

DEVELOPMENT OF SRI LANKA'S ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM - THE COLONIAL IMPACT

BY PROF. G.R. TRESSIE LEITAN*

INTRODUCTION

Spanning a period of 150 years, Sri Lanka's colonial history under British rule (1796-1948) is of special significance in the development of her administrative system. For despite subsequent constitutional and political developments - especially after independence in 1948 - Sri Lanka's administrative structures and processes have remained, in large degree, based on the foundations laid during the British colonial era.

The system which was established by the British was dictated mainly by the need for centralized administration, both for ease in tax collection as well as for purposes of consolidated rule.

Although the needs and conceptions behind administrative organization underwent change during the course of time, and the importance of a development-oriented administration with popular interaction was recognized, yet the legacy of the past, especially of British colonialism, is discernible in Sri Lanka's administration even today.

THE EARLY PERIOD 1796-1931

The maritime provinces of Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was known until 1972) was taken over by the British in 1796, but they were initially administered by the East India Company from Madras.

This was, however, not a success, and in 1802, Ceylon was constituted a Crown Colony within the British Empire.¹ All legislative, executive

* Associate Professor, Department of History and Political Science, University of Colombo..

¹ The Kandyan Provinces were annexed in 1815, so that in that year the entire country came under British rule.