

## **How to Modernize a Society with Transportation: Colonial Ceylon in the Late 19th Century**

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### **Abstract**

In this research paper on industrial archaeology, the intent is to demonstrate how novel modern transport from Europe was established and integrated into late 19th century Ceylonese society known for its deeply rooted traditional and conservative way of life. My paper identifies issues, changes, and relevant circumstances pertaining to the integration of new transport technology that transformed society from being largely defined and governed by traditional values and norms to a modern democratic political space. The monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean ushered in British rule, following Dutch and Portuguese, colonial enterprises in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), esp. in the coastal areas. These colonizers initiated a number of economic, social, and religious changes in the society. The plantation economy introduced by the British paved a way for an industrial capitalistic economy. The era and the background, explored in this study is the transitional period of the late 19th century in the socioeconomic history of Sri Lanka. The island started moving into a new phase using the opportunities of the economic revolution. The late 19th century was the rise of a new capitalist class comprised of various castes. Internal transformations occurred in both of the caste and class systems. Even the *govigama* (prestigious caste of cultivators) sector that was at the upper layer of the Ceylonese caste was also divided hierarchically. At the same time in this colonial era, lowly coastal *karawa* (fisher folk), *durawa* (toddy tappers), and *salagama* (cinnamon peelers) castes came up challenging the *govigama*. When the motorcar arrived, it became a dominant symbol used by raising new classes, who comprised of these coastal contesting castes, to represent their new wealth along the southwest coast. Thus, modern transport units arrived and gradually helped in establishing a new society as a modern class. The field study primary surveyed historical data collected mainly from colonial documents. The colonial population imported hundreds of unique motorcar models. A unique situation was created across Ceylon as different social statues of the island embraced these new transport machines. My research into industrial archaeology examines the importation of 19th century transport vehicles and how mechanized transportation transformed caste into a class.

**Key Words:** *Industrial archaeology, Modern transport, Vehicles, Sri Lanka*

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