2. 20   Evolution of the Compulsory Service System (*Rajakariya*) in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRAT

In ancient Sinhalese society, a citizen had to contribute some service to the king. The system was called the system of rajakariya or the compulsory service system. It was accepted that the king was the owner of all land. Agriculture was the base of the economy in the country. People got lands from the king for cultivation. In return for the lands they used, people performed a compulsory service to the king. The compulsory service system was based on the caste system and land tenure system.

The Portuguese came to Sri Lanka in 1505. When the Portuguese ruled the Maritime areas they used ancient traditions, customs and laws for the administration of the areas under them. The compulsory service system was used by them for their benefit. At first they wanted to develop their economy and spread their religion. Because of these aims compulsory service was very important to the Portuguese. Compulsory service system depended on responsibilities and duties.

Coastal areas of Sri Lanka were captured by the Dutch by 1658. They ruled these areas till 1796. Compulsory service system collapsed during this period. According to their view, people were landholders in the country. Because of this, the Dutch used the compulsory service for the success of their economic and administrative sectors. It was especially used by them, for the benefit of the VOC.

The British came to Sri Lanka in 1796 and at the beginning of their rule they accepted the compulsory service system. They used it to complete their mission in Sri Lanka. However the aim of the British was to build a commercial economic system. But the compulsory service system was a barrier in fulfilling that objective. Hence, in 1833, the Colebrooke – Cameron Commission proposed to abolish the compulsory service system and the British government accepted the proposal.

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