

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MUNICIPAL COUNCILS IN SRI LANKA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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Introduction

Local Government in Sri Lanka, as we know it today is a modern development dating back to the latter half of the 19th century. With the introduction of Municipal Councils in 1865 to manage the affairs of the then three principal towns of Colombo, Kandy and Galle we inherited, a system of local government designed on the lines of the English model.

However the concept, and the mechanism of Local Government were not unknown or completely alien to Sri Lanka. Although it is difficult to say how ancient they were, it is evident from chronicles and the works of several writers who have done few studies in this field of study that there existed Local Government institutions in our country from about the 4th century B.C. and that functions which are now considered belonging to local government were being exercised by these institutions.¹ Archaeological evidences corroborate literary references which confirm the existence of developed and well planned cities. Hence it is believed that the idea of local people having democratic responsibility for the solution of their problems connected with local needs goes back to very ancient times.

King Pandukabhaya who established Anuradhapura as the first capital of Sri Lanka, as early as 4th century B.C. was also responsible in introducing two different local government institutions to administer the affairs of the city and the villages. After the great victory over his uncles Pandukabhaya, on the advise of Astrologers and Architects organized Anuradhapura as the capital of his kingdom. It is evident that since the time of king Pandukabhaya, Anuradhapura had been a planned city. Mahavamsa provides us with a clear picture on the planning of the city and the administrative system designed by him for the city.² In planning the city he set a part specified areas for the royals, for ykkhas who helped him, for places of worship, for parks and convalescent homes, for lying-in-homes, for cemeteries, for dwellings of foreigners, huntsmen, and chandalas, etc. Hence it is evident that urban facilities such as in modern towns had been available in Anuradhapura in the 4th century B.C.

In organising the administrative machinery for the city several officers and communities were assigned to perform different duties and services. The head of the city government was known as Nagaraguttika³ or the guardian of the city and was considered to be a very important and a high official. He

was in-charge of the government at night.⁴ This high official could be identified to be similar to the City Mayor in modern times. As a mark of gratitude for the help given at the war against the other uncles Pandukabhaya appointed his eldest uncle, Abhaya, for this high office. To keep the administrative machinery in operation he set five hundred Chandalas to the work of cleaning the town, two hundred Chandalas to the work of cleaning the sewers and hundred and fifty Chandalas he employed to bear the dead and as many Chandalas to be watches in the cemetery. He built a separate village for the cemetery workers close by the cemetery so that they could continuously carry out their duties as was expected. It could be seen therefore that the services of the city government was organized under separate departments like in the modern times and sufficient employees were appointed to perform the services regularly. Moreover it is interesting to note that the king himself was considerate and attentive for the welfare of the employees to the extent of providing them with living quarters as well.

The Mahavamsa report also has recorded that "ten years after his consecration did Pandukabhaya the ruler of Sri Lanka established village boundaries over the whole Island of Lanka."⁵ However unlike its report on the organization of the city of Anuradhapura the Mahavamsa report on the villages does not specifically say whether king Pandukabhaya introduced a new system to administer the villages or whether he regularized an existing system. It has been suggested that a local government institution known as "gamsabe" and in charge of the administration of the village affairs existed from the date at which king Pandukabhaya established village boundaries and it is believed that the purpose of establishing village boundaries was to divide and demarcate the areas of jurisdiction of numerous village corporations or Gamsabhawas spread all over the Island.⁶

Hence the existence of developed cities and well planned systems of municipal administration in Sri Lanka is evident from the time of the 4th century B.C. The successive capital cities of Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya, Yapahuwa, Kurunegala, Gampola, Senkadagala and Kotte as well had been well planned cities and administered by some sort of urban administrative system. It can also be suggested from designations like Niyam-gam and Patunagam - such as Yapapatuna that there existed few smaller towns as well. However the number of towns were few and very often they were limited only to the capital city and the principal harbours. Most of these lesser towns were administered by a local institution known as "Rata saba" an institution on which we have very little information since very little or no research has been done on them.

On the other hand the whole society was basically rural and the village as a unit played an important role in almost all the day to day activities. Accordingly "Gamsabe" or the Village Council played a prominent role as a local government institution and hence Gamsabe could be identified as the principal local government institution that existed in ancient and mediaeval Sri Lanka.

The duties and functions performed by Gamsabe was mainly rural in character. This situation is quite evident from the fact that the promotion of agriculture and maintenance of irrigation were the prime responsibilities of the Village Councils.⁶ This system of local administration was adequate for the needs of the sort of rural society that existed in ancient and mediaeval Sri Lanka. But with the vast changes that took place under the Western imperial rulers, by the middle of the 19th Century, there arose a crying need for a system of local government that would suit the needs of the day.

The modern classification of the term urban used in contrast to rural connotes certain characteristics. An urban area has a compact form, characterized by the patterns of buildings, street systems and component open spaces. Secondly, it has a dense population which is revealed by the varying spatial arrangements of residential types. Thirdly its way of life linked with commerce, business, governmental administration, and industry is different to its counterpart in the rural economy.⁷

Accordingly the society in Sri Lanka from the earliest times up to the early 19th century can mainly be described as rural. Agriculture was the main occupation of the Sinhalese from ancient times. They did not buy or sell in abundance. They provided themselves with their own food, clothing and shelter or rendered services in return for them. There was hardly any money in use and the little trade that took place was based on barter system. Communication was slow and difficult. Accumulation of wealth is evidently, found to be an essential feature of an urban society and in traditional Sri Lanka the basic structure of the social fabric and the constitution of its ethos were such that there was no inducement for individuals to exert themselves in the accumulation of wealth.⁸ The few cities that existed were mainly administrative centres and trading ports. The importance and development of them depended mainly on the changes of the capital city of the kingdom, an event that has been taking place very often up to the 16th century. Therefore there were very few towns or urban societies in the modern sense of the term and the following description by Robert Knox explains the type of Sri Lankan towns in the 17th century.

I will now add a little concerning their towns. The best are those that do belong to their idols wherein stand their Dewalas or temples. They do not care to make streets by building their houses together in rows, but each man lives by himself in his own plantation... Their towns are always placed some distance from the highways for they care not that their town should be a thorough-fare for all people but only for those that have business with them. They are not very big, in some may be forty, in some fifty houses and in some above an hundred and in some again not above eight or ten.⁹

THE CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND THE PROCESS OF URBANIZATION IN SRI LANKA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Urbanization is characterised by those factors associated with the emergence, growth, development and spread of towns and their socio civic affairs. Some of these factors influencing a concentrated pattern of settlement are tied up with the economic opportunities, civic facilities, amenities and utilities available in towns. Most of the modern towns in Sri Lanka came into existence in the 19th and 20th Centuries and urbanization in general were mainly the outcome of British policy and related activities. By the middle of the 19th Century the three main towns of Colombo, Kandy and Galle were in the process of urbanization. The common factors like administrative reforms, the growth and development of transportation, communication and plantation industry together with particular factors peculiar to these several towns led to the organization of urban areas in the modern sense of the term functioning as "service centres" and offering certain public utilities.¹⁰

Administrative Refroms.

The British Colonial Policy during the period from 1796 to 1833 was directed to consolidate their authority and to introduce British system of institutions wherever practicable to replace the medieval administrative institutions of the country. With the subjugation of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815, the experience gained during the period, and the financial problems confronted with, demanded a major reform scheme in the Island. A Commission of Inquiry was appointed and consequent to the recommendations made by the two Commissioners William Colebrooke and Charles Hay Cameron, a reform scheme affecting almost every aspect of political, economic and social spheres was implemented in 1833. The provinces of the Kandyan Kingdom was unified with the Maritime Provinces and a single and unified system of administration was introduced. The country was divided into five provinces and initial steps towards legislative and executive reforms were introduced. The medieval system of Rajakariya labour was abolished while several measures of encouraging foreigners to own land, invest on business enterprises and settle down in the Island were also introduced. These reforms were so broad based and the results of implementing them were so wide that the scheme is considered as a turning point in the history of the Island.

It is evident that these administrative and socio-economic reforms played an important role in bringing up several new towns in different parts of the country and expanding the existing ones. With the implementation of the administrative reforms several administrative centres came into existence. In each capital of the five Provinces, a Government Agent who was an English civil servant was stationed and his office, the Kachcheri was also established in addition to making the supportive staff reside in the vicinity of the centre. Likewise several government departments also stationed their provincial

officers in different provincial centres. These administrative centres not only contributed in the emergence and the development of several provincial towns such as Matara, Jaffna, Ratnapura, etc., but also to the expansion of the existing towns of Colombo, Kandy and Galle.

The influx of foreigners and foreign capital also contributed in the process of urbanization in the country. Not only in places, in and around the centres of plantation industry where the foreign capitalists resided but also in places like Nuwara-Eliya, Bandarawela, Welimada, etc., where they used to spend their holidays also had to be provided with their daily needs. Hence to cater to a foreign population who were accustomed to live in European style, these local towns had to be developed in the lines of modern European towns availing urban facilities. It is evident therefore that the reforms of 1833 based on the recommendations of the Colebrooke Gameron Commission contributed immensely to the growth of towns and urbanising process in Sri Lanka.

Transport And Communication

The greatest material change from rural to an urban society is due mainly to the vastly improved means of internal communications. Though roads were not unknown in Sri Lanka prior to the coming of the British, those that existed were limited to the environs of the emerging towns in the maritime provinces and to a broad track running along the coastal belt. Strategic and administrative considerations led Governor Edward Barnes who assumed the governorship in 1820 to take the initiative in opening up a few lines of communication into the interior of the country. Due mainly to his efforts, before he resigned in 1831, he could complete a highway, from Colombo, the capital of the Island to Kandy, the central hill capital. He also succeeded in making every other place of importance approachable by a carriage road.¹¹

Governor Barnes, however, left an immense deal to be done in bridging the rivers and extending the roads in the interior. Governor Sir Henry Ward (1855 to 1860) with but limited means did a great deal to open up the remote districts and to bridge the rivers which in the wet season were well-nigh impassable. He also began the railway to Kandy which was successfully completed during the time of his successors Charles McCarthy (1860 to 1863) and Hercules Robinson (1865 to 1872). Governor Robinson also laid the foundation for the construction of the Colombo Breakwater and the scheme was continued by his successor William Gregory (1872 to 1877). This scheme ensured for the capital of Sri Lanka one of the safest, most convenient and commodious artificial harbours in the world.

Thus the network of roads linked the two principal towns of Colombo and Kandy with not only the plantation districts and the new plantation settlements but also with every other town of importance in the Island. Colombo however was the hub of the island's route system and by 1863 there were four main roads from Colombo to Kandy. One of them was a

direct line, while the other three were indirect lines running through Kurunegala, Ginigathena and Ruwanwella respectively. There was also one continuous line of road starting from Colombo running about seven hundred and sixty miles round the entire circuit of the coast. Thus Colombo was linked by trunk roads with such places like Galle, Badulla, and Trincomelee.

Kandy too had its share, however, and a network of roads—main and minor—linked it with such far away places like Jaffna, Talaimanar, Dambulla, Puttalam, Rattota, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, and Badulla. This network of roads and afterwards the railway, led, not only to the growth of Colombo and Kandy into cities but also to develop few other big towns like Galle, Nuwara Eliya, and Jaffna while also creating several other junction-towns of varying sizes and functional importance.¹²

Plantation Industry And Socio-Economic Changes

The Plantation industry, introduced by the British on a commercial basis warranted urbanization and thus contributed towards the growth of several towns in Sri Lanka. The most suitable land for the cultivation of coffee was found in and around Kandy and hence there was a rapid utilization of the land for cultivation by 1830's. As a result of this new industry, new modes of socio-economic behaviour and a host of concepts foreign to the native system were introduced and no time was lost before the new system encroached into the very foundation of the existing structure. Economically the virile commercial agriculture soon displaced in importance the traditional pursuits of the people to the extent that within a short period of time coffee had made itself responsible for almost a third of the Government income.¹³

Naturally in these years the problems of the planters came to be regarded as synonymous with those of the country and in the quest for their solution much that was old was swept away and much new replacements were introduced with startling rapidity. In the process a new economic structure began to evolve. The factors of production—land, labour and capital—took a new meaning and alone with these developments a money economy emerged. It brought with it a consciousness of the prices, profits and wages and started off a variety of socio-economic developments, the like of which the indigenous population had not encountered before. Political affairs were invested with novel significance and a "middle class" in the modern sense of the term—a notion totally foreign to the prevalent system began its slow growth.

The plantation industry grew so rapidly that there was a heavy demand for labour. Abolition of Service labour or Rajakariya in 1833 did not bring about the desired result, the free market of labour. This was due mainly to the firm attachment of the indigenous people to the traditional social and economic system they had cherishly inherited for over 2000 years. Consequently the

planters had to import labour in large quantities and this influx of immigrants was of much significance to the growth of small towns in and around the plantation districts. For the first time a landless working class proper, and a class tied to its employers by the cash nexus alone, came into existence and as a result there emerged the need for market places to provide with the requirements of this new community. As the scope of economic activity increased, a considerable widening of the existing administrative structure became imperative. New posts had to be created and many fresh departments set up. Personnel for the higher appointments were normally recruited in the metropolitan country while other positions were filled from amongst the local population. The widening of economic and administrative activities led to the establishment of provincial capitals and district centres. This situation stimulated the growth of several towns.¹⁴ Consequently a class of white-collar and petty officials, came into being, with the ability to speak English as their main qualification for employment. Being aware of the advantages of educating their younger generation, this new class or social category produced from its ranks within the next twenty-five years, a number of professional men, lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc., equal in calibre to their counterparts in the West. Out of these widely differing strings of clerks, doctors, lawyers, merchants and planters was woven the new Sri Lankan "Middle Class". It was essential for this new class of people to live in towns, not only to carry on a prosperous profession but also to maintain their peculiar way of life. Hence the growth of towns in Sri Lanka was more or less an automatic outcome of the requirements of the plantation industry.

These socio-economic developments changed the functional environment of the towns as well and specially that of Colombo and Kandy underwent rapid changes. With the increasing number of firms expanding their business, Colombo which was once only a military fort, developed to be the centre of great commercial activity. By 1860 the coffee trade alone had brought about twenty to thirty commercial firms into action in Colombo and many mills, storehouses and transport facilities accompanied them. Similar firms and institutions dealing with the export of other products like cocoa, cardamoms and coconut produce were also established.

With the growth of a money economy a number of banks as an essential concomitant made their appearance in the Island. In 1841 the Bank of Ceylon began operations in Colombo and in 1843 opened a branch in Kandy. Shortly after "The Western Bank of India" came into being, with branches both in Colombo and Kandy and in 1845 changed the name into "The Oriental Bank". However the Bank of Ceylon did not last long. The depression of 1848-49 found the bank so heavily involved that it was unable to meet its liabilities and its closure was imminent when "the Oriental Bank" took over its debts. The two banks were formally amalgamated in 1851 by a fresh charter under the

title of "The Oriental Bank Corporation". From 1851 to 1854 it was the only bank available in the island. In 1854 the Mercantile Bank opened branches in Colombo and Kandy with Messers. Ried and Co. as its agent in Galle. The Bank of Madras and the National Bank of India also opened their branches in 1867 and 1871 respectively. C. Pridham thus describing the city of Colombo in 1849 has given a vivid picture of its many and beautiful shops and markets.

Some handsome and well stocked shops have also opened by Europeans, a number of others belong to respectable Burghers of Dutch decent and Main street, Pettah, is now one series of shops and stores. The Moormen own the greater number of shops, the grain stalls are shared by Tamils and Moormen and a few wealthy Parsee tradesmen transact an extensive business in the street... There are several bazaars or market places in the Pettah for fish, flesh of every kind, fruits, grain, garden hearbs, etc.¹⁵

The effects of the plantation industry were equally felt in Kandy. There were a number of plantations in and around Kandy and hence it became the most important distributing centre in the hills. Most of the coffee, produced in the plantations was transported to Colombo via Kandy in carts. These carts on the way back transported the provisions and equipment required in the plantation districts. The goods were next stored in Kandy and thence sold to plantations. As a corollary, by 1850 there emerged in Kandy numerous firms, retail and wholesale dealers, merchants, druggist and apothecaries and cartsmen.

As an administrative centre it was second only to Colombo and hence numerous offices, residences, schools, churches, hospitals, etc., were established very soon. Following the few streets that existed within the town two principal streets were constructed. The Colombo street ran from east to west dividing the town into two nearly equal parts and Trincomalee street which ran from north to south met Colombo street at right angles. A few more streets ran parallel to these and by 1857 the principal bazaar was at the intersection of Colombo and Trincomalee streets. With numerous firms, stores, and boutiques the bazaar was more or less similar to that of Colombo.¹⁶

With the development of the plantations, Kandy experienced a heavy influx of immigrant labourers, planters, low-country Sinhalese and Muslim traders. Consequently, it lost its homogeneity and as a result long standing impregnable traditional Kandyan rural social system which had hitherto withstood all threats and dangers, succumbed and started breaking up. There were indications from as early as the mid 1850's that large sections of the Kandyan peasantry were falling victims of the new economy and becoming money conscious, profit minded, market oriented and all that they signified. The conversion to commercial agriculture was so rapid that in prosperous fifties and sixties it was estimated that of the total acreage of 130,000 under coffee about fifty thousand acres belonged to the peasantry.¹⁷ This illustrates the

growth of a receptive attitude towards the new economic phenomenon, a system which had no significance at all under the traditional local system. Economic individualism was evidently growing stronger and its expansion was hurried by the wide spreading network of roads and railway, the flood of hard currency with the coffee "mania" and the settlement of thousands of wage earning labourers. All these factors led to the disintegration of the traditional "kandyan" system and the growth of a new system where towns, cities, and urbanization were essential. This we see in Kandy as early as 1850's the expansion and development of a city in the modern sense of the term. Emerson Tennent has thus described the situation of Kandy in 1860.

The silence of this mountain solitude has been broken by the din of industry and the seclusion of their village invaded by bands of hired labourers from the Indian coast. Their ancient habits have been interrupted and their prejudice started.¹⁸

The Growth of Population

The increase of population in towns is a reflection of continued prosperity of trade, commerce and other business within them. Hence the demographic features may be considered useful factors of guidance in the study of this rapid urbanization experienced by principal towns in Sri Lanka. The first official census was taken in 1824 on a classification of the population into numbers, sex and age groups. The enumerations in the towns were recorded by streets, which of course were of varying lengths and consequently the numbers varied accordingly, giving us no indication as to which were the crowded areas. The enumerations included only the number of the tiled houses and all other modes of habitation were excluded. Hence most of the houses, especially in the town of Kandy, ought to have been omitted because the privilege of having tiled houses was once reserved for the royalty and the lodgings of the public were mostly thatched with cadjans. In 1824 the Galle town was reported to be more populous than that of Colombo.¹⁹

The growth of population in these towns was continuous.²⁰ Several factors like the natural increase, migration, and the extension of the town limits contributed towards the augmentation of population in towns. However since 1824 the migration emerged as the factor mainly and mostly responsible for augmenting the population of these towns. The migratory tendency was connected with those forces which "pulled" the individuals to the towns.²¹ These pulling forces were the job opportunities tied up with the increasing trade and commerce of the ports and towns and the administrative activities centered in the towns. Not all who found employment in a town cared to reside within its limits. As a result there began the trickle of commuters that has since grown up in considerable streams. Consequently, the town of Colombo being the capital city of the Island, the principal port of the Indian Ocean, the seat of Government and the principal centre of trade and commerce, had a large

floating population. Their avocations brought them to the town, thus augmenting the day population of the city. In 1881 Lionel Lee, who compiled the census of that year, caused an enumeration to be made of these persons, coming on three days to the town by the principal roads and by train. The average for the three days was estimated at 8,684.²²

THE FACTORS OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE TO THE GROWTH OF THE RESPECTIVE TOWNS OF COLOMBO, KANDY AND GALLE

The Town of Colombo

Beside the common factors that contributed to the growth of towns in general there were several factors of particular importance to individual towns. The importance of being the capital of Sri Lanka and its port played a major role in the urbanization of Colombo and hence in the emergence, development and growth of the town of Colombo. However, Colombo was a port long before it became the capital of the Island. Sri Lanka by virtue of its midway position in the Indian Ocean, has throughout her history been a meeting place of foreign merchants and travellers. About 700 A. D. "Kolamba" or "Kolantota" became a Muslim trading settlement and was one of the first six settlements on the west coast of Sri Lanka. The Muslims had built warehouses (bangasalas) and carried on trade in cinnamon and elephants. They also brought to "Kolamba" gold, silver, cotton and silk-stuffs from Cambay. This trade attracted a concourse of merchant's and the port was both rich and populous. Thus the settlement of "Kolamba" developed in its size and functions from about 1330 A. D. and it was at that time "one of the finest and largest cities of the Island of Serendib, the residence of wazir, lord of she sea".²³

Under the Dutch, from 1658 to 1796 the port of Colombo changed very little in its form although its functions increased. Cinnamon was one of the most important articles of foreign trade and the port of Colombo with its rich cinnamon hinterland was the centre for storing, packing and shipping of cinnamon to Europe and India. Colombo shared also in the foreign trade with Madura and Coramandal Coast. The Dutch imported large quantities of rice and clothing to be sold in Colombo where the traders met to barter their arecanuts, etc., for them. In the port to port trade, Colombo provided the other ports mainly with goods imported from foreign countries. In this respect the port of Colombo was gradually establishing itself as the chief port and the trading centre of the Islands.

Though the functions of the port was much increased, the Dutch failed to provide adequate facilities for shipping. Hence until 1870, when the British decided to improve the harbour by the construction of breakwaters and the installation of port facilities, Colombo remained "nothing more an open road affording safe anchorage to ships within only four months of the year."²⁴ Despite the limitations and meagre port facilities, the trade of the port of Colombo increased as its hinterland provided goods for both export

and to the local markets. By 1830 coffee exports reached 885,728 cwts. while rice imports reached 4,735,832 cwts.²⁵ The Colombo port being the largest importing point attracted to its vicinity numerous industrial, commercial and business establishments which largely depended on imported items like foodstuffs, textiles and manufactured goods. With the construction of breakwaters and the provision of harbour facilities the port of Colombo had by the turn of the century come to be called the "Clapham Junction of the East".²⁶ It had surpassed all other port towns that thrived on commerce and business during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

The selection of Colombo as the capital of Sri Lanka also contributed immensely to the growth and development of the city. The Portuguese who were carried by the monsoons to the shores of Sri Lanka in 1505 set up a garrisoned factory close to the Muslim settlement, Kolomba.

The choice of the site was no accident. But it owed more to considerations of local strategy than to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean. The port of Galle offered the Portuguese a better site for shipping in their colonial ventures. But by establishing themselves in Colombo it was easier for the Portuguese to come into contact with the king who resided at Kotte, a mere six miles distance. Colombo was also the centre of the cinnamon trade and thus enjoyed an advantageous commercial position. Thus by the beginning of the 17th century the Portuguese had established themselves in the Sinhalese Kingdom of Kotte and had gained effective control of the trade and shipping along the western seaboard of Sri Lanka. The administrative as well as the economic affairs of the provinces under the Portuguese were centered round the capital of Colombo.

Ever since, Colombo continued to be the capital of the Island and its internal situation was improved under the Dutch and British. The agricultural settlements and road policies of the Dutch helped to improve and develop Colombo considerably. A period of peace and economic stability under the British, barring the depression of 1844—49, brought progress and prosperity to Colombo. The privilege of being not only the capital but also the principal port and the trading centre automatically contributed in transforming Colombo into the administrative centre as well. Consequently the headquarters of all the government departments and the Queen's House or the Governor's residence, hospitals, churches, parks and places of recreation, principal schools, etc., all amenities required to the growth of a city, were concentrated in Colombo and by the middle of the 19th century Colombo was at the height of a growing city in the modern sense of the term.

The Town of Galle

The urbanization of Galle also can be attributed mainly to its natural harbour. It was by far the most venerable emporium of foreign trade and the resort of merchant ships at the earliest stage of commerce. It was also one of the Muslim trade settlements and one of the entrepôts, whence the Moorish

traders of Malabar drew the produce of the remoter East, which they sold to the Genoese and Venetians to be distributed over the countries of the West. Consequently when the Portuguese landed in Galle in 1505 the port of Galle was much more prosperous and was also strategically better situated in the Indian Ocean than that of Colombo. However choice of Colombo as the capital by the Portuguese was a turning point in the history of the city of Galle, because it contributed immensely to the decay of the port of Galle and this loss on Galle was a gain on Colombo. However during the 17th and 18th centuries Galle continued to be the emporium of the Portuguese and afterwards that of the Dutch.

As the port of Colombo grew rapidly, Galle's share in Sri Lankan trade fell in equal rapidness. The Port of Colombo, being in the vicinity of or nearer to the coffee and cinnamon districts, accounted for the export of the largest proportion of the local products. Therefore the trade of Galle was restricted mainly to coconut products, for which the Southern Province is so well known. Besides, the large population of Moors who held sway over the gem trade as well, engrossed themselves in the trade of rice and other commodities. But the local prosperity of Galle depended mainly on the merchant vessels which made it their focus. There grew up numerous hotels, lodging houses and shops to supply the necessities of the foreign travellers and the town was sufficiently prosperous to support these establishments.²⁷

The Town of Kandy

The origin and growth of the town of Kandy owes much to its political importance. It was the seat of the last Sinhalese Kings and when the British obtained control over the Kandyan kingdom they treated it as a separate territory and introduced a different system of administration as well. Even after 1833, when the Kandyan areas were administratively amalgamated with the rest of the island, Kandy continued to be an administrative and strategic center, which is second only to Colombo in importance.

Moreover Kandy was the centre of plantation districts and its economic importance contributed immensely to the growth of the town. Not only the planters but also many others like low-country Sinhalese and Muslims migrated to Kandy from other parts of the Island for business ventures. The cool and healthy climate in the Kandyan districts suited not only for coffee cultivation but also helped to attract foreigners. Hence with the expansion of coffee plantations more and more foreigners and other businessmen together with the Indian labourers settled down in the Kandyan areas. As a result, to satisfy their growing needs and requirements, a kachcheri with a first class government Agent who was also a member of the Legislative Council,²⁸ a regiment of the army, branches of almost all the government departments, markets, schools, parks and recreations all came into existence and contributed in making Kandy a fast growing town.

THE EMERGENCE OF URBAN PROBLEMS

Hand in hand with the growing socio-economic fabric of Sri Lanka, various problems connected with those towns and the lives of the dwellers also emerged. Improvement of transportation and sanitation, maintenance of peace and health, supply of water and lighting the streets were some of the problems that demanded urgent attention of the government. The few lines of communication opened on strategic and administrative considerations during the early decades of the 19th century were merely trunk roads. It is true that they were of some value to coffee planters. But with the flood of investments on coffee during the 1840's the call for more and more roads became insistent. The government was not in any way hostile to this need but so many roads were demanded within so short a period that the providence of finances and labour required in constructing them were found to be serious problems. Moreover the construction costs were unseemingly heavy especially because the roads had to be constructed in the hill country where the coffee industry was located. High maintenance costs also had to be expected because of the heavy rainfalls, extreme heat and the thin iron-rimmed wheels of the carts which ran between estates and the shipping centres combined to cause serious damage to even the newest road surfaces within very short periods.²⁹ The annual expenditure on these items increased heavily every year, the figures for 1842, 1844 and 1846 being £ 23, 147, £ 35,451 and £ 64,947 respectively. Yet the planters who were dissatisfied and accusing the Government of discrimination, intentional neglect and indifference, launched a political movement notable for its open hostility to official policy and personnel.³⁰

Moreover the local requirements of public health such as a supply of good and wholesome water, drainage, sanitation and market facilities were found to be deplorably deficient. With the gradual growth of populous and congested towns where sanitary facilities were of a primitive nature, epidemics formed a grave problem. Unpredicted epidemics of smallpox and cholera were recurrent. In 1828 saw an epidemic of smallpox in the island and with the influx of Indian labourers cholera ravaged it in 1845 and 1846. The outbreak of cholera in 1845 was unprecedented in its severity, carrying off almost entire villages in the plantation districts.

Social conditions in the growing town of Colombo, especially in Fort and Pettah, grew to be completely different from those which had existed in the early decades of the century. These two localities which once formed the residential areas of Europeans and Burghers and well-to-do citizens had now been converted into places of extensive business and commercial enterprises. The houses were converted into stores and the space for dwelling decreased. Some of the business houses had their wares stored in a part of the building and the outhouses were used as dwellings for a larger number than they could accommodate with comfort. This situation was thus described in the press

“many other four walls which before had sheltered in or around a dozen of wretched idolators were by the aid of this social ‘Jack-Screw’ made to hold twice the number and King Dirt reigned supreme throughout the drainless territory”³¹. The surface drains in the cross streets were broken and damaged by the carts and no measures were taken to repair them.

It may be stated as a broad fact that with comparatively rare exceptions, there did not exist in any of the houses of poorer classes in these towns any provision whatsoever to meet in privacy the natural wants. The only exception was the cesspits that existed in the houses of well-to-do citizens and even they were not emptied for several decades. Obviously, these cesspits contaminated the soil, air and water, the three basic sources of disease. Hence they were as much of a nuisance as the public thoroughfares and open compounds where the poorer people had in common to relieve the call of nature.³² These primitive sanitary measures which even did not suit the limited population did not in anyway suffice the congested localities. In all the towns the densely populated areas were rampant with filth and there were heaps of dirt collected in the house yards. The open drains which were found on either side of the streets were commonly used as urinary closets and for committing other types of disgusting nuisance. H.C. Sirr thus described the situation in the Kandy town. “The town of Kandy is insalubrious as it lies in a basin, open drains running at either side of the principal streets and the effluvia from these receptacles of filth, especially after rain is absolutely pestiferous”.³³

None of these towns was supplied with pure water and the water used by the inhabitants was unwholesome. In Colombo the only means of supplying water to the town was wells. Lack of drainage and the existence of cesspits in the close proximity to these wells subjected their water to contamination. Hence the water used by a large population of the inhabitants of Colombo was utterly unfit for human consumption.³⁴ H. C. Sirr wrote as follows with regard to the supply of water in Galle.

The town of Galle although a clean picturesque little spot has one serious drawback namely the want of pure water and neither Europeans nor the natives will use the water that is procured in the Fort for drinking or culinary purposes as it is peculiarly unwholesome... water of the best and purest description is procured in the vicinity of the fort and the water carriers gain a good livelihood by furnishing the inhabitants of the town with this essential requisite to health and comfort.³⁵

Although Sirr was of the opinion that no one used the unwholesome well water it is evident that the mass of the people could not afford to buy the pure water, which was very expensive, and hence had to content themselves with water so impure as to be even offensive to the senses.³⁶ Every requirement for

the protection of health such as pure water, drainage, sanitation, scavenging, slaughter houses and cemeteries was found to be deplorably lacking and the prevention of epidemics resulting from filthy environments was found to be a serious problem.

Preserving order in these growing towns too was found to be a difficult task. Generally in each and every town, and especially in the Kandyan areas where the lawlessness followed the wake of plantation, there had emerged a need for a police service to safeguard life and property.

A VACCUM IN THE FIELD OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Amidst these growing socio-economic problems there had emerged an administrative want in the field of local government. The ancient rural economic system which was based on agriculture and land-holding entailed the land-holders in a counter obligation on their part to render to the State either a part of the produce of the land or personal service.³⁷ This personal service or "Rajakariya" as it was called formed one of the main sources of revenue of the kings, and he used it for the maintenance of irrigation, roads and paths or in other words the public works of the localities. However owing to various difficulties such as lack of communication, the king could not exercise his direct authority over, the distant parts of the country. Hence the king regulated this customary service or Rajakariya and maintained the public works of the localities through the "village councils".

The little evidence available on the early local government system of Sri Lanka shows that the Village Councils discharged both administrative and judicial functions.³⁸ The administrative functions were in the areas of apportioning Rajakariya and the duties connected with irrigation which had to be performed by different cultivators. The settling of disputes amicably was their main judicial function. However their usefulness as an administrative body was very much lost after the abolition of Rajakariya in 1833.³⁹ When the system of Rajakariya was abolished the Village Councils had to part with their administrative powers and functions and hence ceased to exist as administrative bodies.

The people personally appreciated the advantages of their exemption from Rajakariya. But with this abolition, on the one hand the Government had to give up suddenly all claims whatsoever to a portion of the services of the people which, according to their customs, they had from the time immemorial been liable to render to the government. On the other hand the people themselves had to part with their right of governing their own affairs or the right of local self-government which they had enjoyed from ancient times. However

with the abolition of Rajakariya and the substitution of hired labour instead, the anticipated "free market" of labour did not take place. Hence the indirect repercussion of the measure was the neglect of internal communication and irrigation. Governor Torrington in his long and comprehensive despatch forwarding the Road Ordinance of 1848 thus described the neglected situation of public works as a result of the abolition of Rajakariya.

The banks and tanks and water courses still in use have been gradually going out of repair and a retrograde movement has been in many parts too apparent. A sufficient quantity of hired labour even for the principal roads was not easily procured, and the little they were able to get formed the indispensable resources of Government for the maintenance of these works. The minor lines of communications, canals, etc., and other very desirable works of much local importance in a tropical country have received little attention.⁴⁰

In the meantime the administrative and financial reforms implemented in 1833 contributed very much to aggravate the situation. The Island was divided into five provinces and the whole administration was centralized in the hands of the Governor in Council. A Government Agent who was responsible with regard to every minute detail of administration of the province was appointed to each of these five divisions. Several European as well as native officers who assisted the Government Agent in his administrative function came under his strict authority.⁴¹ While a large province with heavy and enlarged administrative duties was thus placed in the hands of the Government Agent, some of the other government offices were abolished and their duties were entrusted to officers of inferior grades. With all the enhanced burdens entrusted to these officers their salaries were reduced. Hence all the minute public works which under the traditional local system were managed by the local people with the supervision of the Village Councils were thus placed under the Civil Servants who were overburdened with heavy duties. Moreover these officers had no knowledge of the local systems, people or their language. Hence naturally these administrative and financial reforms led to the deterioration of public services during a "time of trouble" when they had to be performed promptly and efficiently. Hence very soon it was felt that the central government could no longer attend to all the minute wants of each and every locality or spend on them out of the general revenue.⁴² The logical and eventual solution which also suited the "colonial policy" of the period was to fill the vacuum in the field of local administration with some form of local government institution.

THE EARLY EXPERIMENTS OF A MUNICIPAL SYSTEM

The Policy Involved

The early experiments in Municipal Government in Sri Lanka were carried on in accordance with the contemporary colonial policy of the British Empire. Several ideas and concepts that dominated the "Reform Age" in England contributed considerably in shaping this aspect of the colonial policy. It is evident that since about 1840, colonial policy was aimed at establishing and improving as far as possible the representative institutions in the colonies.⁴³ This was the outcome of the influence of the preachings of several important ideological groups such as the Whigs, the Radicals, the Free traders, the Wakefield school of Colonial Reformers, and the Evangelicals.

The outcome of the American War of Independence and the loss of the thirteen colonies built up a feeling of depression and pessimism in England with regard to colonies in general. It was believed that independence was the ultimate destiny of the colonies and there were advocates of separation already in the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century. The Radicals were inclined to see the empire as a heavy burden and advocated in favour of the dissolution of the empire. However these separatist ideas were not dominant due to the activities of the Wakefield School, a small but energetic and vociferous group of "Colonial Reformers".⁴⁴ They had ardent faith in the future of the Empire which they wanted to preserve by granting a large measure of self-government to the colonies. It must however be observed that the self-government contemplated by these Reformers was subject to certain limitations. They made a distinction between local and imperial affairs and it was only in respect of local affairs that they recommended the granting of responsible government. Imperial affairs however were to remain under the control of the home government. They were also Free Traders who opposed the imperial preference system and emphasized the affinity of colonial self-support to colonial self-government.

In 1850 a Colonial Reform Association came into existence under the inspiration of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Its main objectives were the promotion of colonial self-government and colonial self-support. It was clearly evident from the composition of this association that their ranks included Tories, Radicals, Evangelicals and their major principles enjoyed the approval of such prominent statesmen such as Lord John Russel,⁴⁵ Earl Grey,⁴⁶ Gladson and Disraeli. Hence their concepts dominated the colonial office from about 1845 to 1860. The Free Traders always insisted that free trade for the colonies ought to be accompanied by colonial defence. Accordingly with the growth of free trade in the 1840's "self support" of the colonies became a principal feature of the colonial policy. In keeping with these principles emerged a belief that there should be a local contribution towards the expenses incurred on defence within the colony.⁴⁷