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DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A 'BACKWARD' REGION

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE KANDYAN PEASANTRY : STATE
DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A 'BACKWARD' REGION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

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A B S T R A C T

The present study deals with the process of development in a 'backward' region with a view to identifying the effectiveness of state intervention in development activities with special reference to the Kandyan peasantry in Sri Lanka.

The term 'Kandyan peasantry' has ethno-regional and socio-economic connotations. Ethnically Kandyans are Sinhalese, the majority ethnic group of Sri Lanka. The term carries a regional dimension based on the fact that the interior parts of the island of Sri Lanka are conventionally referred to as 'Kandyan Areas' and distinguishes Kandyan Sinhalese from their ethnic counterparts in the lowlands - the Low Country Sinhalese. The Kandyan peasantry has been perceived as a group of people possessing a distinctive cultural heritage that separates them from other ethnic groups in the country, behaviourally conscious of their distinctiveness in terms of societal customs and traditions and as a group different from others both economically and socially. They appear to have drifted away from mainstream of socio-economic modernization and change during the colonial dominance.

It is the socio-economic backwardness of the Kandyan peasantry and the attempts that have been made to improve their living standards that provide the thematic base for the present study.

The study consists of a macro-scale investigation that encompasses the entire 'Kandyan Area' and a macro-scale study focussed

on specific 'localities' within the area.

At a macro-level the present study examines the historical perspectives of the economic and social landscape of Kandyan areas and attempts to trace the roots of it's backwardness. The study then proceeds to examine the implementation of state development programmes with a view to evaluating their achievements during the past three to four decades. The macro-scale component of the study also seeks to examine the trends and patterns of development of the Kandyan peasantry during that period.

The micro-level study of specific 'localities' attempts to examine in depth the socio-economic characteristics of the Kandyan peasantry and seeks to identify the nature and effectiveness of government intervention in uplifting their levels of living.

The 'standard of living' and the 'quality of life' of the Kandyan peasantry are major thematic concerns of the present study. Conventional socio-economic measurements and indices are employed in assessing absolute and relative changes in living standards.

The Principal Component Analysis based on fifty variables of socio-economic significance is used in the assessment of the present state of development in the Kandyan districts. The analysis indicates that the standard of living and the quality of life of the Kandyans are still low when compared with the situation in the lowland districts like Gampaha, Colombo, Kalutara, Galle, Matara and Jaffna. It also showed that the 'quality of life' of the Kandyans is also lower than the standards enjoyed by the people in the Dry Zone. However, the Kandyans are relatively well off if compared with the people in the

districts of Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Baticaloa. Within the Kandyan area, Kandy and Kegalle districts however enjoy superior living conditions.

Furthermore, the field investigations carried out in five selected villages located in different parts of the Kandyan districts demonstrated that the living standards and the quality of life of the villagers are appalling. This is not to suggest that the Kandyan villages have not gained any benefits from state development activities. Some benefits of state development activity has infact trickled down to the level of the rural peasantry. But the impacts of these benefits are not very significant.

This study emphasizes the prevailing depressed situation in the Kandyan areas and the writer expresses the hope that it would draw the attention of policy makers and planners to the plight of the Kandyan peasantry.