

# LOCAL PARTICIPATION AND PARTICIPANTS IN BRITISH COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION : THE SRI LANKAN SCENE : 1833—1900<sup>1</sup>

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To understand the nature and extent of junior partnership in the colonial administration during the period under review it is necessary to have some idea regarding changes in colonial policy as applicable to Sri Lanka, and the structure of its politics and of the administration. The Colebrooke - Cameron Commission was a landmark in colonial policy as applied to Sri Lanka. Hitherto the British had generally followed a policy which carried forward the system which they had inherited from the Dutch in the Maritime provinces and from the Kandyan Kingdom. The few changes which they made had as its main objective the stability of their political power and were changes in emphasis rather than in direction. The Colebrooke - Cameron recommendations saw an attempt to introduce a far more liberal, laissez - faire and utilitarian outlook and concepts in the administration of the colony. Most of the reform proposals of Colebrooke and Cameron were accepted at the Colonial Office, which was influenced in its decisions more by the ideological and political environment prevailing in England at the time, rather than by an adequate consideration of the conservative reactions in the colony or by an assessment of future prospects. This background as well as later changes of emphasis in colonial policy resulted in making the actual implementation of the reform proposals a half - hearted exercise rather than an enthusiastic response.

In colonies such as Sri Lanka, where there were large indigenous populations, entrenched traditional structures, and tradition bound socio-economic systems, and where large scale European colonization was not a feasibility, it was inevitable that some sharing of power with indigenous elitist groups was a necessity. Prior to 1833 this was seen in the association of the Mudaliyars and other headmen in the administration of the Maritime provinces<sup>2</sup> and with the Kandyan chiefs after the cession of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815.<sup>3</sup> By 1833,

1. During the period under review Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon. Thus wherever Ceylon occurs in quotations and footnotes it should be understood as referring to Sri Lanka. Also note that this paper leaves out the Headman system, the clerical services and Municipal Councils.
2. For further details see P. D. Kannangara, 'The Headman system in the British Administration of the Maritime Provinces of Sri Lanka', *Kalyani: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya*, Vol. one, Nos. 1 and 2, pp. 96 - 130.
3. For the role played by the Kandyan chiefs, see K. M. P. Kulasekera, *British Administration in the Kandyan Provinces of Sri Lanka, 1815 - 1833, with special reference to social change* unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1984, chapters 2 and 3.

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