

Loss of land ownership to upcountry peasant: subsequent waste land ordinance of 1840

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The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the Waste Land Ordinance of on the Kandyan peasants. As a result of the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms the British government decided to change their land policy in Ceylon. The government decided to reduce the salaries of civil servants, cut off their allowances and encourage them to enter into private businesses. They allowed British officers to buy lands in Sri Lanka up to 4000 acres. Therefore the majority of civil servants joined the plantation sector as land owners. British rulers offered them lands at the lowest prices, one shilling per acre. Due to the high demand the government faced a problem of supplying land for coffee cultivation. To solve this problem they decided to sell the uncultivated land. When taking over the land ownership from the Kandyans the British believed that all uncultivated land was owned to government. Therefore they sold all the uncultivated land including chena lands, pastures and land used by the community. This was a major attack on traditional land tenure system. When objections arose from the peasant, the government introduce ordinances like crown land encroachment ordinance to subdue them. According to the said ordinance if some one claimed land ownership he had to prove it by producing legal documents. If they had a Sannasa, a receipt of a tax payment within a 20 year period or some proof of doing some service to the land, they could prove their ownership. Many of the peasants lost their chena lands because they did not have any of the above document. That was the origin of Landlessness in Kandyan kingdom.

Key words: Land ordinances, Civil servants, Plantation sector, Documents of proof, Problem of ownership

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