

## **Unsuccessful decentralization of administration and other elements that hindered Sri Lanka's rapid development**

WAS Perera<sup>1</sup>

During the first two decades after the independence, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) maintained a high degree of literacy level, which was second only to Japan in Asia, high rate of socio-economic development and a peaceful environment. The defence budget of the country then was also happened to be very low.

But due to many reasons Sri Lanka could not sustain that high degree of socio economic development or the environment due to many reasons. Many neighboring countries surpassed Sri Lanka in many aspects. In 1965 hundred Indian Rupees were equal only to eighty Sri Lankan rupees. Today the same has gone up to 250 Sri Lankan rupees. We are now experiencing a situation which is entirely different from what it had been then.

Objective of this study is to analyze improper decentralization of administration and four other elements as the major causes for such downward trend.

"Self-government in any country cannot be a success unless it is based on a system of sound and efficient local self-government; nor could the good government of the country be ensured without the closest co-operation and collaboration between the central government administration and the local authorities both urban and rural".

The truism that is contained in the above quotation was uttered even before Sri Lanka achieved independence. The quotation is from the Ceylon Sessional Paper XXI of 1945.

What took place after independence proved that the rulers did not pay much heed to what is stated above. It has been therefore considered that the main reason for the downward trend of the country's development was the unsuccessful decentralization of power and authority. The present discussion therefore is based on this notion. In addition, four other elements such as adverse political trends, terrorism, unhealthy attitude of some trade unions and selfish attitude of some NGOs have been identified as the other elements that effected Sri Lanka's development adversely.

In this presentation, I would like to address four issues. Firstly, to try to understand reasons for the persistent trend of centralization. Secondly to seek to study the effects of this trend on the evolution of a democratic polity in the country. Thirdly, steps taken by consecutive governments to address contemporary issues. Fourthly to highlight the other elements that debarred Sri Lanka from rapid development.

It is not expected to suggest remedial measures. But a brief comparison between the ancient and present ruling systems will be made.

**Key words:** Improper decentralization, Political exploitation, Patronage network, Public agitation, Unsustainable development

<sup>1</sup> Sri Lanka Administrative Service