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*Paper: Transformability*

## **Early public libraries in Sri Lanka during the British period**

Although Sri Lanka has a tradition of libraries from ancient times, with temple libraries, during the Anuradhapura period to the Kotte period, the modern development of the public library system in Sri Lanka started with the British regime. The British came to Ceylon in 1796, and gained complete control of the island by capturing the Kingdom of Kandy in 1815. The British had control and changed the social, political and economic situation of the country in many ways, during their governing period in Ceylon.

The modern library system in Sri Lanka started with the establishment of the ‘Subscription Libraries’ in principal towns of the country in the early British period, during the nineteenth century. These libraries fulfilled the information needs of the British government officers and Army officers who worked in Sri Lanka. The United Service Library (1813) and The Colombo Pettah Library (1829) were the first subscription libraries set up in Colombo by the British. As per the growing user demands, the government set up a number of subscription libraries, mainly in areas such as Central, Southern and Northern Provinces by the end of the 1880s.

The initial idea of establishing subscription libraries in Sri Lanka gradually changed during the early years of the twentieth century. The establishment of the Colombo Public Library in 1925, marked a new dawn in the public library system in Sri Lanka.

The main objective of this research is to study the history and gradual development of the public library system in Sri Lanka during the British period. Secondly, it aims to study the historical reference sources, institutions and human sources related to the history of public libraries in Sri Lanka.

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary data sources. Data were mainly collected through historical and archival information sources available in the National Archives Department, National Library, and other libraries in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords: Public Library, Subscription Library, Library History**