

Dynamics of Local Government System under the British Colonial Period in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the nature and dynamics of local administration and governance processes under the British colonial period. Local government is the cornerstone of the democratic governance of the country. As a democratic country, Sri Lanka has a historical timeline for practicing local democratic governance and political tradition since its independence. There was a local governing system under the king domain period in Sri Lanka. But, since colonial administration the local government system has been subjected to many radical and vibrant changers under colonial rule. It was significantly emphasized during the period of the British colonial period. Modern local government system was established under the British colonial period. The main objective of the pre-and post-independence that local democracy and government system was to enhance democratic applications and enhance the social well-being of the ordinary people who live in the grass root. There were a couple of changes and conversion were happened during the period of the British colonial period regarding the local government sector in Sri Lanka. A significant point of the local government sector under the British colonial period is it has been gone democratization process of local democracy with new combinations. Introducing the universal franchise system was a benchmark of the enhance of the local democracy and governance in the local government sector in Sri Lanka. However, there are considerable modifications process had been taken on the local government sector but on the other hand after independence, democracy has been catching up by another social segment beyond the basic principles of democratic concepts. Democracy and its practices were interpreted by some social groups who had social power in society. From the bottom to top, social power was a concentration into a specified group call as elite. In Sri Lanka, the nature of pre-and post-independence politics that freely participation of the politics by the people had been paralyzed due to these specified social groups and their governing system. Parallel to the changing pattern of the social practices that applications and interpretations of the conceptual meaning of democracy also have been changed. Whatever modern features enriched to the democracy and governance that since independence also has been extended elite politics over the democracy and governance system in Not only local but also national politics in Sri Lanka.

Keyword: Colonial Administration, Modern features of Local Democracy, Social Changes, Elite Politics.

I. Introduction

Local government is one of the determinations of identifying the nature of democracy in a given country. That is more significant not only practicing democracy but also delivering services for the community who live in a lower level of society. On the other hand, it is one of the primary bodies concerning to initiate and implementation of the policy of the country. When talking about the socio, economic, and political development that local government institutions will come as a center point of the discussion. There are various kinds of local government system can be shown in the different kind of countries in their different political system. However, without any criteria such as physical or population differences of the countries that it is a significant universal concept in the contemporary geopolitical continents in the world. Establishing a local government system in the many countries that they have their own experiences at the foundation level. Most of the third world countries like Sri Lanka had a common experience in this regard. Especially, countries which have been controlled by the colonial administration had a common experience when they established their local government system. But every country had its own native local government system before the under control of the colonial administration. Sri Lanka also had the same experience with its local government system.

But it can seem that the local government system of many countries like Sri Lanka has been gone through many radical changes under the colonial administration. Modern features of the local government were in cooperated during the colonial administration. Especially, by many political and constitutional amendments and reforms that modern features such as community engagement for the policy decisions making process, electoral rights, were introduced for the local government system in Sri Lanka. In this paper, the main focus point is to explore the nature and dynamics of the local government pre and colonial periods. Post-colonial trends were also had taken into the discussion in this article. Especially emergence of the elite class on a local level which is based on local politics is a significant benchmark in the Sri Lankan political system which had a highly influential factor in not only local but also national politics in the latter part of politics in Sri Lanka.

A. Literature Review

Various scholars have been done many investigations concerning the concept of local government. They have given many interpretations and knowledge to



the literature on local government studies in many ways. Initial claims for the value of such a form of government lay in an extension of the separation of powers, most closely argued first by Montesquieu and further developed by the federalists determined to provide a constitution for the US seeking to escape from the tyranny of British rule (Sharp, 1970).¹

The literature on democracy and democratic theory is long and honorable, and it would be impossible to attempt to summarize so much work here. Fukuyama (2011), for example, traces the role of democracy in human order from prehistoric societies. Dunn (2006) assesses the impact of democracy in terms of liberation movements in history. And Keane (2010) charts the impact of democratic principles on current political regimes and the reasons why democracy has begun to receive negative connotations globally. This supports other research that directly criticizes democracy as a dangerous ideal (e.g., Hawksley 2009). the concept of localism—empowering local people to make decisions that affect them at the local level, which is part of a broader agenda that aims to "release councils from Whitehall control" and give them greater flexibility to meet the needs of their residents (DCLG 2010). Localism has been described by the coalition government as "a radical devolution of power to the local level" (Communities and Local Government Committee 2011). Key elements of the Localism Act include new community rights to bid for land and buildings, new neighborhood planning rights, the transfer of public functions to local authorities to improve local accountability or promote economic growth, and the creation of a general power of competence for local authorities to develop innovative approaches to service delivery and governance. Concerns with the democratic deficit and with new forms of citizen participation have highlighted these issues (John 2009; King, Feltey, and Süsel 1998; Norris 2011). At the same time, the locus of democracy has also been the subject of much debate, as the relationships between, as well as citizens' trust in, national, regional, and local governments raise questions of local engagement and local governance. Participation has been strongly linked, for example, with the development of integrity (Wang and Van Wart 2007) and with the development of accountability (Devas and Grant 2003). Berner, Amos, and Morse (2011) suggest that participation may be regarded differently by stakeholders: professionals may view optimal public participation at a low level, whereas citizens strive for a more proactive approach. political participation has been the subject of much debate in recent years, particularly following Putnam's (1995) work on the decline of social capital. The relationships between individuals, their communities, and the political process have been at the heart of such debates, recognizing that new forms of participation have emerged (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005; Fung 2003, 2006;

Nabatchi 2010). Bovaird (2007, 848), for example, charts several levels of citizen coproduction according to the degree to which citizens are involved in the planning and delivery of public services.

When talking about the concept of governance, Stoker (1998) proposed a set of five interlinked propositions to identify the varied aspects of governance. The key dimension of these propositions is that governance involves institutions and actors in government, but also stretches beyond government in establishing and utilizing autonomous networks, and using tools that do not necessarily evolve from sovereign power.

B. Nature of the Local Government System under the British Colonial Period

The dynamics of local administration of Sri Lanka experience under the colonial period was vibrant as well as crucial for the establishment of democracy and governance. There were three colonial rulers who administered the country. But mostly, an influential factor was the British colonial period rather than other Protégés or Holland. Both Protégés and Holland's administration was the limited surrounding coastal belt of the country. Those colonial powers couldn't fully catch the whole power of the country. In 1815, the British colonial power fully handover the country's political and social power in their hand by the engaged in an agreement called Kandyan Pact or agreement between British colonial ruler and up-country leaders who were represented by the elite class. The existing social and cultural situation of the country was very familiar to the feudal system in which society has been compartmentalization to different social layers by social status. The colonial government did not rapidly change the existing system because they could understand the cooperation of the existing elite class for the achievement of future objectives. Further, the British colonial government was continuously applied to the existing system without complicated their objectives.

This situation has mentioned, "Gam Saba" functioned in a democratic form, within a monarchy, and performed social-economic, and cultural activities. Foreigners like Robert Knox and Forber have mentioned in their reports that the "Gam Saba" system which functions continuously under the 180 Kings was still functioning in the first few decades of the British era mentioned by its Administrative map of the country has been changed by the British colonial government for their easy administration (Work Procedures for Local Authorities: 2001).² The local economy was based on the agricultural sector therefore; British rulers did not try to suddenly change the ground situation. Rural society was more complicated during the King domain period. It was compartmentalization on many social factors. Cast and

¹ Mike Goldsmith. Local Government, Urban Studies Vol. 29, No. 3/4, REVIEW DOUBLE ISSUE (May 1992), pp. 393-410 (18 pages), Published by Sage Publications, Ltd.

² Work Procedure for Local Authorities, 2001. Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance, No, 17, Malalasekara Mawatha, Colombo, 07

class were the main determination with regard create of the social composition. Social practices and customs were combined with feudal social structure. At the village, level administration was handled by the elite class. This system has functioned for a long period. The village is the most fundamental administration unit not only that it was determined social integration and unity of the community at the ground level. In former times the Sinhalese village communities managed altogether of themselves the affairs of their social and communal life. The cultivation of the fields, the common pasturing of cattle, the conduct of fisheries, the use of village paths, and other like matters of common concern was regulated by ancient customs; and all breaches of these customs and disputes between the villagers were settled by a Tribunal consisting of an Assembly of Elders in each village (Report of the Commission Inquiry Local Government Reforms 1999).³ The final stage of King Domain governance of the Kandyan period country has been divided into several administrative regions and units. There are 4 Maha Disawa, (Disawa mean administrative district) 8 Disawas, and 9 Rata.

The village has become the smallest administrative unit at the local level. The village administration had to cover various services that were related to agricultural activities. Therefore, the governing body of the village was the village council. Robert Knox in 1681 had described village administration through the Gam Sabha which functioned at the village level to organize agricultural activities and to fulfill other common needs of rural life. All community activities were performed according to customs and conventions with a sense of unity. Every chief householder was a member of the Gam Sabha. Appeals from the Gam Sabha could be referred up to the Rata Sabha (Report of the Commission Inquiry Local Government Reforms 1999).⁴ Community integration was handled by the village council. It was an organ for governing the locality. Mostly elite people have participated in this council. The representation of this village council was a volunteer event. It was created the prestige and image of the leaders in the village. Mostly, those representatives have governed locality without any basic democratic principles under the feudal social structure. These village bodies were coveted as mediation boards or Tribunals. Decisions of these councils were bound by the villagers without questions. The ultimate responsibilities of the decision were to bind with the King's power. In addition to these village councils, there are two kinds of upper-level administrative units that can be identified final stage of the Kandyan Kingdom. British colonial government had to face those administrative structures in the latter part of the country administration. Rata Sabha is a higher-level administrative unit above the village council during the Kandyan period. Most of the

appeals from village councils were handled by these higher administrative units. There are diverse functions that have been done by the village council. It was not narrow down to administrative functions.

Community disputes also short out by the village council at the ground level. Most of the representatives in this council are represented by elders or elite from the village level. However, the final stage of the Kandyan Kingdom that there are higher-level administrative divisions has been demarcated as follows. The nature of District (Disawa) administration during the Kandyan period may be explained through an introduction to the system that prevailed in the Matale Disawa. According to the description in the Matale Kadaim Pota (Boundary Book Matale) the administration of Matale during the region of King Godapala Vijayapala (1639 A.D) was under Etipola Disawa and the posts under the Disawa administration were;

Matale Maha Disawa

Adikaram of Matale Disawa (Judge)

Lekam (Scribe)

Rate Mahattaya of Matale

Rate Mahattaya of Udugoda

Rate Mahattaya of Wgapannaha Korale

Kodithuwakku

Lekam of Thunkorale

A Korale was a subdivision and village under village leaders were the smallest units of the administration (Report of the Commission Inquiry Local Government Reforms 1999).⁵

The nature of the ancient local government administration system gradually has been changed in the later period. There was a golden era regarding local government and development under the colonial administration. Especially, during the colonial period, the local government system and its social background were radically changed by the colonial administration. There were three regimes such as Portuguese, Holland, and British can be identified as colonial hegemony in Sri Lanka. But, the British colonial period was most influential regarding local administration and governance. It marked a turning point in local governance and administration in Sri Lanka.

The main purpose of the British colonial administration was to control the Entire Island by dividing

³ Report of the Commission Inquiry Local Government Reforms, 1999. Printed at the Government Publication Bureau, Colombo 01, Sri Lanka.

⁴ -Ibid-

⁵ Report of the Commission Inquiry Local Government Reforms, 1999. Printed at the Government Publication Bureau, Colombo 01, Sri Lanka.

different administrative units. Therefore, they have divided the country into 9 regions and nineteen districts for their administrative purpose. At the beginning of the British colonial period, there was a nature of dichotomy between administration and governance. British had established a strong Administrative network in the entire country by deploying Bureaucracy. Especially, they have established nineteen income districts under the bureaucratic dominations. All those sub-districts were controlled by the Government agents. Each district has been subdivided into small divisions called (Gam Muladani) and (Sulu Muladani) which were headed by (Mudliyors) the traditional leader of the area. Beginning stage of the British period that newly introduced local government systems were similar to the local government system of Europe. Those institutions were controlled by both government agents as well as Mudliyors (Gam Muladani).⁶ The functions of all those institutions were controlled by those representatives. Also, they have appeared as chairman of those institutions. The nature of the background of those institutions was highly dominant by the government bureaucracy. It was bureaucratic domination rather than democratic governance. Those institutions couldn't work independently. Government bureaucracy always tried to implement the policy of the central government than local institutions through local government bodies. There was no space for ordinary citizens to declare their ideas or participate in local governance activities. Many infrastructure activities have been launched by the central government through those local bodies.

C. Application of the Modern Local Government Concept by the British Government

However, the modern local government system of Sri Lanka was completely designed by the British colonial government for Sri Lanka. There was an informal local government system was implemented under the King domain period. But there was a formal local government system within a legal framework has been established by the British government. The legal foundation of the local government system was laid down by the British colonial administration. Therefore, even today, the British legal foundation has been given direction for the local government and its governance in Sri Lanka. In 1865, the then British Governor Mr. Hercules Robinson reported to the Secretary of state for the British colonies, the difficulties that had to face when implementing all the activities under the central government, and approval was sought to establish Municipal Councils. The establishment of municipal's councils, which was considered a turning point in the history of local government, was initiated in this manner. The governor paying his special attention to Colombo, Kandy, and Galle municipal system, established village councils' ordinance was presented to the secretary

⁶ E.F. Dias Abeyasinghe, W.D. Mahatanthila, W.A. Wijesinghe, D. Rajendram, S.Surya Kumaran, 1959. Local Government, Saman Printers, Maharagama.

of the state for the colonies and the report sent by the governor very clearly reveals the old village council's system (Work Procedure for Local Authorities: 2002).⁷

British colonial government was established as the first local government institutions based on modern democratic principles. It was the first attempt to established formal local government institutions in Sri Lanka. British colonial policy was launched regarding the execute of the revenue and maintain social peace by intervening in the welfare activities of the society. British colonial administration was mainly concerned above two matters. According to that they have built up an administrative system for the entire country. Tressie Leitan says, there was a two kind of strong establishment could be shown under the British colonial government

01. Establishing many government departments

02. Establishing a strong local administrative system. (Tressie Leitan 1991).⁸

During the British colonial period, the British government has been taken the most positive steps regarding reduce corruption, vast and misuse of resources. During 1805 and 1811 there were considerable measures have been taken in this regard under the Governor of Sir Thomas Maitland. It was crucial for the later establishment of governance activities from top to bottom in the Sri Lankan political system. There was a huge polarization was happened regarding Civil Service as well during the British colonial period. The local government system was undergone many changes which mainly focused on a modern local administration system. The existing Gam Sabha system did not cause massive changes because the British needed to strategically maintain these institutions further. Local elite class and their social power were crucially important for the British ruler to achieve their purposes. Therefore, they did not do radical changes suddenly concerning Gam Sabha. But finally, it has become useless institutions at the grass-root governance.

Simultaneously, the British government was urged to introduce a new local government system in urban and sub, urban areas. Especially, the British government was tried to continue the Gam Sabha system in rural areas which mainly fused on rural agricultural activities. For the first time in local government history, a new local government unit was introduced in urban areas within a legal framework. Those Local government units were received new subjects that had to be short out of urban

⁷ Work Procedure for Local Authorities, 2002. Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance, No. 17. Malalasekara Mawatha, Colombo 07.

⁸ Lankan History in British regime, (ed by) G.P.V Somarathne, Tressie Leitan, 1991. Administrative Development in Colonial Period in Sri Lanka, ed by G.P.V Somarathne, Publish by Department of History and Political Science, The University of Colombo.

social aspirations. The British government was passed the Gam Sabha Ordinance under the Irrigation Act number 9 in 1871. Respectively, they have introduced the Road Ordinance Act in 1861 which is mainly targeted in urban areas. In parallel to this act, the government was introduced to new committees concerning sanitary and public health through suburban areas. In the local government history of the country, the first urban councils were established by the British colonial government in the main two cities mainly Kandy and Colombo. Village committees were established under the Village committee's ordinance No. 26 of 1871. This was the most important point of the evaluation of local government law in the country. This act was established a formal administrative and judiciary system for the rural people in Sri Lanka. There are two important institutions were established through this act. One is Village Board (Grama Mandala) and another one is the Village court for the rural communities. First time in the local government history that people received the right to established their local governing village level. At least more than ten citizens could request from the Governor-General to establish a Village council. This was an important point of the country's democracy compare to King Domain regimes. This body is headed by government agents. But 06 qualified people could appoint for this local administrative body. It was the most closed governing body of rural people. Especially, people's common aspirations at the grass-root were fulfilled by the village council and village court.

According to a new legal framework the British government has established two municipals councils in those main cities. Municipal Council Ordinance No. 17 of 1865 was introduced by the British Colonial government. This was most crucial for the local government's history of Sri Lanka. One of the important factors of this event was that a path opens for ordinary people to take part in democratic representation in the local administration process. People representatives through the electoral process lay down in this period. Initially, limited access to electoral rights was introduced by the British colonial administration. It was a remarkable point of introducing democratic principles into the local government system in the country. There is a limited voting system was introduced for ordinary people. That voting right has been subjected to age and property rights. Citizens who are over 21 years with above 100 rupees property rights could enjoy voting rights. Also, a citizen who had over more than 5000 rupees property rights could contest for the urban council election as well. It was a narrowly defined democratic system but compare with the previous nature of the local governance history it was one of the progressive steps. Therefore, in the latter part of the politics, people who lived in grass root could elect their representatives for the local democratic institutions on their administrative purpose. The feudal system and their practices were the main barriers for the colonial government regarding the elaborate of the modern political approach in local; administration and governance. Those conservative feudal

customs and practices had created an unfavorable environment for the democratic establishment in local administration in Sri Lanka. Local elites were purposely continually maintaining this system because they needed to survive and sustain their social and civil status further among the ordinary people. On the other hand, the colonial administration wanted to achieve several socio, economic goals but it has been prevented by those ancient social practices and traditions. Especially, to achieve the economic objectives they had to do some radical changes in the entire social system which was controlled by the noble feudal elites. Colonial administration wanted to transform the existing stressful and backward local administration system because why the colonial government wanted to release State lands that had belongs to elites who controlled the grass root society. The land was one of the important economic factors for the colonial government therefore they needed to release all the state land free from the feudal class from bottom to top. That was one of the pre-conditions of the colonial administration for their purposes. But it has not completed all the necessary conditions for the democratic establishment in local politics or administration in the pre-colonial era. The significant point is British colonial government was established an ennobling environment for the enhance democracy and administration not only at the local level but also at the national level as well.

As a governing body that local government institutions were most prominent under the colonial period. Handling huge lands at the periphery and people's desires were easy for the British through local administration. The first time, introduced the modern local government system on a democratic basis, it was a crucial benchmark of the Sri Lankan local government history concerning changes of socio, economic and political system in the latter which was existing feudal socio, economic and cultural dominations on politics and administration. The major obstacle for this attempt was those noble ruling groups have been functioning in society through their strong social capacity under the King domain period. The existing social structure had strongly combined with this social group and their social practices. British colonial government strategically has launched a dividing rule policy regarding weaken of the noble ruling system which bases on local elites in local administration. British colonial administration was gradually encroached on the local administration system and taken all the socio, economic, and political decision-making power on their hand. It was caused to do a paradigm shift in local administration in Sri Lanka. Because the British wanted to create a new social class that including different features from the existing noble ruling groups. They interpreted this group as the middle class which was emerged from the existing noble group. British could identify their capacity to raise the economy, society, and receiving political power as well. Historian, G.C. Mendis pointed out about this noble class; the middle class differed from all other groups. It crossed all existing group boundaries and drew its members from all of them. It ignored the foundations on

which other groups rested and based itself on wealth and enlightenment. It united for various purposes especially to safeguard and develop its interests (G.C. Mendis: 2005).⁹ It's clear that the structure and role of the class-based society have been changed but social hegemony did not change. Alternatively, it was happened and demonstrated in different perspectives in politics and administration.

a) Nobility, Class and emerging of the ruling Elites at the Local Administration

Especially, in politics, they could do a vital role regarding political development but not democratic development. Although, the new middle class emerged under the colonial period that base on the same socio, economic, and cultural hegemony that was had earlier noble society. British colonial government did not change its policies regarding the recruitment of officers for the local administration. The colonial government was recruited from these officers from the new middle class because they were aware of the role of this class regarding the social change of the Sri Lankan society. Social change was a significant necessity for the British colonial administration to archive its objectives. At the national level, this new middle class was disciplined by western education and new trends of the politics and economy in the globe. Therefore, strategically, all respectable posts were given to these new elite groups. Patrick Pebbles pointed out, The British consciously selected those men they considered the highest status individual for each position increased, and the British became increasingly selective concerning social status (Patrick Pebbles: 1995).¹⁰ Colonial government has chosen leaders for the local administration from these groups for their administrative process. Because all of the new elites pro-reformist. Tissa Fernando coated by Patrick Pebbles, expressed ideas, the new elite as those whose English education enabled them to hold a position of responsibility in the administrative, political and professional life of Ceylon (Tissa Fernando, Patrick Pebbles: 1995).¹¹ However, the administrative hierarchy in the Kandyan region was the chief headmen (Disawa) Superior headmen (Ratamahattaya) and In charge of a unit known as Rata and Korala, s respectively. The native headmen performed a wide variety of functions on behalf of the colonial government (Bandarage: 1950).¹² All those positions were held with considerable power and authority in the grass-root administration under the British colonial government.

⁹ G.C. Mendis, 1944. *Ceylon under the British Rule*, Laurier Books Ltd. October 1, 2005.

¹⁰ Patrick Pebbles., 1995. *Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*, Navarange, Booksellers and Publishers, RB-7 Inderpuri, New Delhi 12.

¹¹ -Ibid-

¹² Asoka Bandarage., *Colonialism in Sri Lanka the Political Economy of the Kandyan Highlands, 1833-1886*. 1983.,

Lakehouse Investment Ltd, Book Publishers, 41, W.A.D. Ramanayake Mawatha, Colombo 2.

Gradually, the British government presented some political reforms regarding the change of the authoritative power of the elite class not only in local administration but also at the national level. In 1924 the British government was introduced the village council act with amendments that had extensive powers to prepare laws. The first time in history, according to the village council act that the chairman of the council was appointed through the election. That is a new trend vs. the traditional selection method of the leader of the council. Also, the functions of the village councils were restructured by the British colonial government. The British government was introduced new functions such as property ownership, marker, water supply, development of thoroughfare, and public service ext. Introduction of Colebrook-Cameron reforms was introduced by the colonial government in 1831 that reforms had provided several pre-conditions for socio, economic changes in the colonial society in Sri Lanka. But it was clear that the new elite class already dominated of existing social foundation. It was caused to create an unresolved vacuum for the democratic administration in local governance.

II. Colebrook Cameron Reforms and Political Nature of the Governing System

However; Colebrook Cameron's reforms emphasized the necessity of the economic, political reforms regarding the political and social modernity of the country. G.C. Mendis in his papers has pointed out; The Colebrook reforms in Ceylon provide a classical example of the application of utilitarian ideas to administrative social and economic problems (G.C. Mendis 1956).¹³ British expectations were polarized with such new elite domination. Result of this new social layer that a new trend has become in Politics as a new perspective. Most important changes in social and politics have emerged with the introduction of limited voting rights for the people under the Colebrook – Cameron reforms. But this democratic privilege was narrowly defined at the beginning stage. Therefore, this was enjoyed by the elite class only. The right to vote was subjected to the many pre-conditions such as wealth, education, social status, property ext. that also reflected the social hegemony of the existing society. Only the selected group of people was qualified for the votes. But, in this case, the term "citizens" cannot be justified under this kind of condition. This was completely violating modern democratic principles. The right to vote was subjected to some conditions such as income, property, and education. This is a strong undemocratic nature by comparing modern principles of democratic theory and practices. This trend was applied to local politics as well; therefore, ordinary people could not actively participate in politics in terms of the "right to vote". All those opportunities were taken by the elite class.

¹³ G. C. Mendis (ed.): *The Colebrook-Cameron papers: documents on British colonial policy in Ceylon, 1796–1833*. 2 Vols. lxx, 404 pp.; ix, 416 pp. London: Geoffrey Cambridge, Oxford University Press, Indian Branch, 1956.

They had completed all preconditions requirements which need to use to vote in politics. But, an important point of this event is that it was a benchmark of local governance and administration in Sri Lanka. It was encouraged local politics towards democratic application through appointing representatives in their institutions on behalf of the people. It was influenced the citizens with regard latter part of democratic development in local administration in Sri Lanka. The reality of this administration was the ruling class was represented for their interests but not the interests of the ordinary people. British colonial government needed to convert new noble groups who depend on the plantation economy.

Strategically point of the colonial government was that group to use as reformists to escalation of socio, political and cultural reforms towards favorable to the plantation economy. Interest in this new ruling class also was business-oriented. They expected to build up their business especially towards the Commercial plantation economy under the policies of the colonial government. But local people were completely dependent on the agrarian economy in rural society. One of the main pieces of evidence of weak democracy that lack of participation of the general public in administration caused to lack of development in the rural agrarian sector due to less consideration by the governing body of the elite representatives. The local administration system had marginalized and neglected the general public at the grassroots. Such a system excluded the public from the administration or governance process at the grass root. There was no compromise between the administration and people or representatives and citizens. That practical aspect of the dominant authoritative governing power of the social elite class has been challenged in the latter part of the colonial administration. Introducing the plantation economy that previous elite society and their social status was converted into a new paradigm. During the period of British administration that the colonial government tried to abolish tyrannical type social structure from the Sri Lankan grass-root administration. On the other hand, it could be identified as an emancipation of the society from the feudal governing system in Sri Lanka which was an ordinary citizen were victimized by these feudal ruling class and their politics. After the collapse of the Kandyan Kingdom, from the beginning stage to the end of the colonial era, there was a strong objection that erupted against concerning British colonial social reforms from the existing feudal elites. Since the beginning, the British colonial government strategically used that internal conflict that had erupted between the king and his subordinates regarding ownership of the properties. Also, in the latter, they used the economic interests and social status of the elites to shot out this problem. However, the British colonial Government was introduced most formal local government bodies in the main two cities such as Colombo and Kandy. For the first time in Sri Lankan Local government history that nine representatives were appointed by the people including five members were appointed by the government in 1866. This is the first time

that establishes the formal local government bodies in the colonial period. Gradually, this system has been spreading to the main cities. The same municipal council was established in Gall city in 1895. Meanwhile, there was an important incident was happened regarding Colombo municipal council. That was an amendment brought regarding the appointment of the members by the government for the municipals. According to the amendment, that recommendation was all the members has to be appointed by the people of the area. This was a great successful event regarding local government history and their democracy in Sri Lanka. Respectively, municipal councils have been established in other main cities such as Jaffna, Negombo, Nuwara Eliya, Kurunegala in 1947. Also, one of the significant points of this event was women qualified for the votes regarding the appointment of the members in local councils. It was a positive turn out of democratic governance in the local government system in Sri Lanka. The colonial government could succeed in their reforms easily with the support of these new elites but they become as most powerful political elites in the latter part of the local politics.

The most important result of this process was that all the traditional elites have converted into a new commercial class. G.C Mendis says British governor use diverse methods to reduce the powers of the Mudliyors and to bring the civil servants into close touch with the people, Fredrick North back the Nindagam given to the Mudliyors for their service and deprived them of the sovereign powers which they exercise in such a village (G.C. Mendis 1944).¹⁴ Newly created government service adopted all the administrative activities from bottom to top. Sometimes this civil service consisted of British as well as Sinhalese who come from the new middle class. These new classes led the society for the next era by growing up cohabitation with the British colonial government. The new commercial class has provided necessary socio, economic and political leadership for the local administration in Sri Lankan society under the British colonial administration. There was a big change was happened in local administration activities under the colonial period between 1930 and 1947. British needed to do massive structural change', especially, regarding politics and administration activities in the grass root society. The British government wanted to start this process at the bottom level because traditional customs and laws had deep-rooted in local politics and administration.

In the beginning, the British did not want to introduce real democratic rights for the Sri Lankan grass root society. They had only one interest that was to establish a favorable administration system regarding their commercial purposes. One of the important obstacles for them could be shown that is existing traditional socio, economic, and political patterns had been blocked the rights of ordinary people. Therefore, they could not

¹⁴ G.C. Mendis, 1944. *Ceylon under the British Rule*, Laurier Books Ltd. October 1, 2005.

overcome their rights beyond the elite governing body. This also impacts the original objective of the British colonial government. British needed to establish a liberal labor market and other per conditions for their main purpose. On the other hand, ordinary people could not overcome Rajakariya (Corvee Labor) which is one of the main social barriers where a person could not archive social mobility in her or her capacity. The existing social system was the main determination with regard determined the qualification for the person who wants to be as a partner of the politics, economy, or administration. The social life of the people was decided by the existing traditions customs and beliefs. Positions and professional life are decided by the existing social criteria. It was reflected in a hereditary perspective. Therefore, this perspective was blocked the social mobility of the people in the grass root. This was a major aristocratic barrier for the village citizens to enter politics or administration. It was a major block regarding the social activities of the ordinary mass. British wanted to breakdown this system by introducing a modern commercial economy and their cultural and social attitudes.

As mentioned earlier, Local administration and democracy have faced some radical changes in 1831 under the Colebrook Commission reforms. It was remarkable in 1898 because the British government introduced the Regional Boards System under Act No. 13 in 1898. The important point of this board was that for the first time in Sri Lankan Local Government history the Government Agent was appointed as a chairman on this board. Besides, six members consisted of this board. Three representatives were appointed from the people and the other three members were from the public service (Guruge Lionel: 2008).¹⁵ General observation in this regard that the local administration body was concentrated only on the delivering of services and collecting taxes from the people who live in urban areas. It was keenly demonstrated that bureaucratic domination was gradually established in the local administration system under the new reforms of the colonial Government. Functions of local government institutions were narrowly defined by the existing political necessity. On the other hand, a new approach was demarcated in the local administration system by the British Colonial government during their tenure.

Further, in the 19th century, the main purpose of the British colonial government was the democratization of the local government system in Sri Lanka by introducing local government laws. It was confirmed by the establishment of a commission to an investigation of the existing local government bodies. According to this commission report that Local Government Act No. 11, 1920 was passed by the constitutional council. With this act, except urban councils that all other areas have been divided into three institutions such as Urban District Council, Rural District Council, and Common District

Councils with giving equal power and authority. This was one of the important landmarks of the evaluation of the modern local institutional system in Sri Lanka.

A. Donoughmore Reforms, Universal Suffrage, and Local politics and Administration

The most notable event was the introduction of universal suffrage for the ordinary people by the British colonial government in 1931. In 1931, the British government brought the Donoughmore Commission to find out facts and feasibility regarding further enhance of democratic reforms in the Sri Lankan political and administrative structure. This commission was gathered information from various sources. The commission was focused middle class on their investigation and obtains recommendations regarding the enhancement of the political and local administration capacity of the country. In the Commission reports, there was a most important recommendation that has been given by the commission that is voting rights (Universal Franchise) for the entire people of Sri Lanka. Donoughmore Commission has given the most positive sets of recommendations that were an impact on the development of democracy and administration at the bottom to top in Sri Lankan politics and governance. Following recommendations has been made by the Donoughmore Commission,

- a) Appointment of an Executive Committee to formulate policy on the development of local government
- b) The establishment of a department of local government
- c) The organization of this department as a reserve of experience in administrative and technical expertise and thereby: -
 - i. To assist local authorities and
 - ii. To prepare proposals to broaden the scope of local government service
- d) Establishment of new institutions and reorganization of existing institutions.
- e) All representatives of local authorities to be elected by popular vote
- f) Formulation of qualifications of candidates parallel to those for candidates for membership of the state council (Report of The Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms: 1999).¹⁶

This was the most progressive approach to the democratic establishment and strengthens of local administration from the bottom to top in Sri Lankan society. The British government desired to take ordinary people into politics and give them active participation in the administration body through voting rights. It was indicated that the entire elite society and their agents were

¹⁵ Namasiwayam, 1970, the Legislatures of Ceylon, Education Department of Sri Lanka.

¹⁶ Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms, 1999. Printed at the Government Printing, Sri Lanka.

strongly opposed to this decision which had been taken by the colonial government. It is clear; this is the reality of democracy and administration of the power elites in not only local but also national administration in Sri Lanka by the time. Simultaneously, the British government had set up a local political body which bases on principles of modern democratic principles. Under the Donoughmore Commission's report, the British government had appointed a commissioner with authority and power for the local administrative sphere which had concentrated all the institutional body subjected to him (Lionel Guruge: 2008).¹⁷ This event was also complicated because power and authority were concentrated into to single organ. But the important point was people could appoint their leaders in their local governance body through Votes. But the reality was completely different from the existing situation at the time. The local elite had established their social power in the entire society through their social capital and civil status. Especially, local politics was dominated by these elites' groups. Most lands were belonged to under this middle class and they could handle a considerable amount of the local economy in this capacity. They could handle the labor market and the agrarian sector by using their social capital capacity. Regional elites were derived from the upper caste so they could manipulate people's interests on this matter as well. When political power comes to the bottom those elites could gain power in their hand by using their social and civil power. But this situation has been challenged by the universal franchise which was a demarcated crucial point regarding the decline of the power and authority of the elite class regarding local administration and governance. However, the Donoughmore Commission's report was set up a unified structure regarding the local government system. Further, Commission has introduced the following measures for the local governance system, mainly reforms included

01. The Programme to motivate Local Administration
02. Assign the powers and duties widely
03. Introduce the system to select the members through the universal franchise
04. Abolition of the various boards appointed relating to various Local Government Activities (Work Procedure for Local Authorities: 2002).¹⁸

The structure of the local government units gradually becomes a strong and modified system. But, the social hegemony of the powerful class was one of the main barriers to enlightening democracy in practice at the bottom level. However, the establishment of the

Department of Local government was highly impacting later enhancement of the local government system. Especially, the central government could control and hale many subjects concerning local government institutions through the department of local government. On other hand, gradually local government could gain expert knowledge for the governing process. Especially, further, regional vice, power, and authority decentralized through the department of local government. District agents had more power concerning local government institutions by the time.

After these reforms that power and authority have been decentralized for specific commissioners on local government. These trends also, positively impact elite base politics in the grass root. People could gain voting rights but the real situation was they could not participate in the decision-making process or administration. The above official authority could serve some kind of independence of the local government units. K.M. De Silva pointed out that, nevertheless, the universal franchise had a powerful influence on the pre-independence political process. First, although the rural vote established its dominance from the outset, universal suffrage strengthened the working-class movement and opened the way for its activists and radicalizing role in Sri Lankan politics (K.M.De Silva:1998).¹⁹ When democracy and governance were strengthened that space for the social capital of the collective mass will be increased then it will impact positively society. Judson Hanifa pointed out that the collective effort of people will impact and improve mobilizing community as a whole and will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts while the individual will find in this associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, a fellowship of his neighbors.....when the people of a given community have become acquired with one another and have formed a habit of coming to gather occasionally for entertainment, social intercourse, and personal enjoyment they by skillful leadership the social capital may easily be diverted of the community wellbeing (Judson Hanifa:2002).²⁰ One of the results of the universal franchise is that people could move each other and become aware of what is politics. On the other hand, there was a space open for civil society. Various political and civil society activities were started at the local level. Therefore, the general public was started to do some influential campaigns against existed local institutions and their representatives.

¹⁷ Guruge Lionel., Local Governance in Sri Lanka, 2008, Community Participation Programme, Center for Policy Alternatives, 24/2, 28 Lane, out flower Road, Colombo 07.

¹⁸ Work Procedure for the Local Authorities, 2002.Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance, 17, Malalasekara Mawatha, Colombo 07.

¹⁹ K.M.de. Silva, (ed) Johan M. Richardson Jr: S.W.R.D. Samarasinghe, 1998, Sri Lanka;

²⁰ Judson Hanifa, by Robert D. Putnam, 2002, Democracies in Flux, The evaluation of social capital in Contemporary society, Oxford University Press, 198, Madison Avenue New York.

B. Early Marxist Movement and British Colonial Administration and Local politics

The best result of this has erupted the early Marxist movement in Sri Lanka. Between 1920 and 1935 the Marxist movement rapidly has been spread to remote areas. One of the main objectives of the Marxist movements was the first result of universal suffrage and strengthens the political confidence of local people through the universal franchise. The main reason behind the rapid expansion of the Marxist movement by the time was less concerned with the local elite or representatives regarding the socio, economic aspirations of the local people. One of the slogans of the Marxist movement was the eradication of poverty and social inequality from rural society. It was a people movement against the capitalist elite middle class and their political homogeny. Colvin R. De Silva who is one of the founder members of the Lanka Samasamaja Party which was the first socialist party (Lanka Socialist Party) in his 2nd annual presidential address on 18th December 1937, he expressed that The growing volume of masses protest has alarmed our ruling classes, and the responsiveness of even the present state Council to organized mass pressure has scared them (Wesley Muthiah, Sydney Wanasinghe: 2007).²¹ These campaigns concentrated in a rural area since 1935 and people were mobilized surrounding these political trends. Initially, those movements had a dual challenge that is against concerning colonial administration as well as local comprador class regarding local administration. This movement emphasized and identified the existing middle class as a local agent for the capitalist movement. People thought that the main threat to their democracy and governance in the middle class and their social hegemony. Since universal suffrage as a popular political implication was become as most prominent in the latter part of the political development of Sri Lanka not only at the national but also in grass-root politics.

C. Influence of Colonial Traditions, Customs on Post-Colonial Political Trends of the Local Politics

Even nowadays, Traditions and customs as well as beliefs are strongly attached to the grass root society. Therefore cast, wealth, and prestige were major necessities to get the political power at the local level politics. This trend has been continued in local politics from different perspectives. The singer was quoted as saying by S.T. Hettige, The pattern did not change much even after the withdrawal of the alien rulers primarily because effective power was transferred to an indigenous elite because of their background and their inevitable closeness to their precedence's, had little in common with the masses of the ex. colonial countries (S.T.Hettige:1984).²² Therefore,

elite political culture has deep-rooted in terms of popular democracy in local politics latter part of the political modernization process in Sri Lanka. In this sense, democratic practices and privileges of the ordinary mass were not realized in the local democratic institutions in pre-and post-colonial Sri Lanka. Therefore, the elaboration of democracy in practice has been manipulated by specific social factors not only in grass root but also in national politics and governance in Sri Lanka. Even post-colonial political culture was dominated by the pre-colonial social groups as a new force in local democratic applications. Especially under the first and second republic constitutions and their electoral provisions has been an encouraged specific social group concerning gain of the power at the grass-root governance. The electoral process of the modern local government system is not favorable for the correct democratic practices. As a new electoral approach the proportional representative system introduced by the 1978 constitutions that have called the local government system for a new paradigm. This new electoral system has been created many negative impacts on local democracy and administration. The new electoral system is a highly competitive and costly electoral process that has created limited spaces for ordinary people to enter local politics.

This electoral system has been encouraged the richest people to come for politics than the general mass. The costly electoral campaign has been created various kinds of undemocratic actions such as corruption, misused of the people's minds, and manipulated the public property at the electoral campaign. Devas says; However, the strength of this citizen's power is dependent on the structure of the electoral system, the regularity of elections, and the extent of genuine voter choice (Rakodi 2001).²³ Politicians who have social capital at the grass-root are handling the voting behavior of the local people by utilizing their social networks and economic capacity. Therefore, Local people don't have space to maintain their rational choice regarding appointing suitable people in their institutions. Those powerful classes have been diverted the democratic voting rights of the ordinary citizens at the grass root. Vote buying and vote bargaining are common features of local-level electoral practices. The latter may offer some scope for the poor to influence outcomes, albeit usually in a clientelist way (Devas 2001).²⁴ Under the new electoral system that a new political trend has been created in the electoral culture of the local government as well as the national level. Patriot client relationships have hegemonies the electoral campaign at the grass root. In this term,

²¹ Wesley Muttiah, Sydney Wanasinghe, 2007, Colvin R De Silva; Selected Speeches 7 Writings, A socialist Publication, 12, Parakumba Place, Colombo, 06.

²² S.T. Hettige, 1984, Wealth, Power and Prestige, ministry of high education, Sri Lanka.

²³ Rakodi C.2001. Urban Politics: Review of the Literature. Urban Governance Partnership and Poverty Research

WP30. International Development Department, University of Birmingham; Birmingham.

²⁴ Governance and Poverty: Lessons from a study of Ten Cities in the South: A Policy Briefing Paper for Donors, Government and Practitioners. University of Birmingham: Birmingham, UK.

citizens have become politically victimized in front of the politician.

The right of the vote has become an object such as buying and selling at the market. Citizens have become as client lists. It has created an electoral deal between citizen and politician beyond the principles of ethical democratic politics. As agents' electoral candidates are delivering various charities and services for the target citizens in the local areas. Sometimes, politicians are giving psychological bribes to ordinary people. Money is the most important tool for bribes in the local electoral campaign at the grass-root elections. Most rural areas are still suffering under the poverty line. The economic difficulties of the people have been complicated by the rational choice of the voters in the local government politics. Therefore, Charities such as shelter, agricultural equipment, domestic items, and appearing for the public event at the family level such as a funeral, weddings are common strategies of the candidates at the local government election campaign in Sri Lanka. All those actions have been complicated democratic rights (including voting right) of the ordinary people in their local government system. On the other hand, this electoral system and their political culture have opened space for the families to bring in to politics than ordinary mass. The new political trend in local administration in Sri Lanka is that representatives are coming from the same family background. That is like a hereditary system that was established under the King's ruling system. This trend has seriously impacted the democratic governance at the grass-root politics in Sri Lankan society. Due to this trend corruptions, briberies, have been increased in recent history. Max Weber who is a pioneer scholar says, Liberal parliamentary – Pluralism, class compromise, and leadership democracy with an economic base upon private ownership – are also strictly contemporary (David Beetham 1985).²⁵ The sociological perspective of family politics can be examined through Webern ideology that is the best approach to examine the existing situation at the ground level politics in Sri Lanka.

Further, Webber's argument pointed out by Devas that family-centric politics always encouraged a monopolistically environment in the given society. Underline in this distinction was the more general assumption that what matters in politics, as elsewhere few people of the top, indeed oligarch is inevitable (Devas 2001).²⁶ Local politics of Sri Lanka has been hegemonies by the elite class or specific group of people again. Therefore, governance and citizen participation in local

administration has become an unrealized phenomenon. There are social elites who have dominant economic and social spheres that have done significant influence regarding local administration for a long period. All the social capital has been concentrated into those elite's classes. Therefore, the elite's behavior also a prominent factor concerning the backward nature of the local administration and governance. Max Weber who is prominent German scholars coughed by David Beetham says, Universal suffrage has seen the right of the property and cultural heritage of liberalism threaten by too active a popular involvement in the political process or too serious an encroachment upon the independence of economic and political elites (David Beetham 1985). Weak civil society has created a favorable environment for dominance in politics and governance by this elite social class at the grass-root Sri Lankan local administration sphere. Therefore, the changing process of society has not positively impact ordinary citizens or their political participation in local political institutions. Finally, that concept of democratic governance or administration is not giving meaningful reality to Local government practices in pre-or post-independence contexts.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka is one of the democratic countries in South Asia that has been practicing democratic traditions and applications in its political system. Local democracy and governance system of the country has gone a historical timeline with the king domain period, But, the modern system of the local democracy and governance was reshaping by the colonial administration during the period of the British colonial period. Local democracy and governing systems were determined by the existing ruling pattern of the country. During the period of the King's domain, the shape and functions of the local government bodies were specified by the king and his subordinated class. There is a democracy rather than a feudal system regarding local institutions. Meaning of the democratic governance is derived from the massive participation of the people in the governing process. But, during the period of King's domain, it was not properly happened in Sri Lankan local democracy and governance. This nature was radically changed out of the colonial administration. Especially, the British colonial period put the benchmark regarding reshaping local democracy and governance systems in Sri Lanka. There were many modern democratic features were introduced by the British colonial for the local politics in Sri Lanka including introducing franchise rights. Many times they have done many reforms from time to time regarding the structure and functions of the local democratic institutions. Changing the pattern of the politics and social practices many structural and social determinations have been changed. Due to these dynamics changes, in practices, functions, and objectives of the local institutions were not worthy for ordinary people due to the interests of the colonial administration. Inside the democratization process that arena of the locality has been developed another platform to perform to lead the local politics and governance on itself. The political platform of

²⁵ David Beetham., 1985. Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 108, Cowley Road, Oxford.

²⁶ Devas N, Amis P, Beall J, Grant U, Milton D, Rakodi C, Satterth Waite D. 2001. Urban Governance and Poverty: Lessons from a study of Ten Cities in the South: A Policy Briefing Paper for Donors, Government and Practitioners. University of Birmingham: Birmingham, UK.

the colonial period was generated a new social class called a modern elite class at the bottom politics in Sri Lanka. Since independence, Local government and institutional bodies have been dominated by these local elite groups beyond the basic principles of democratic values. Cast, wealth, and social status were criteria for doing politics and engaged in the governing process of not only local government institutions but also national politics in Sri Lanka. Even, nowadays, it is very clear that democracy and democratic governance has functioned at the local and national level but practicing is giving a different picture of the reality of the democracy and governance system. This article has been investigated this nature with the support of the other scholarly interpretations.

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