

The Road to Kandy: A bibliographical and historical study of Colonial and Post-Colonial accounts

Kanchana Dehigama¹

Abstract

A considerable body of literature highlights that the survival of Kandyan Kingdom from western invasion was mainly caused by geographical barriers and ancient travel rules and procedures practiced. Thus, the construction of road to Kandy under the supervision of Dawson and Skinner established British administration in Kandyan provinces. The road to Kandy is known as the “Great Road” not only because the of route is taken by the higher officials of Kandyan court and embassies of different countries to reach the Kandyan kingdom but also it marked a milestone of British Occupation in Sri Lanka. Historical literature suggested that changes brought into effect the construction of Kandy road in to the lives of Kandyans in particular and Sri Lankans in general, stretched from social, political and economic liberty to facilitating communication through fast trade and passenger transportation while transportation facilities were at minimal stage. On the contrary, it is argued that building a new road to Kandy under the concept of D’oyley and policy of Barnes had interrupted the traditional life style of Kandyans. Nearly after two centuries of opening of the road to Kandy, building of a new expressway to Kandy is at its crossroads. One may argue that the construction of a new expressway will fade away the significance of the existing Kandy-Colombo highway. However, due to social, political economical as well as historical linkages associated with Kandy road with Sri Lankan way of life, significance of Kandy road is heightened continuously. Gradually the same route was popularly known as Colombo-Kandy highway with the increasing development of Colombo as a commercial and administrative capital and its significance is even so emphasized by designating it Sri Lanka’s A-1 motorway. Notwithstanding the significance of the Kandy road, exploring into literature reveals that there is no effort has been taken to record the history of Kandy road in a descriptive manner. Except for few brief attempts made by handful of authors, rest of the accounts on constructions of the road to Kandy is intermingled in the administrative reports, travel accounts and, personal diaries etc. Hence, this study attempts to contribute to historiography of road building in Sri Lanka by putting all aspects of construction of Kandy road together.

Key Words: *Road Culture, Kandy Road, British Administration, Kandy*

¹ Senior Assistant Librarian, University of Peradeniya.

kanchanad@pdn.ac.lk