

THE COLEBROOKE-CAMERON REFORMS AND THE HEADMAN SYSTEM IN SRI LANKA (CEYLON)

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Radical utilitarian and liberal thinking in England re-opened somewhat forcefully a debate on colonial policy and on problems involving the relationship between the rulers and the ruled in the colonies. Utilitarian and radical concepts no doubt had an immediate relevance to the stage of economic and social development at which England had arrived towards the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless they provided a standard by which to judge policies, institutions and actions in the colonial empire. They also provided ideals towards which colonial policy, it was thought, should be directed. The criticism was mainly focussed on the maintenance of monopolistic practices and quasi feudal institutional structures, which it was assumed, were obstacles to the development of free enterprises.

The colonies attracted the attention of the radicals and utilitarians because by now they formed an important branch of British economic and political life. This is evident from the greater parliamentary interest that was shown with regard to the administration of the colonies, resulting in the appointment of many commissions and committees of inquiry on particular aspects of colonial policy or on the administration of certain colonies. Underlying this interest was the disappointment, in the words of Joseph Hume, "that colonies instead of being an addition to the strength of the country increased its weakness". The "drain" which was caused by the colonies, it was argued, was an illustration of the harmful effects of the application of erroneous policies and the maintenance of institutions which placed obstacles to the free development of the individual.¹

A few persons who could be taken as belonging to this category ventured to express opinions on problems of colonial administration in Ceylon. One of the noteworthy developments in the administration during the period 1801 to 1832, was that the judiciary was able to take a more liberal stand than the executive on several issues. Apart from a struggle for power between the Governor and the Chief Justice, which was noticeable during this period², recurring conflicts between the judiciary and the executive

1. See debate on Ceylon, 27 May 1830. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, new series*, vol. xxiv, pp. 1155—1170.

2. For an account of these conflicts see Kannangara, P. D. *The History of the Ceylon Civil Service 1802—1833*, pp. 12—26.