5. These remarks appear to the Lieutenant-Governor to corroborate entirely the opinions that he has formed on his Indian experience. In the Indian village people collect to hear the recitation of the Purans or the Ramayana, but they do not do any reading for themselves, and it is not until printed or written matter stares them in the face every day both at school and after they leave school that the knowledge imparted in their childhood will remain with them generally in after life. The difficulty is not to be solved merely by improving teachers or by compulsory education. Many of these boys who, as grown men, confessed to being able to do nothing more than scrawl a signature, must have read with considerable fluency when they were boys in the school classes. Naturally, as education increases and more travelling is indulged in and with the rise in the standard of comfort, the habit of reading and writing will be retained by continuously growing numbers; but the stimulus of village libraries and literature is required, if the present lapse into illiteracy, now so marked a feature of village life, is to be rapidly checked.

6. This aspect of the question has not been touched upon in the letter under reference, but the Lieutenant-Governor attaches so much importance to it that he has thought it desirable to bring these observations to the notice of the Government of India. The attention of the Divisional Boards of Education in Burma will be called to this subject; but, as the opinions herein quoted show, it appears that the progress of literacy among the Burmese has not been unsatisfactory.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

Your most obedient servant,

C. M. WEBB,

Secretary to the Government of Burma.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.—No. 365—5E.-24.

Dated Rangoon, the 9th August 1918.

Copy, with a copy of the letter referred to, is forwarded to the Director of Public Instruction, Burma, for information.

Copy, with a copy of the letter referred to, is forwarded to the President, Educational Syndicate, Burma, for information.

Copy, with a copy of the letter referred to, is forwarded to the Presidents of Divisional Boards and the Rangoon School Board, for information and any action that may be feasible.

By order,

R. G. McDOWALL,

Assistant Secretary to the Govt. of Burma.

Homel Edn) Sept
[CRO 2200A] From the Log I No 912 & 29.10.18
Subject: Lapse into illiteracy of students after leaving school

The letter forwarded by the Log I
may be sent to the D.P.J. for perusal
and recorded on its return after
circulation to H.E. the foreman.

8.11.18

MS
9/11/18

14/11/18

15/11/18

Home (Edn) No 2700

15.11.18

183329 19.11.18

Received 1480
19.11.18

may be circulated to H.E.

20.11.18 21/11/18



B. 41
C. 22/11
2/11/18

Returned with H.E.

22.11.18

Recorded order 1489 & 23.11.18

23/11/18

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