

Sri Lanka: the Colonial in the Postcolonial

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Introduction

In view of the prevailing characteristics of the colonial in postcolonial Sri Lanka, it is necessary to understand the socio-cultural life and institutions of the local community during the preceding period in Sri Lanka. In this regard, contemporary and near contemporary archival sources and several studies undertaken by scholars provide a resultant picture enhancing a clearer identification of the changes, introductions and innovations of the colonial period¹.

From the 16th century onwards Sri Lanka began to be subjugated to European control consequent to their enthusiasm in monopolizing the trade and commerce network of the island and establishing their superiority in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean. Of the colonial powers, the Portuguese and the Dutch were able to possess a territorial power only over the maritime provinces of the island but the British who came to Sri Lanka in the last decade of the 18th century were able to bring the whole island under the British crown by the second decade of the 19th century. While controlling the trade and commerce of the island, all three European nations were concerned in safe-guarding and improving their sustainability in the island. Consequently, many European modes of socio-cultural elements were introduced. Pre-colonial society of Sri Lanka that had integrated in a local way of life was largely affected. The local inhabitants subservient to the European colonial rule adapted their lifestyle in accord with the new situation, whether willingly or otherwise, perhaps to receive some social status or even material advancement in the changing circumstances. In this way, the European colonial rule of more than four centuries of Sri Lanka was able to make a substantial impact on the local social and cultural behaviour of the time.

Moreover, some of the manifold European colonial influences at a socio-cultural level are recognizable even today in postcolonial Sri Lanka. It is proposed to uncover the reason(s) for the social tendencies in postcolonial Sri Lanka towards attitudes and concepts introduced in the colonial period by touching a few aspects namely, the creed, architecture, culinary, dress, recreation and the vocabulary expansion/language. The above mentioned aspects have been selected liberally for discussion. They will be discussed in flowing order without demarcating under conventional headings because obviously there are no hard and fast rules of discrimination on these aspects in real life, as they all are in some measure vitally connected with one another.

¹ Central Cultural Fund (CCF), Sri Lanka.