

A Review of Caste Consideration in the Public Service by the Dutch and the British Officials in the Maritime Provinces of Sri Lanka up to 1850.

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The imposition of foreign dominance over the long established social order of the littorals of Sri Lanka had a disruptive effect resulting in a significant change. The society for centuries had been the atomized village community guided by the precepts of Buddhism under benevolent rulers who upheld the traditional law, and a socio-economic and an administrative order based on a system of exchange of labour service defined by traditions of caste. Some of these castes were organised on the basis of essential crafts, occupations and ritual services.

The colonial policy of the Western powers was moulded mainly by the economic and religious considerations. They were interested in obtaining the local produce, at the lowest cost, to be traded in European or Asian markets. The Portuguese, who first held sway over the Sri Lankan littorals, made use of the ready-made machinery of the local rulers for the exploitation of the economic resources of the country. In dealing with the natives the alien rulers were careful not to make sudden changes in the system. But in due course, they stretched the customary services and obligatory duties of the caste system to meet their economic and political requirements. They apportioned the Royal Villages,¹ and *Vihāra*² *Devālagama* among their officials and churches, who in turn enjoyed the dues and benefits hitherto enjoyed by the lordship, the temples and the *Devālayas*, according to the customary usage. The village economy remained unattended and untouched for a considerable time. In due course, in extracting the economic resources for their advantage, steps were taken to reorganise the services advantageous to their cause, looked after them, built upon them, strengthening and formalising their services and organisations, while on some, others new or additional services were imposed, and services of no value to them, were left unattended. The *Mahabadda* or the cinnamon department was a classic example of their patronage while the *Badahela badda* or potters department was an example of neglect. *Mahabadda* was

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01. Royal Villages or *Gabadagam*, were the lands cultivated by the tenants for the King's use and delivered the grain direct to the government stores.
 02. It had been the custom of the King to donate villages and lands for the use of the *Viharas* and *Devalayas*. The King's share of the produce together with the services were thus transferred to them.

regulated in the most elaborate fashion and its industry very well looked after, while the *Salāgama* caste skills attached to it were organised in association with the industry into sub-castes which in turn tended to build up group solidarities unparalleled in the entire caste hierarchy.

The ignorance of the details of the caste system and the reluctance to interfere too much, and the fear of the mass uprisings, kept the foreign officials away from direct control over caste matters leaving the caste headmen many discretionary powers and authority. This in turn led to the great expansion of the power of the headmen at the expense of the service tenants. Many of them became rich through the abuse of service obligations and were claiming higher status, as the headman posts were often conferred on the same families of trust and loyalty, repeatedly, as they were wielding political and economic power as junior partners to the foreign overlords. The overall impact of the Western dominance on the Sri Lankan social order was the obliteration of the traditional social balance and the desecration of the social values and competition among castes for social positions.

Theorists are divided on the definition of caste, some give it a cultural definition while others treat it as a structural phenomenon. In an ethnographic category it refers exclusively to a system of social organisation peculiar to Hindu India, while the sociologists define it as a kind of class structure of exceptional rigidity.³ Caste is essentially a Hindu phenomenon based on Hindu values and beliefs. As Kosambi observes, caste emerged as a rationalisation and smokescreen for gross inequalities in the distribution of power, as an instrument of class exploitation which then perpetuated itself as an increasingly elaborate ideology in the hands of the Brahmins.⁴ The fundamental feature of the Hindu system according to Dumount is the existence of hierarchy based on status independently of political power.⁵ However, a clear cut hierarchical structure of the caste system was not in operation in the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka, at any time of its long history.

The origin of the caste system in Sri Lanka is lost in the obscure past. The concept of caste no doubt came from India with the immigrant groups, never reached the same level of rigidity achieved by its Indian counterpart. Though Hindu influence would have been there before the advent of Buddhism, it never became a ideological base of the social web. Conditioned and promoted by specific local circumstances, the caste system developed in due course in its own form and uniqueness due to features such as the influence of Buddhism, partial isolation from its original home and subjugation to a strong, unified and benevolent monarchical administration.

03. LEACH, E. R., "What should we mean by caste" in Leach, E. R. (Ed.), *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and Northwest Pakistan*, Cambridge University Press, 1960, pp. 1-10. ..

04. KOSAMBI, D. D. *Myth and Reality*, 1962, pp. 15-16.

05. DUMOUNT, L. "Caste, Racism and Stratification, Reflection of a Social Anthropologist," *Contribution to Indian Sociology*, No. 5, October 1961, pp. 20-43.

The Sinhala literati who were familiar with the classical Hindu texts continued to postulate a theoretical fourfold division akin to the Hindu conventional system. Though scattered references to such a division can be found in the classical Sinhala literature, no other independent source testifies the existence of such a division in the Sinhala milieu.⁶

It is highly probable that many Sinhala castes represent immigrant groups having had predetermined status while the rest rose through a division of labour.⁷ The Vijaya myth, according to Prof. R. A. L. H. Gunawardane, recognises the emergence of three major groups of immigrants; namely (i) the Sinhala, the descendants of Sumitta, the brother of Vijaya, (ii) the service castes or the descendants of 1000 families from Madura, and (iii) the *Pulindas* or the descendants of Vijaya from Kuvēni.⁸ The intermittent additions by means of invasions and migrations of the tribal groups kept the members of such groups and functionaries multiplied. The royal prerogative power of assigning to new arrivals the duties and functions to the state have completed the process of their integration. The national oneness and persisting cultural assimilation rested fundamentally in the theoretical acceptance of a common monarch and the integration of the new tribe or groups in the village community interwoven with the social ethos sharing the community ownership of the land.

The South Indian immigrants of the late Anuradhapura period reached the island at a time of higher development of the caste institutions in South India. The fondness shown by the Sinhala rulers and nobility in importing their wives from appropriate families of South India would have further accelerated the influence of South Indian caste consciousness which tended to crystallise the notion given scant mention in the early writings.¹⁰ The reference to the construction of two terraces for the worship at *Samanthakuta* for the men of good birth (*Kulina*) and for inferior castes (*Adhamajati*) by King Vijayabāhu I of Polonnaruwa testifies the cleavage of the society thus getting widened.¹¹

This was further widened during the period between the 12th and 13th centuries when contenders to the throne appeared from the foreign divisions such as *Kaliṅga*, *Pandya*, *Chola*, *Kerala* and the indigenous *Goyigama* caste. Nissankamalla used lithic records to propagate the view that *Kshatriya* status and the adherence to Buddhist faith were essential pre-requisites for kingship.

06. HETTIGE, S. T, *Wealth Power and Prestige*, Colombo 1984, p. 33.

07. RYAN, BRYCE *Caste in Modern Ceylon*, New Jersey, 1953, p. 12.

08. GUNAWARDANE, R. A. L. H. 'The people of the Lion,' *Sinhala Consciousness in History and Historiography* in *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1984, p. 15.

09. DUMOUNT, L. "Homo Hierarchicus," *The Caste System and its Implication*, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

10. RYAN, BRYCE, 1953, p. 11.

11. *Epigraphia Zylanica*, Vol. II, pp. 202-218.

The period after the collapse of the *Rajarata* civilisation witnessed several waves of immigration which brought not only the South Indian linguistic groups like *Demala*, *Malala*, *Kannada* and *Doluwara* (Tulu) but also groups like *Javaka* and other South Asian immigrants. Myths of this period reflect the settlement of such immigrants over different parts of the island.¹³ The professional skills of these migratory groups, the availability of plants, animals and minerals, connected with their longstanding skills and life styles, and the requirements of the local rulers and the society as a whole would have had a bearing on the location of their early settlements.¹⁴ It was also a period of cosmopolitan culture when frequency of six languages was considered to be the desirable accomplishment by the Sinhala scholars.¹⁵

During this period the political stability of the country too had been shaken. The increasing thrust of the expansion programmes of the South Indian empires on Sri Lanka and the gradual drifting of the capitals to the South Western region where several political centres challenging the suzerainty of each other ended up with the emergence of two culturally distinct kingdoms of Jaffna in the North and of the Sinhalese in the South in the fourteenth century. The Jaffna kingdom formed in collaboration with the South Indian empires was rested on a society based on caste concepts that was in vogue in South India.

The consolidation and legitimization of caste in the Sinhala kingdom was primarily a secular function in the hands of the King.¹⁶ The Buddhist priests not engaged in production, had to depend on the laymen. They could not go against the caste traditions operating in the society. However, they disregarded the caste differences in dealing with the laity.¹⁷ However, the growth of monasteries in the early medieval phase of Sri Lankan history as relative independent economic organisations due to the practice of granting property to religious institutions by the royalty and nobility, became active organisations embodying caste principles in support of established distinction.¹⁸ Thus in short, on the eve of the advent of the Western powers, the Buddhist temple organisation became adjusted as the functional part of the feudal caste order, and the Buddhist priests were collaborating with caste.¹⁹

12. GUNAWARDANE, R. A. L. H. 1984, p. 25.

13. OBEYSEKERA, G. "Gajabahu and the Gajabahu Synchronism," A Inquiry into Relationship between Myth and History," *Ceylon Journal of Humanities*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 25-36.

14. GILBERT, WILLIAM H. "Sinhalese Caste System in Central and South Ceylon," *Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. 2 pp. 295-366.

15. The six languages varied from time to time, but generally included Sanskrit, Apabramsa, Maghadhi, Pakrit, Sauraseni and Paisachi. During the Kotte period there is concrete evidence to prove that Tamil was taught in some of the Pirivenas.

16. MALALGODA, KITSIRI. *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 1750-1900, London, 1976, p. 46

17. HETTIGE, S. T. 1984, p. 33.

18. GUNAWARDANE, R. A. L. H. "Irrigation and Hydrolic Society in Early Medieval Ceylon," *Past and Present*, No. 53, 1973, pp. 3-27.

19. HETTIGE, S. T. 1984, p. 36.

In the Northern kingdom of Jaffna, the caste system that had emerged, similar to that of South India, seems to be more rigid and redolent of the hierarchical ethos and features unknown even to the North Indians.²⁰ In Northern India the *Brahmins* dominated the social order but in South India the *Vellala* caste dominated. *Brahmins* provided the *Vellalas* with the ideology they needed to defend the privileges and position of the *Vellalas* as a morally excellent and distinct caste. In public rituals at the temples, *Vellala* donors were rewarded with honours indicating their high status and legitimate rights.²¹

The caste system in the Jaffna peninsula was thus no more than a regional variant within the South Indian pattern. The Dravidian caste system that had emerged in the coastal plains of South India during the early parts of the Christian era and crystallised during the 8th and 9th centuries and radiated around the 10th century had a profound effect when the independent Jaffna kingdom emerged in the 14th century.²² The system was a mixture of Brahminic and non Brahminic social relations in which *Vellalas* were adjudged to stand in public esteem just below the *Brahmins* with a system of agrarian caste relations and statuses that would not be questioned. The status ladder clearly defined in this society, composed of a small segment of *Brahmins* associated with the rituals in *Kovils*, and the dominant majority and the principal landholders and the agriculturists, the *Vellalas* playing a dominant role in the status ladder with a number of small professional castes and the labourers of untouchable rank below them. The *Vellalas* lived like feudal lords with the traditional *Kudimai*²² (right side) and *Adimai*²³ (left side) retinues representing different castes which served them in such a capacity whenever occasion demanded.²⁴ The tenurial system of the Tamils was different from that of the Sinhala areas as there were no big landholders. *Vellalas* held the cultivable lands which were cultivated by the labouring castes for a share of the crop by means of water drawn from the ponds and lived in palmyrah groves. However, well organised outside groups migrated in recent times of history to these areas during the times of political and economic prosperity and started dominating the local institutions and structured them to their advantage.

In the Sinhala areas there was no reference to the untouchable castes or socially disabled groups. The immigrant groups were incorporated into the existing system by assigning specialist roles without any ritual meanings. The new roles were of utilitarian value to the state. They were organised into state

20. PLAFFENBURGER, BRYAN. *Caste in Tamil Culture*, Vikhas Publishing House, 1982, p. 1.

21. LUDDEN, DAVID. "Ecological Zones and the Cultural Economy of Irrigation in Southern Tamil Nadu," *Journal of South Asian Studies*, N.S. 1, pp. 1-13.

22. *Kudimai* represented artisans such as Goldsmiths, Blacksmiths, Coppersmiths, Carpenters and Temple carvers and professional castes such as the potters, masons, washers, and barbers etc.

23. *Adimai* represented the menial labourers such as Navalar, Pallar and Kovia castes.

24. HOCART, A. M. *Caste a Comparative Study*, New York, 1950, p. 7.

25. ROBERTS, MICHAEL. *Caste conflict and Elite Formation—The Rise of the Karawa Elite in Sri Lanka 1600-1931*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 49.

departments or *baddas* for periodic *rajakariya* or corvee service such as the *Kottalbadda*, the artificers department of the *Navandanna* caste, *Madige* or the transport department manned by the Moors and the *Karawa* caste, *Kuruwe* or the elephants department of the *Durāwa* caste and the *Mahabadda* or the Cinnamon department of the *Salagama* caste in addition to those *baddas* already in existence. Each *badda* was organised separately and the mobilisation of the labour services for public works and the command of militia drawn from their ranks were entrusted to the headmen appointed from the same caste. These headmen were entrusted with royal authority and the symbol of power and were relieved of menial tasks.²⁵ The services of these departments were easy to procure as they were clustered around in villages and hamlets.

The ritual functions assigned to some of the older castes made their services indispensable. Those service castes had to render *Tovil*²⁶ at the "Sacramental" ceremonies of the patron, in return they received the customary gifts, the *Divel*.²⁷ For the convenient performance of those services, such caste groups were incorporated in the village or a cluster of villages under their own headmen.

The services allocated to caste groups among the Sinhalese were largely divided according to labour specialisation and were centered around the monarchy which was basically absolute, though circumscribed by the long practised customs and traditions. The requirements of the monarchy or the economic priorities of the state, caused changes in the inherited occupations of individuals and castes. The rise and fall of castes in importance depended to a large extent on the acts of state. However, the caste distinctions would have emerged and stabilised when the groups became culturally and occupationally dependent on one another. Yet a clear cut hierarchical order was not in existence till the advent of the Western powers.

The institution of caste however, existed and exists below the surface of easy visibility and identification by an outsider. A caste can only be recognised in contrast to other castes. The identification of a sub-caste is still difficult. The differences are spoken in confidential tones. The sub-castes often are just as closely intermarried as the other groups with the rest of the inhabitants of the village. To many, caste is a quality in blood and the blood is graded from pure to extremely defecting.²⁹ Many retain the natural love of caste and

26. *Tovil* was the service rendered to the Lord at the sacramental ceremonies according to the caste.

27. *Divel* was the Lands granted to individuals for their maintenance in consideration of certain services rendered or offices held by them.

28. PLAFFENBURGER. 1982, pp. 26-27.

29. YALMAN, NUR. *Under the Bo Tree*, University of California Press, 1967, p. 87.

honour belongs to them. Caste is rarely spoken in public. Therefore, it is difficult for a foreigner to identify with perfectness, the intricate differences operating in silence in the caste system. In the maritime provinces some castes are concentrated in specific areas and the regional differences of castes made it impossible to generalise on some common theme. An ordinary villager is simply unconcerned of the caste of the other in his dealings in his day to day life. Therefore, as rightly observed by Bryce Ryan, any single historical arrangement of Sinhala castes cannot confirm wholly to reality.³⁰

Till the end of the nineteenth century the writings on caste system of the Sinhalese were mostly an act of the foreigners.³¹ They, however, managed to tabulate the main features of the social organisation as they had understood. Fernao de Queyroz says that the Sinhalese carried the external symbols of caste to which each individual belonged. The Lascarín carried his spear bow, shield or firelock as a badge, the husbandman his scythe, the blacksmith a file, the washerman a towel over his shoulder, the carpenter a chisel, the mason a rule, the lace-maker a plane, the goldsmith a scale, the founder a mould, the tailor a pair of scissors, the barber a mirror, the cinnamon peeler a pruning knife, the cornac a hook, so each mechanical workman his customary badge.³² Thus it is evident that the foreign writers like Queyroz managed to identify the occupational and functional roles of the community rather than the castes.

The official records maintained by the foreign powers had a natural inclination towards the justification of the free extraction of labour to meet their economic goals on traditional lines. Under the indigenous system the free services were extracted for a certain limited time from only the head of the household depending on the extent and quality of land held by him, though, there were many able bodied persons in the family.³³ A person who obliged to serve the state or a person or an institution, as the case may be, under this system was not only a labourer, but also a client and as such he was entitled to the affection, generosity and also of the protection of his rights by the master. However, this obligatory part was never in operation under the alien rule. Yet, there were innovations for the extraction of services of the other members of the family and also on new fields of services.³⁴ The Portuguese imposed

30. RYAN, BRYCE. 1953, pp 86-87.

31. The noteworthy writings on caste system of Sri Lanka were:

ROBEIRO in 17.c.

QUEYROZ in 1665-80.

BALDEAUS in 1672.

ROBERT KNOX in 1681.

VALENTYN in 1726.

CORDINER in 1807.

DAVY in 1821.

32. QUEYROZ, FERNAO DE. *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, p. 97.

33. REBEIROS' *History of Ceilao*, translated and edited by Pieris, P. E., Colombo, 1909, p. 106.

34. ROBERTS, MICHAEL. 1983, pp. 51-52.

Angabadda or the poll tax on all males of the *Salāgama* families and a decree from Goa later declared them as the descendants of slaves brought as captives.³⁵ The males above 12 years of age were made liable to deliver a quantity of one pingo or 56 to 60 lbs. of peeled cinnamon annually free of charge. This amount increased gradually depending on the age and the physical condition of the peeler up to a maximum of 11 pingos which dwindled at the old age. If the quantity thus collected fell short of the demand the peelers were further obliged to peel extra cinnamon for which some payment in money was made under threat of punishment. Thus, at the end of the seventeenth century, the original weavers, now turned peelers had to stay in the woods for more than eight months of the year.³⁶

The Western powers, perhaps influenced and experienced by the Indian caste system, seem to have been carried away by the principles of high and low caste notion in dealing with the natives. The natives did not feel the difference immediately as long as their matters were dealt with by their own caste headmen. The orders for the extraction of services were channelled through the headmen of the same caste who also supervised and kept the details of such services. However, the competition for social superiority among the different castes was strong within the headman system.

Thus the records kept by the alien powers was an account of the adjustments made to the system without due regard to its origins and age-old customs and traditions. The non-availability of the records of the native rulers allow no room for a comparison.

The mass of literature on the caste system that came up at the end of the nineteenth century was of a polemical nature. This upsurge was due to the official patronage extended on one segment of the caste system.³⁷ The other castes vehemently protested through pamphlets, brochures and petitions while the privileged caste tried to justify its claim. On the whole, these publications show the natural bias of their authors. It is therefore, difficult to free the subject from obscurity in treatment.

Sri Lanka was predominantly an agrarian society. Throughout its history it had the capacity to amalgamate all migratory groups into one homogeneous body within the Sri Lankan cultural entity. Agriculture was the main source of existence of everybody, looked after by the village community. The *rajakariya* system was the mechanism which combined the land tenure and the caste services for the benefit of the state and community. Everybody, except the monks were bound to perform service to the state.

35. QUEYROZ. p. 1019.

36. KOTALAWALA, D. A. *The Dutch in Ceylon 1743-1766*, (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of London,) 1968, p. 68.

37. For details read De Silva, M. U. "Some aspects of the Social Issue in the Public Administration in Sri Lanka in the Nineteenth Century." *Sri Lanka Archives*, Vol. IV (Forthcoming)

In the absence of details of the system that was in operation during the period when the Western powers assumed control, it is probable to assume the system that was in action during the Kandyan kings and the continuation with slight modifications, of the same system that was in operation during the sixteenth century. Under the Kandyan monarchy the *rajakariya* was basically three fold, i.e. (i) the compulsory labour service for the work of public utility and military service in times of war and crisis, (ii) various services to state, temples and individuals based on caste, (iii) the *Kada rajakariya* or pingo duty or the land tax. The compulsory labour services were extracted for the construction, upkeep or restoration of the work of public utility such as roads, bridges, canals, *ambalams* and resthouses during normal times and for war during invasions. The headmen of the caste supervised the labour services under royal command. The pingo duty was the tax paid in kind and cash for the officials and the royal treasury.³⁸

The administrative apparatus of the indigenous rulers were of three kinds. *Firstly*, there were the institutions and offices connected with the monarchy and the royal household which included the key positions of finance, defence and military services and other positions dealing with the public duties of the king including the supplies and the personal comforts. These offices were often held by the King's trustworthy favourites, and kinsmen. When the foreign powers assumed control over the native administration these posts were done away with. *Secondly*, there were the *baddas* or departments managing specialised labour services organised on caste basis. *Thirdly*, there was the administration of provinces or *Disavonies*, *Districts* or *Korales* and the villages each under a separate head varying in power, rank and social status. The Portuguese appointed their own men to supervise *baddas* which were found economically useful to them and appointed Portuguese officials as *Disaves* to administer regions with subordinate officials chosen from the converted natives of influential families.

The Portuguese pledged to continue the administrative system that was in operation by upholding the traditions of caste. But in practice they did not compile the laws, traditions and usages in operation, for the guidance of the alien managerial staff. It was then left to the caprice, to the good or bad conscience of all those who had some authority over the people to treat them as they liked.³⁹ This invariably led to the disregarding of the cardinal ethics of the unwritten law of mutual contract between the ruler and the ruled. The deterioration of the fabric and the confusion in the system was inevitable. To avert the crisis, the new rulers brought in amendments and additions to the system along with new interpretations basing their experience on European and Asian systems.

38. Memo on Sources of Revenue in the Kandyan Provinces, Brownrigg to Bathurst, 15 March 1815, Colonial Office (C.O.) 54/55.

39. QUEYROZ. p. 1023.

The ignorance of details of the administration and their understandable reluctance to interfere too much in local matters and for reasons of economy they continued with the headman service. The repeated appointment of headmen from the same families loyal to them would have enhanced the position of these families at the expense of the service tenants. The favours, concessions and honours extended by the colonial masters in due course and the alliance of matrimony and other common interests generated social classes within the caste themselves. Many of them became rich and got used to money economy by means of abusing the service obligation of the people and were following the social habits of the masters, and were gradually claiming higher status as they were now wielding more political and economic power as junior partners to the foreign rule. As Balandier observed it was the political power which organised the legitimate domination and subordination and created its own hierarchy.⁴⁰ It gave official expression to a more fundamental inequality to that of social stratification and a system of social classes established between individuals and groups. Hierarchy is thus a product of history and justify itself by reference to myth.⁴¹

The direct rule of the Portuguese in the coastal belt of Sri Lanka did not last more than half a century.⁴² But it disturbed the social fabric of the natives to a very great extent. As seen earlier, the caste services which were useful to their economic exploitations and defence purposes were looked after and sometimes regulated while the others were compelled to serve officials on circuit in various capacities and to provide lascorins for war and guard duties and coolies for other needs sometimes in violation of the traditions.⁴³

The Dutch gained the political hold on a reduced area on "trust"⁴⁴ to face the immediate problem of depopulation and devastation of the lands on

40. BALANDIER, GEORGE. *Political Anthropology*, p. 78.

41. *Ibid.* p. 81.

42. LORENCO DE ALMEIDA, the first Portuguese sailor to land in Sri Lanka was drifted ashore accidentally in 1505. From 1518 the Portuguese had a permanent fort in Colombo for trading purposes and their political and religious purposes. From 1527, they supported the Kings of Kotte in their struggle with Seetawaka which they gradually intensified. By 1543 they became the advisors in selecting a successor to the Throne. By a deed of gift of King Dharmapala the Portuguese succeeded to the throne of Kotte in 1597. From 1597-1638 they ruled the maritime provinces of the Kotte Kingdom to which they annexed the Kingdom of Jaffna in 1619. Between 1638-1658 the Dutch waged war in support of Rajasinghe II of Kandy against the Portuguese and finally ousted them from Sri Lanka with the capture of Jaffna fortress in 1658.

43. QUEYROZ, p. 1020.

44. Rajasinghe II (1635-1687) of Kandy invited the Dutch to oust the Portuguese from the coastal belt of Sri Lanka on a contract and assured them the payment of the war expenses and to confer trading rights in Sri Lanka. However, the Dutch misinterpreted the clauses of the agreement through a translated copy of the original agreement and held the Portuguese fortresses on the sly. Read for details, K. W. Goonawardene, *The Foundations of Dutch Power in Ceylon 1638-1658*, Amsterdam, 1958.

the orders of King Rajasinghe II of Kandy (1636-1681).⁴⁵ This largely upset the settlement pattern of the traditional villages and the caste composition. The Dutch resettlement was a tedious task⁴⁶ and some of the settlers were granted favours and concessions.⁴⁷ "Many people who were liable to render services to the government" according to Van Goens (Senior)⁴⁸ "were diverted to other purposes".⁴⁹ However, by the end of the seventeenth century the resettlement was complete and by the middle of the eighteenth century the Dutch managed to complete the compilation of the *Thombos*⁵⁰ of the area and the Dutch were in a position to extract the caste services of the subjects, without the advice of the native headmen.

The compilation of the *Thombos* was a tedious task confronted with many obstacles. According to Governor Schreuder the registration was hampered by the self-interest of the various social groups.⁵¹ The headmen did their utmost to hinder the work and tried to mislead the Commissioners who were entrusted with the work of such compilation. Some bribed the Commissioners to enter their claims favourably.⁵² The Kandyan King forced the

45. When Rajasinghe II found that the Dutch were not acting in terms of the agreement, he circumscribed their activities to the forts in occupation until the Portuguese were driven away and later went on a policy of devastation and depopulation of the area to make them uneconomical to the Dutch. Read for details, S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon 1658-1687*, Amsterdam, 1958.

46. Memoir of Rijkloff Van Goens (Senior) 1663, translated and edited in 1932.

47. Instruction to Disave of Colombo, 1656-1665, p. 23.

48. RIJKLOFF VAN GOENS (Senior) who assumed duties as the Special Commissioner to administer the territories under Dutch control in Sri Lanka organised the revenue and economic activities for the Dutch. When Rajasinghe II was devastating and depopulating the coastal areas, Van Goens retaliated and applied a strong policy against the King of Kandy. He and his son Van Goens (Junior) (1664-1675) followed this aggressive policy which was beneficial to the Dutch to re-establish their hold and exploit the resources of the coastal areas for the Dutch.

49. Memoir of Rijkloff Van Goens (Senior) 1663, p. 8.

50. The *Thombos* were the registers maintained by the Dutch for the extraction of revenue and services from the inhabitants of the coastal belt of Sri Lanka. They were based on the '*Lekammiti*' of the indigenous rulers. The Dutch compiled three kinds of *Thombos*, the head *thombo* or the list of persons in a household, the land *thombo*, the list of lands possessed and enjoyed by the household, the school *thombo*, or the registers of school children maintained by the schoolmasters. The entries in the head *thombo* consisted of the names of the persons, their age, caste and obligatory service and the land *thombo* contained the list of lands enjoyed by the household and their tenure, and the dues to the government. The school *Thombo* carried the details of the names of the parents, whether married, age, date of birth, date of baptism, date of entry to school, the date of marriage, date of leaving the school and the death.

51. Memoir of Jan Schreuder, 1762, translated and edited in 1946, p. 64.

52. Member of Joan Gideon Loten, 1757, translated and edited in 1935, p. 22.

people to rise up in revolt.⁵³ The ignorance on matters relating to such registrations on the part of the Governor and the Disaves and the diligence of the Commissioners too hampered the progress of the registration.⁵⁴ Severe punishments were ordered for false declarations and the native officials were ordered to be present during the registration.⁵⁵ In the registration process the inhabitants were compelled to disclose all their gardens and lands and also to prove their rights to the *paraveni* and *accommodations* within the space of six months, either by documentary evidence or by testimony of old and trustworthy men before the chief headman and the Korala.⁵⁶

The compilation of the *thombos* with details of caste services for the guidance of the officials gave a new impetus to the caste system. The evolutionary process had given way to statutory laws exacted by an alien power block. The Dutch Political Council of Colombo⁵⁷ commenced handling the caste matters by resolutions and *placaarts*.⁵⁸ The marriage laws enforced by the Dutch defined the social positions and the right of inheritance of the offspring. The marriages solemnized in the Dutch Reformed Church gave birth to legitimate children while those who followed the traditional customary way⁵⁹ and did not go to the church for such solemnization gave birth to illegitimate children.⁶⁰ Only the legitimate children had the right of inheritance to the property of their parents.⁶¹ The caste of the children born to the parents of two different castes were defined in terms of the lowest of the two.⁶² This was to secure the services of the "lower castes" which were of much use to the Dutch. The distinction of the dress of the different castes and the right of inheritance were defined by a *plakkaat* of 18, August 1686.⁶³ The distinction

53. Memoir of Schreuder, 1762, p. 11.

54. Memoir of Julius Stein Van Gollenesse, 1751, translated and edited in 1974, p. 55.

55. Memoir of Disave De Costa, 24 August 1764, Colonial Office (C.O.) 54/124.

56. Memoir of Schreuder 1762, p. 63.

57. The Political Council of the Dutch in Sri Lanka or the 'POLITIEKE RAAD' of Colombo was the supreme political authority of the Dutch administration within Sri Lanka. It was chaired by the Governor and had eight other members. The Council met in ordinary and secret sessions.

58. *Plakkaats* were the proclamations, publications and orders of the Dutch government issued to the general public of the colony. They were posted up at public buildings as Gazette Notifications of the present day.

59. The marriage in Sri Lanka was a social contract on mutual understanding. With the consent of the parents, a bridegroom took a bride home or stayed at her place as husband and wife. It was never registered before any legal authority. Sometimes a marriage was solemnized on a grand scale, or otherwise with the common consent they lived as husband and wife.

60. Such entries are very common in the Head *Thombo*.

61. GOONAWARDENE, K. W. *Dutch Religious Policy Towards Buddhism and Some Aspects of Religious and Social Changes in Sri Lanka*, 11th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia 1988 (IAHA), Colombo, Session 1 B. p. 12

62. Dutch Political Council Minutes of Colombo, 21 May 1770, Sri Lanka National Archives (SLNA) 1/160.

63. SLNA. 1/21.

of dress was further elaborated by another resolution adopted on 4th August 1758.⁶⁴ Soon many seem to have avoided the caste obligations by the change of dress. Steps were taken to prevent such practices by enforcing the provisions of a resolution of 11th October 1759.⁶⁵ To wear a European dress a native had to produce a certificate under the Burgher Act.

The policy of replacing outmoded or unnecessary services with useful ones to serve their economic purposes made the caste services more complicated. The *Mahabadda* of the *Salagama* caste, the *Madige badda* of the moors and the *Karawa* caste, the *Kuruwe badda* of the *Durawa* caste and the *Rada-badda* of the washers were basically important for their economic exploitation. Therefore, the Dutch took meticulous care to regulate the services of these castes and extended preferential treatment to them while the other castes were compelled to serve officers on circuit and to provide lascorins and coolies for the government service.

Throughout the period of the Dutch rule the *Mahabadda* remained important. Rijkloff Van Goens (Junior) referred to cinnamon as the "bride around whom all of us danced"⁶⁶ in Sri Lanka. Trade or transport of cinnamon other than of the authorised persons were prohibited.⁶⁷ The smallest piece of land bearing the cinnamon plant was not alienated or granted for planting and cultivation.⁶⁸ Lists of villages, pattus and korales yielding cinnamon was compiled and kept separate under special care.⁶⁹ A prohibition enforced on the peeling or selling of cinnamon by private persons.⁷⁰ Lists of *Salagama* families were prepared and annually checked and amended showing their class, name, condition, profession, office, duties, qualifications, domicile, village, hamlet, and dwelling house, taking great care that none were left out.⁷¹ To increase the number of Cinnamon peelers the illegitimate children of *Salagama Durayas* lascarins, *Illandarias* and *Patoabendas* were brought up as peelers.⁷²

64. SLNA 1/118. The Dress of the Washer Caste was defined by the motion of the Political Council of Colombo, 28 June 1757, SLNA 1/117.

65. C. O. 54/124.

66. Memoir of Van Goens (Junior) 1675, p. 8.

67. Instructions to the Superintendent of Cinnamon Department, edited and translated by Sophia Peters, Colombo, (Instructions Cinnamon Department), p. 50.

68. Political Council Minutes, 4 August 1758, SLNA 1/112.

69. Do, 12 September 1766, SLNA 1/137.

70. Do, 23 May 1705, SLNA 1/31.

71. Instructions to Cinnamon Department, p. 48

72. *Ibid.* p. 57.

According to Jan Schreuder, the Dutch Governor of Sri Lanka—1762 “there was no product in the East or West of the Indies in respect of which such great difficulty, opposition, and vexation were experienced in its collection and transport as the Cinnamon”.⁷³ Therefore, the *Salagama* caste had to be ruled in a peculiar manner in order to make them perform their duty.⁷⁴ They were not allowed to marry outside the caste without the permission of the company.⁷⁵ The *Salagama* caste people did not have the right to sell or alienate the lands granted to them, but their heirs inherited them. By an order such sales were made null and void, and both the seller and the purchaser were severely punished.⁷⁶ Besides, the fields given to the *Salagama* peelers for their maintenance, they also received, when going for peeling, one *parra* of rice and a *medide*⁷⁷ of salt per month and a quarter of arrack daily and when the harvest was complete a piece of cloth of 12 cubits.⁷⁸ They were also free from all tolls or passage money both for themselves and for their articles they transported for sale to and from their villages.⁷⁹ They were allowed to fetch salt from the *levayas* or salt pans free of charge and transport them in *dhoneyys* to their villages.⁸⁰

Salagama caste was outside the jurisdiction of the normal courts. For general administration they were placed under the captain of *Mahabadda*. However, his authority with regard to punishment was limited. All offences and serious disputes reported to him were to be referred to the chief authorities of the nearest station for adjudication. The Captain had to inform such cases to the Governor, Commander of Galle, the Dissave of the district after which the Fiscal had attended to the matter. Matters of minor importance which could be disposed of by fines, whacks with fist on the back, or putting in shackles and such like punishments were left to be dealt with by the Captain. However, such minor complaints on the *Vidanes*, the chief and the sub *Durayas*, *Durayas*, *Canganees*, clerks and schoolmasters were to be referred to the next authority as they were considered injurious to be exposed to the mockery and scorn of those over whom they had supervision.⁸¹ However, by the end of the Dutch rule the head of the Cinnamon Department exercised exclusive magisterial authority over the *Salagama* caste of the six districts extending from Chilaw to Hambantota.⁸²

73. Memoir of Schreuder, 1762, p. 13.

74. Instructions to Cinnamon Department, p. 43.

75. Political Council Minutes 23 March 1753, SLNA 1/102.

76. Instructions to Cinnamon Department, p. 46.

77. According to Valentyn is equal to seven quarters.

78. Memoir of Van Rhee, 1697, p. 43.

79. *Ibid.* p. 48.

80. Memoir of Schreuder, 1762, p. 79.

81. Instructions to Cinnamon Department, p. 52.

82. Evidence of John Willbeoff, the Superintendent of Cinnamon Plantation, 5 May 1829, C. O. 416/5/B. 5.

Salagama caste seems to have been carved out into four classes at the beginning of the Dutch rule which transformed into four stereotyped sub-castes at the end of their rule. During the middle of the seventeenth century there were the *Handarias* or *Poetbennas* or the children of the *Durayas*, the *Arachchies*, the children of the lascarins, the *Decum carrias* or coolies and the *Corondahalias* or the peelers.⁸³ *Handarias* were to take part in the binding of the peeled cinnamon on the order of the Captain and also to take up arms and go to war with the Captain and to protect the cinnamon peelers. They were never employed for cooly work, but had to pay poll-tax. *Arachchies* were to follow their fathers in times of war and employed only in carrying letters, doing errands etc. but were exempted from the poll-tax. However, these *Arachchies* were directly under the Disave and the Governor and the Captain could not remove them without the consent of the Disave and the Governor, though he was to maintain the list of them. The unemployed *Arachchies* were placed under the Captain and were to assist the cinnamon department work. *Decumcarrias* were the coolies and served as canganies, messengers, letter carriers and were bound to serve in all ordinary inferior and servile occupations. They were also exempted from the poll-tax. *Corondahalias* were the real peelers of cinnamon who had to go to the woods and peel cinnamon and pay the *Angabadda* in cinnamon. The *Angabadda* was first demanded at the age of 11 years amounting to 3 stivers or 1/4 of a laryn a year which gradually increased to 48 stivers or 4 laryns. At the end of the eighteenth century the fourfold division of the caste became clearly marked and the gulf between the sections well established.

The collection of cinnamon entrusted to the *Salagama* caste was organised directly under the Governor. Rijkloff Van Goens (Senior) who reorganised the Cinnamon department remarked that hitherto the Captain of the Mahabadda had oppressed those who harvested the fruits of the country and expressed the beholden duty of the Company to protect those who "milk the cow" for them.⁸⁴ Therefore, he placed the cinnamon department under the direct control of the Governor with an European Captain and four *Vidanes*.⁸⁵ The *Salagama* caste living in Velitara, Kosgoda, Madampe, Dadalla, Magalle, and Lanumodara were placed under the *Maha Vidane* of the *Mahabadda*. The second *Vidane* held authority over the *Salagama* caste surrounding Colombo and those living in the villages of Totabadda, Moragalla, Caluwamodara, Calamulla, Potupitiya, Wascaduwa and in around Negombo and was called the *Hoelanbadde Vidane*. The *Salagama* caste people of the Matara district were under the third *Vidane*. The people of Ratgama were under the fourth *Vidane*. To assist these *Vidanes* were the *Maha Durayas* and *Durayas*. By the end of the seventeenth century a separate *Vidane* division was formed for Caluwamodara and the *Salagama* caste people of the Walallavitti Korale and

83. Instructions to Cinnamon Department, pp. 46-48.

84. Memoir of Rijkloff Van Goens (Senior), 1665, p. 19.

85. Instructions to Cinnamon Department, pp. 43-44.

the Pasdunkorale were placed under him.⁸⁶ In addition to these there were three other *Vidane* divisions of non-*Salagama* caste people who were engaged in the peeling of cinnamon. The *Vidane* division of Magamme, comprised partly of the *Hangarama* or the *Wahumpura* caste villages of Galwalamula, Mahagama, Nebada, Hatwatura, and Latpandura in Pasdun Korale, the *Vidane* division of *Demalagattara Hinnava* or *Pannaya* caste people of Dodanpapitiya in the Walallaviti Korale north of Bentota river, and the *Vidane* division of *Tondagattaru* or grass cutters of the village of Walambagala south of the Bentota river.⁸⁷

The lists of cinnamon peelers were annually checked by a committee of two persons including the Disawe of the district appointed by the Captain in April. All *Salagama* caste people were forced to appear in person before this committee which had the right to strike off the disabled persons from the list and bring the tax lighter of the old and include the youths for the service⁸⁸ for the first time.

There were two harvests of cinnamon. The great harvest was from July to September and the small harvest from January to February. The headmen were to collect the peelers and were entrusted with their supervision. Temporary sheds were put up in the cinnamon bearing woods and the headmen had to place guards for the protection of the peelers and the peeled cinnamon. The peelers were sent out in groups of 2, 4 and 6 men and sometimes they were about 4 miles apart of each other.⁸⁹ The headmen were paid according to the number of peelers they provided for the service and hardly a person who could stand up and walk with the help of a stick, though tottering with age seems to have escaped their compulsion.⁹⁰ The lascarins of the *Mahabadda* kept constant watch over the peelers,⁹¹ and the headmen searched the houses of the peelers at midnight to check whether they had returned home. Such absconders were brought to the superior headmen tied and tortured like high criminals to be placed in stocks and sent to Colombo for trial. Seldom they escaped flogging and other punishments⁹² in Colombo.

86. Memoir of Van Rhee, 1697, p. 41.

87. *Ibid.* p. 42.

88. Instructions to Cinnamon Department, p. 48.

89. Memoir of Cornelis Jean Simon, 1707, p. 8.

90. Archdeacon Glenie's Submission to Commissioner of Inquiry, 3 September 1830, C. O. 416/5/B 3.

91. John G. Forbes. Collector of Matara to Chief Secretary, 1 July 1818, C. O. 416/23/H 24.

92. Archdeacon Glenie's Submission to Commissioners of Inquiry, 3 September 1830, C.O. 416/5/B 3.

The peelers were instructed to peel only the good quality cinnamon and by a Plakkaat issued on 30th November 1720, the headmen were instructed not to accept course cinnamon from the peelers.⁹³ In due course further restrictions were enforced and the peelers were banished to the Cape of Good Hope for peeling bad cinnamon.⁹⁴

It was customary for the Governor to meet the peelers in an annual audience⁹⁵ after the harvest. Governor made gifts to those who fulfilled their obligatory services satisfactorily and discussed their problems with the peelers. Some Governors considered the peelers as bold, stubborn⁹⁶ impertinent, discontented and mutinous,⁹⁷ but Falck (1766-85) and De Graaf (1785-94) seems to have won the confidence of them and used them in many other services as well. They were appointed for Commissions in dealing with the illicit felling of timber, illicit clearings of *Cnenas* etc. and in the destruction of garden crops in cinnamon bearing land and enforcing the harsh land policies.⁹⁸ The *Salagama* caste was richly rewarded with many favours and privileges not enjoyed by any other caste.

People of other castes were also drawn to the service of the *Mahabadda*. *Hunu*, *Wahumpura*, *Karawa* and *Durawa* caste people in certain localities were entrusted with the peeling or transport of cinnamon.⁹⁹ However, the position of these castes did not improve at the same pace as of the *Salagama* caste.

The headmen of the *Salagama* caste prospered immensely during the Dutch period both in wealth and prestige. At the beginning of the Dutch rule the highest position held by a *Salagama* headman was the *Maha Vidane*. Gradually the nomenclature of the chiefs changed and by the end of the Dutch period they had a *Maha Mudaliyar* and five *Mudaliyars* to administer to their functions. Their authority cut through the *Salagama* caste people in the relevant districts where the *Goyigama* provincial *Mudaliyars* exercised their jurisdiction.

The British too continued the same privileges granted to the *Salagama* caste when they took over the administration in 1796. But some voices in the committees of investigation in 1798 was raised against the indulgence shown to the *Salagama* caste by the British administration. Both Agnew and De

93. Plakkaats No, 721, 30 November 1720, SLNA 1/2440, p. 19.

94. Political Council Minutes, 17 July 1748, SLNA 1/93.

95. Kotalawala, D. A. p. 83.

96. Memoir of Van Gollense, 1751, p. 46.

97. Memoir of Schreuder, 1762, p. 13.

98. KANAPATHIPILLAI, V. Dutch Rule in Maritime Ceylon 1766—1796; (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London,) 1969, p. 299.

99. Memoir of Martsuker, 1650, p. 10.

Meuron, the members who inquired into the affairs of Sri Lanka after the 1797 rebellion believed that "their present independence of all authority, but that of their own immediate chiefs may throw difficulties in the way of many desirable arrangements for the Revenue Department."¹⁰⁰

The *Karawa* and *Durawa* castes too enjoyed preferential treatment under the Dutch rule. When the elephant trade was lucrative the *Kuruwe badda* was looked after and their activities were regularized and the position of their headmen were raised.¹⁰¹ But however, with the decline of the elephant trade in the latter part of the eighteenth century the attention paid to the *Durawa* caste obliterated and persons around coconut gardens were used as toddy tappers and drawers of toddy. Many took to other professions while the literates took service under the church as teachers.¹⁰²

The *Karawa* caste had many regional variations in their service obligations. In the Kalutara and Galle districts the different groups performed different services to the government in lieu of the lands they held.¹⁰³ The *Nanayakkara* assisted the elephant hunt and crossed the beasts over the rivers without any remuneration. The *Pedumkaraya* or the rowers served in the government boats as rowers in unloading the government stores and salt on payment. The *Mandadi* or Tindals served in the government boats and were obliged to supply fish for the passing chiefs and officials in the district for which they were paid. The carpenters served in the government carpentry shed and were paid while the *Keatkarayas* or the sawyers were obliged to saw timber for the government for payment. There were the lascarins who served in the guard duties and the *Naindes* who carried luggage. The *Ooliyakkarayas* served as palanquin bearers and the *Panividakarayas* carried messages. A sizeable portion of the *Karawas* of Colombo and Kalutara were employed as sailors or carpenters attached to the harbour duties.

In the Matara district *Hannadias* were obliged to steer dhonies and do other duties on board at sea and rivers and had to carry lights in the villages while the officers were passing.¹⁰⁴ In the Wellaboddepattu of Matara district the fishermen under the Basnayake of Dondra were obliged to collect corals and drag coconut tree for the burning of lime. They were also to pro-

100. Agnew to Commissioner of Inquiry, 10 November 1798, as Quoted by Wickramaratne, U.C., in *British Administration in the Maritime Provinces of Ceylon, 1796-1802*, (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London,) 1964, p. 326.

101. Petition of 104 Chandos, 5 November 1830, C. O. 416/32 Petition No. 734.

102. GREGORY DE ZOYSA's Oral evidence before Colebrooke-Cameron Commissioners, 6 September 1830, C. O. 416/6/C 11.

103. Atkinson, J. The Collector of Kalutara to the Chief Secretary, 21 June 1818, C. O. 416/23/H 24 and

SMITH, M. J. The Collector of Galle, to the Chief Secretary, 4 July 1818, C. O. 416/23/H 24.

104. JOHN G. FORBES. The Collector of Matara, to the Chief Secretary, 1 July 1818, C. O. 416/23/H 24..

vide mats for the resthouses and cover beds and chairs on the arrival of the Governor, Disave, Mudaliyar or other European officials. The *Hannadi Oroopitawedakaraya* and *Baddeturas* were to press oil from government coconut gardens.¹⁰⁵ The *Karawa* fishermen of Dickwella were obliged to burn lime for the government and process the olas cut by the toddy drawers for the construction of bungalows and resthouses by the Mayorals of the place. They were also to cover the bungalows.¹⁰⁶ The fishermen of Weligama Totamuna were obliged to erect arches, ornament and decorate the resthouse and provide families for the kitchen. They were also obliged to carry messages to the passing ships, collect limestones for burning, float timber along the river and press coconut oil for the government.¹⁰⁷

It is clear from the records that along the south western coast where the coconut plantations were coming up, the Dutch compelled a section of the *Durawa* and *Karawa* caste people to engage in the processing and extracting of coconut oil. However, tapping and toddy drawing seems to have been entrusted to the *Durawa* caste.¹⁰⁸

The economic importance of some of the castes varied from time to time. But the services of coolies and lascarins drawn from all the castes were useful to them throughout their rule. The lascarins were the native soldiers armed with swords and spears who were used for various light services such as the delivery of letters and carrying of messages. Jan Schreuder noted that large numbers were attempting to join the lascarin service through the connivance of the headmen and the numbers have increased in disproportionately larger than the coolies.¹⁰⁹ The other category was the coolies or the labourers known by different names such as the *Naindes*, *Ooliyakkarayas*, *Sellakkarayas* and coolies. They were employed in many capacities as palanquin bearers, torch bearers, luggage carriers and sometimes as messengers. However, this service obligation was mostly felt on the service castes identified by the Westerners as "low castes," and unlike the *Goyigama*, *Salagama*, *Karawa*, *Durawa*, *Smiths* and the *Dhoby* castes which experienced a tendency of having higher categories of headmen such as the *Mudaliyars*, *Mahavidanes* and *Muhandirams* to supervise the caste services, the "low castes" had only petty headmen whose authority was subjected to those of the regional headmen.

The restrictions imposed on the movement of such "low castes" retarded the social mobility that was taking place with the gradual evolution of the marketing places and small towns. A restriction imposed on 15th August 1663, on the "low castes" compelled them to report in advance to the headmaen when moving from place to place. Failure to do so was to be subjected to

105. John G. Forbes, *Collector of Matara to Chicf Secretary, 4 July, 1818, Co. 416/23/H 24.*

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*

108. Memoir of De Costa, C. O. 54/124.

109. Memoir of Jan Schreuder, 1762, p. 61.

punishment. By another regulation of 12th September 1703, the natives taking abode in another place had to obtain a licence from the headman. Failing to do so was subjected to a penalty to put in chains.¹¹⁰ These regulations together with the restrictions imposed on the dress, ornaments and special concessions extended on certain categories of natives further reinforced the caste distinction.

Only certain castes were permitted to wear coats and curved combs, to use palanquins, to carry parasols, to have servants attending on them with umbrellas or *talpat*. If any person assumed such marks of distinction which his caste did not entitle, a mob would immediately surround him and attack, and take him like a criminal to a Magistrate.¹¹¹ Referring to such an incident in the third decade of the nineteenth century the Methodist priest Abraham Stead remarked thus. "Reasoning, however, powerful in such cases has little effect. With these people, custom is a tyrant."¹¹²

Concessions and privileges conferred on some castes created an environment of animosity and jealousy. This can be seen in the clashes that had taken place in Negombo,¹¹³ Dondra¹¹⁴ and Matara¹¹⁵ during the eighteenth century between the *Salagama*, *Goyigama*, *Karawa* and *Durawa* castes.

During the late Dutch period the seeds of disorganisation had been sown in the caste system. Except the *Salagama* caste and partly the *Karawa* caste, due to their involvements in cinnamon and transport, the other caste organisations were of less importance to the Dutch. Therefore, the Dutch did not pay much attention to caste considerations. It was the higher rungs of the indigenous headmen brought into more frequent contact with the Dutch in the course of their duties that were benefitted by the changes in improving their economic and social conditions. The loss of official recognition was first felt by them. Gradually the appointment of higher positions such as *Mudliyors* were done away with. The relaxation of the enforcement of restrictions on caste and the gradual evolution of towns to which many started migrating as the demand for good workers and carpenters and astisans gave new stimulus to non-traditional labour. The result was the emergence of an active urban life distinct from the caste ridden village life. The customs and traditions could not have a great hold in the urban society. The caste system was in the process of losing its distinctions and official patronage.

110. Memo of De Costa, C. O. 54/124.

111. CORDINER. Description of Ceylon, 1983, p. 56.

112. ABRAHAM STEAD's Journal, 22 August 1821, Methodist Missionary Society records now deposited at the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, (MMS) 444/66.

113. The Dutch Political Council Minutes, 5 September 1740; 14 September 1740; 6 October 1740, SLNA 1/68.

114. The Dutch Political Council Minutes, 25 March 1745, SLNA 1/83.

115. The Dutch Political Council Minutes, 12 June 1750, SLNA 1/97.

The British who succeeded the Dutch in the maritime provinces in 1796 viewed the Sinhala caste system in terms of a single hierarchy, and carried away an impression that only the *Goyigama* and *Vellala* caste headmen could command the respect and obedience of all inhabitants in the Sri Lankan plural society.¹¹⁶ This assumption would have been born out of their close involvements in South Indian politics which started long before their dealings with Sri Lanka. The *Vellala* caste played a dominant role in the caste hierarchy in South India, and the British carried the misconception of the Sri Lankan system as part of the South Indian system.

This misconception was embodied in a directive issued to the revenue officials of the British East India company in 1797,¹¹⁷ and in the fifth despatch written by the first Governor of the British in Sri Lanka Frederick North (1798-1805) to the Board of Directors.¹¹⁸ The former advised the revenue officials to appoint *Mudaliyars* and other Petty head men from the *Goyigama* caste in the Sinhala areas and from the *Vellala* and other superior castes in the Tamil areas. The latter dealt with the caste system of Sri Lanka, in which North referred to the appointment of *Mudaliyars* and other principal native officials from the first two classes of the *Goyigama* caste. Subsequently, by a Proclamation of 3rd September 1801, Governor North, abolished the service tenure in favour of a direct tax on the produce of service lands,¹¹⁹ and reserved and reaffirmed the right of the state to compel the services of the inhabitants according to their respective castes, but only at the express orders of the Governor and on receipt of adequate payment. The compulsory services were divorced from land tenure and placed on a purely caste basis. The compulsory customary services were thus given a statutory sanction¹²⁰ contrary to its original norms.

The Dutch policy at the end of their rule was to allow the economically and politically unimportant caste headmen to lapse with their demise. The British too continued the same policy and by 1832, there were *Mudaliyars* only for the *Goyigama*, *Salagama* and *Rajaka* or washer castes.¹²¹ The *Karawa* caste, though numerically second only to the *Goyigama* caste in the lowlands

116. KANNANGARA, P. D. "Headman system of the British Administration of the Maritime Provinces of Sri Lanka—1796-1833." *Kalyanee, Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, University of Kelaniya, Vol. 1, October 1982, p. 104. Colebrooke wrote "the highest and the most esteemed caste is that of Vellales or Goyas." Report of Colebrooke upon administration, 24 December 1831; Colebrooke Cameron Papers, ed. Mendis, G. C., 1956 (CCP), p. 26.

117. Proclamation of 16 August 1797, C. O. 55/2.

118. North to Board of Directors, 26 February 1799, SLNA 5/1 No. 5.

119. Proclamation of 3 September 1801, Skesn, William. *A Collection of Regulations of the Government of Ceylon, 1798-1833*, pp. 57 - 62.

120. DE SILVA, COLVIN R. *Ceylon Under the British Occupation 1796-1833*, Vol. II, 1953, Colombo, Opp. 385-386.

121. See Fixed Establishment for 1832 in Blue book for 1833.

lost their last Mudaliyarship in 1831 with the retirement of Thomas de Andrado Aresekollesoriya Wijeyeratne. Duties assigned to such posts were either entrusted to the next official in rank or amalgamated with those of the territorial headmen. The imbalance caused by this change was seen by Colebrooke¹²² when he received a large number of petitions from the *Karawa Durawa* and other less significant castes of their grievances.¹²³

The British policy on caste in Sri Lanka was ambivalent, hesitant and inconsistent.¹²⁴ At the beginning they did not support the maintenance of disabilities pertaining to the dress, style of house and other caste symbolism. Many less important castes or "low castes" people seem to have begun to white wash their houses, adorn themselves with jewellery and use palanquins¹²⁵ at their marriage ceremonies. Some adopted the Western dress. The violation of these symbolic acts of social distinction were greatly resented by the *Goyigama* caste in particular and by the *Karawa* and *Durawa* castes.¹²⁶ The caste identity had taken a different shape.

This was the period of the industrial revolution in Britain and the triumphant capitalism was forging ahead with the ideologies of utilitarianism and *laissez-faire*. The evangelical influence was in full swing. Many of the British officials who came to Sri Lanka were great admirers of these new ideologies. They resented social inequality and were advocating social justice. Only the European Institutions they thought could offer a chance of obtaining redress for low castes against the high caste.¹²⁷ To undermine caste consciousness in Sri Lanka ideological imports of the notion of individual liberty and equality of all men before law were diffused by means of Schools, Churches, Mercantile firms and government offices by the British officials, but at the same time they were careful to maintain racial superiority of the whites.

122. WILLIAM MACBEAN GEORGE COLEBROOKE (1787-1870) the Commissioner who looked into the revenue, administrative and judicial reforms along with Charles Hay Cameron from 1829-1832, served in Sri Lanka as a First Lieutenant of the Royal Artillery between 1805-1809.

Colebrooke to Leserre, ND. June 1834, C.O. 54/145.

123. Petitions received by the Commissioners of Inquiry 1829-1830, C.O. 416/29-31.

124. ROBERTS, MICHAEL. 1983, p. 142.

125. It was the custom that none save the King be carried on the back of the people. The others of distinction rode on elephants by permission. But during the Portuguese period the palanquin was used by Foreiros in their circuits. Later Vidanes and other officials started travelling in palanquins, Queyroz, p. 1023.

126. REV. NEWSTEAD. A Methodist Missionary at Negombo refers to an incident when his palanquin was attacked by a mob as his interpreter supposed to be of "low caste" origin, who had no right to go in palanquins, was with Newstead. Newstead's Journal, 20 October 1818. MMS. 443.

127. Cameron's Report on Judicial Administration, 31 January 1832; in Colebrooke Cameron Papers, ed. by Mendis, G. C., 1956, Vol. 1, pp. 180-181.

Though it was inconsistent with the prevailing British thinking, they were compelled by local circumstances to recognise in law and rules of caste for the maintenance of law and order and peace. By a proclamation dated 10th November 1802, the Provincial Courts were empowered to hear and determine disputes of the natives according to the customary laws and usages of the castes of the litigants.¹²⁸ To assist the Provincial Judge of Colombo, Paulus Samarakoon of the *Goyigama* caste, Saka Lebbe Sagoo Kanda Lebbe of the Muslims and Simon de Mello of the Tamil *Vellala* caste were appointed as advisors on matters relating to the customary laws and traditions of caste.¹²⁹ But no positive step was taken to codify the customary laws then in vogue. On the otherhand no attention was paid in selecting advisors of other castes other than the *Goyigama* and the *Vellala*. The rules of evidence and procedures of the Provincial Court were based on what was prevalent in Britain at the time. The tribunal was presided over by a British Civil Servant, assisted by a Burgher Secretary and a few clerks and a native interpreter known as the Interpreter *Mudaliyar*. The judges in outstations had to depend on the interpreter for any clarification as there were no advisors. The majority of these interpreters were appointed from the officiating families of the *Goyigama* caste, who by then were trying to identify themselves as an exclusive group of high caste descent. In criminal cases inquiries were made about the caste to which the witness belonged.¹³⁰

In the meantime by a Proclamation of 3rd September 1801, the state reserved the right to compel the caste services. The Regulation No. 18 of 1806, specified the right to the service of persons of lower castes to the higher castes in the Jaffna peninsula.¹³¹ The clothing and wearing of ornaments of the native headmen were regulated on caste lines by the Regulation No. 6 of 1809.¹³²

In the adjudication of caste disputes no uniform system seem to have been followed by the judges of the Provincial Courts. Some considered themselves authorised not to take notice of caste unless it was pointed out in the pleadings.¹³³ Some judges decided the case on the strength of evidence presented on the dispute.¹³⁴ In some cases they found a technical point worthy of dismissing the case.¹³⁵ Majority of these cases were against the collectors or the head of the cinnamon department against a charge of improper labour

128. SKEEN, WILLIAM. Vol. 1, pp. 64-65.

129. Tolfrey to Arbuthnot, 27 February 1802, as quoted by U. C. Wickremaratne p. 331.

130. Criminal Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, 20 January 1800; 16 December 1799.

131. SKEEN, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 106-107.

132. *Ibid.* pp. 119-120.

133. PANNEL, H. Provincial Judge of Colombo, Answer to Question No. 142, 22 November 1830, C. O. 416/13/F 20.

134. PANNEL, H., to the Commissioners of Inquiry, 11 September 1829, C.O. 416/13/F 20.

135. Sneyd, R. M. Provincial Judge, Galle and Matara to the Commissioners of Inquiry, 24 January 1830, C.O. 416/14/F 24.

compulsion.¹³⁶ The lawyers associated in the judicial proceedings were mostly Burghers who were equally ignorant of the customary laws of the litigants. Thus in many instances the judges depended on the opinion of the interpreters. The decisions went on record to be quoted as precedence and naturally, a mis-interpretation of facts would have carried a longway.

Although the British were successful in building up their own administrative structure with an European officialdom and institutions within the short spell of a decade, the native headmen formed the ultimate, albeit vital link between the administration and the people. There were four kinds of *Mudaliyars* who were of much use to the Britishers in bridging the gap between the rulers and the ruled. *Firstly*, there was the *Mudaliyars* of the Governor's Gate one of whom was the *Maha Mudaliyar* who functioned as the interpreter to the Governor when embassys arrived from the Kandyan Court. He also served as the advisor on native customs and traditions to the Governor. He was the highest among the native officials and was always selected from the *Goyigama* caste. The other *Mudaliyars* of the Governor's Gate assisted the Governor in matters relevant to their groups. *Secondly*, there were the *Mudaliyars* of *Korales* who functioned as the assistant to the British Civil Servants, the collectors in the manifold services of the government within a specific geographic division. Often they were selected from the loyal families with a higher social background and respect from the natives. *Thirdly*, there was the *Atapattu Mudaliyar*, who was attached to the collector's office, the Kachcheri, the regional administrative centre, as the interpreter. He was in charge of the native department and was the liaison officer between the people and the regional administrator. *Fourthly*, there were the *interpreter Mudaliyar* to the Judge. The *Atapattu Mudaliyars* and the *Interpreter Mudaliyars* were chosen from the "respectable class" of the natives with a sound knowledge of the English language. Often these interpreters were educated at the Government Seminary in Colombo or under the missionaries.¹³⁷ Majority of these appointments were confined to the *Goyigama* caste at the commencement of the British rule, but by the third decade of the nineteenth century, the *Mudaliyarships* close to the Governor, the Civil Servant and the Judge were all monopolized by the *Goyigama* caste. Thus when the Colebrooke Commissioners started their investigations many persons of *Karawa* and *Durawa* castes complained of the influence wielded by the *Goyigama* caste *Mudaliyars* over the British officials to the detriment of the other castes.¹³⁸

The decline of the importance of the *badda* organisations and the discontinuation of the *Mudaliyarships* assigned to some of these organisations and the transfer of some administrative power to regional headmen strengthened the position of the territorial headmen. Majority of these territorial head-

136. Return of caste cases decided by the Provincial Courts, C.O. 416/14/F 24.

137. CHARLES MARSHALL to the Commissioner of Inquiry, 30 March 1830, C.O. 416/16/F 41.

138. Petition of 427 *Karawa* caste people, 10 November 1830, C.O. 416/32 No. 737.

manships were conferred on the *Goyigama* caste and over the years repeated appointments from the same officiating families and their matrimonial links brought a strong family control in the territorial positions. This "exclusive" group of families attributed to themselves the "first class" status among the *Goyigama* caste. As early as 1805, Governor Thomas Maitland (1805-1812) complained that his predecessor had thrown over the power of the districts of Colombo, Galle and Matara in the hands of the *Muha Mudaliyar* Ilangakoon of the *Goyigama* caste, who in fact "to all intents and purposes carry on a distinct government of their own."¹³⁹ But however, the reforms carried out by Maitland strengthened the position of *Maha Mudaliyar* David de Saram and his family who virtually enjoyed the place of importance right throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁰

The nett result of these changes in the native subordinate service was the gradual strengthening of the authority of the *Goyigama* caste headmen above the others. By the third decade of the nineteenth century the *Goyigama* caste had a virtual hold over the indigenous institutional framework of the government. Thus, the assumption of Bryce Ryan is that "the immediate groundwork for *Goyigama* political ascendancy lies in the British period"¹⁴¹ appears to have had some foundation in fact.

The repeated appointment to the key posts of *Korale Mudaliyars*, *Atapattu Mudaliyars*, and the *Interpreter Mudaliyars* from a small circle of the *Goyigama* families raised the status of the family. It was the rank and position which mattered than the rewards connected with the post. Patronage in the appointment of subordinates, the powers and influence wielded in land matters further enhanced their power. In due course, carefully regulated protocol in officially sponsored ceremonies further strengthened this superiority complex.

The educational facilities extended to these families by the government and the missionaries gave them an added opportunity to study English. Frederick North established the Colombo Seminary, the premier English school to teach English to the children of the leading *Mudaliyar* and chieftain families, and viewed the institution to bring up a catetory of local partners in the public service connected by ties of blood with the principal native families and by education, life style and office with Englishmen.¹⁴² There was an overwhelming

139. Petition of 30 *Karawa* caste people of Weligama, 14 July 1829, C.O. 416/29/No. 138.

139. MAITLAND to CAMDEN, 19 October 1805, C. O. 54/18.

140. KANNANGARA, op. cit., Kalyanee, p. 113.

141. BRYCE, RYAN. 1953, p. 323.

142. North to Board of Directors, 26 February 1799, SLNA 5/1 .

predominance of *Goyigama* caste pupils in the Seminary.¹⁴³ Separate classrooms were maintained for the *Goyigama* caste pupils who refused to sit with the pupils of other castes.¹⁴⁴ The native schoolmasters of the Seminary were also recruited on a caste basis.¹⁴⁵ The *Salagama*, *Karawa* and *Durawa* caste students, though few in numbers freely moved with the Burghers and Tamil students.¹⁴⁶ According to the Archdeacon Glanville, there was caste jealousy to its extreme among the pupils who appeared to have constantly disputed over caste matters.¹⁴⁷

The Missionaries who took up the education of the natives of the littorals in the second decade of the nineteenth century tried to recruit more students from the 'higher castes' as there was pressure against their patronage extended on the socially depressed castes. James Charter, the first Baptist Missionary who started his educational work in Sri Lanka reported that he had to dismiss an enthusiastic washer caste teacher at Mattakkuliya as the higher caste parents refused to send their children to school. The English education imparted by the government and the Missionaries helped to cut across caste distinction in society, yet it failed to promote social integrity because it created and reinforced a dualistic social structure consisting of a disadvantaged majority and a privileged minority. Some Missionaries viewed that some civil distinctions were essential to the existence of the society,¹⁴⁹ and adjusted their educational plans to suit the circumstance. Alexander Johnstone the Chief Justice of Sri Lanka tried to form Church Missionary associations for the *Salagama* caste and Tamils castes through two influential persons in 1816, and expected the

143. The number of Sinhala students at the Colombo Seminary were as follows:

	1812	1830
Total number of students	.. 158	143
Sinhala students	.. 83	79
<i>Goyigama</i> caste students	.. 70	70
<i>Salagama</i> caste students	.. 06	04
<i>Karawa</i> caste students	.. 05	04
<i>Durawa</i> caste students	.. 02	01

BARNES to Secretary of State, 11 March 1829, C.O. 34/104.

144. Archdeacon's reply to Colebrooke, 19 October 1830, C.O. 416/6/C 13.

145. In 1830 the Seminary had a Principal, a native proponent, two English teachers, two Sinhala teachers, a *Vellala* caste and a *Salagama* caste, and a Tamil teacher.

146. Archdeacon's reply to Colebrooke, 29 October 1830, C.O. 416/6/C 13.

14. *Ibid.*

148. CHARTER to DYER, 28 February 1825, Charter Manuscripts at the Baptist Missionary Society, London BMS 1.

149. Extracts from Quarterly letters of John Callaway, 18 January 1821, MMS. 444/2.

other heads of castes to follow.¹⁵⁰ Though an elaborate plan was submitted nothing came out of it. But it showed that the officers in the higher rungs of the government were trying to make use of the caste distinction even for the propagation of the Christian religion.

Some of the judicial institutions introduced by the British to Sri Lanka were also subjected to caste distinction. The system of the trial by Jury was one such, novel institution introduced by the Charter of Justice of 1810. The Jury thus introduced was considered to be an institution in which a portion of the public placed in an official position, armed with the power to interrogate the Judge and the witness in pronouncing a public opinion on the judgement.¹⁵¹ It was looked upon as the best school in which the minds of the natives can be disciplined for the discharge of public duties inculcating the idea of the 'equality before law'.¹⁵²

The system of the trial by Jury thus introduced was subjected to caste distinctions before long. The rules for the empanelling of Jurors were made by the Judges of the Supreme Court. The eligibility of a Juror was 'of good character, a citizen of over 21 years and of free birth'.¹⁵³ The instructions issued by J. Southerland, the Registrar of the Supreme Court on 26 November 1811 by order of the Chief Justice to the Fiscal requested the lists of Jurors be made for the Town, Fort, District of Colombo under (1) Gentlemen of the Civil Service or employ (2) Natives not of Service (3) Dutch inhabitants, (4) Native inhabitants, Sinhalese, Malabar and Moors. But for districts of Kalutara Galle, Matara, Hambantota and Chilaw under (1) Europeans (2) Burghers (3) *Vellales* (4) Fishermen (5) *Chandos*, (6) *Chitties* (7) Moors (8) *Chaliyas*. For Puttalam, Mannar, Jaffna, Mullativu, Trincomalee and Batticaloa, under

150. ALESANDER JOHNSTONE submitted a plan for the formation of a Church Missionary Association for the *Salagama* caste sent by the *Maha Mudaliyar* A. de A. Rajapaksa on 30 June 1816 to the Church Missionary Society in London which was printed in the Church Missionary Society Proceedings of 1816-1817, pp. 531-534 and of Bartholomew's for Tamils in the same issue, p. 535, and wrote "I have no doubt whatever, from the inquiries which I have made on the subject, that, provided proper encouragement be given by the Local Government Church Missionary Association will be, are long, established in every part of the island, and will afford the most certain and the most expeditious means, of spreading Christianity among a million and a half people."

Two years later Fox, a Methodist priest of Kalutara wrote to the brethren of the Church Missionary Society on the formation of caste based Church Mission Societies thus. "Mr. Bisset sent for Rajapaksa Mahabadda Maha Mudaliyar and asked why he send such a plan to England. He answered in Portuguese. 'The Chief Justice sent for me and showed me that letter, and I, what could I do, I signed it.'"

Fox to Brethren of the Church Missionary Society, 6 September 1818, MMS. 443.

151. Cameron's Report on Judiciary, CCP Vol. 1, p. 135.

152. Ibid. 146.

153. Charles Marshall's evidence before the Commissioners of Inquiry, 30 March 1830. C.O. 416/17/F 42.

(1) European (2) Burghers (3) Brahmins (4) *Vellala* and *Madappals* (5) Carres or Fishermen (6) *Chandos* (7) Moors.¹⁵⁴ Thus the Supreme Court itself upheld the distinction of castes before the judiciary and thought that the different castes can scarcely be brought to sit together.¹⁵⁵

The Fiscals had entrusted the headmen to prepare the list of Jurors who made them under caste, class and race distinctions. Thus in the Sinhala areas lists of Jurors were made separately under first class and second class for *Goyigama* and *Salagama* castes. Separate lists were prepared for *Karawa*, *Durawa*, *Hunu* and *Wahumpura* castes and Chitties, Moors, Burghers and Europeans. In the Tamil areas lists were prepared under first class *Vellala*, *Madappals*, Brahmins, *Carreas* and Moors.¹⁵⁶ However, the Judges of the Supreme Court did not detect the discrepancy and the Judges preferred the "first class" *Goyigama* list as it contained the leading officiating headmen of the day. Jurors from the *Durawa*, *Hunu* and *Wahumpura* castes were never summoned¹⁵⁷ The "first class" *Goyigama* Jurors refused to sit with the Jurors of other castes, but sat with the Burghers in adjudication.¹⁵⁸ When difficulties arose as to the selection of Jurors, steps were taken by the rule of court of 11th August, 1815 to summon a special Jury from a list of most respectable and best educated Burghers.¹⁵⁹ Thus the Supreme Court had unintentionally and unwillingly encouraged the claims of the "first class" of the *Goyigama* caste to maintain an exclusive distinction hitherto existed in the private walks of life.¹⁶⁰

The Supreme Court however, did not always act in accordance with caste rules. There were at least two instances before 1832, where the Court upheld the freedom of the individual. In 1818, the Supreme Court convicted a Mudaliyar of the *Durawa* caste of illegally impressing a labourer who has deserted the cooly work.¹⁶¹ The Puisne Judge, William Coke argued in terms of British law regarding imprisonment that the whole system of pressing as conducted under the present rules of government was illegal and in no wise admissible by a Court of Justice.¹⁶² Governor Brownrigg argued that the judgement tended "to subvert the established customs of the colony" and to threaten the source of forced labour necessary to supply provisions to the troops engaged in the suppression of the "great rebellion" of 1817-1818 in the interior,¹⁶³ and the conviction was set aside.

154. SOUTHERLAND, J. to the Fiscals, 26 November 1811, Johnstone Papers, Sri Lanka National Archives 25/1/27.

155. Richard Ottley's answer to question No. 237, 2 January 1830, C. O. 416/16 F41.

156. SIR HARDINGE GIFFORD to COLEBROOKE, 11 April 1829, C.O. 416/14/F 23.

157. RICHARD OTTLEY, Answers to Question No. 204, 2 January 1830. C.O. 416/16/H.

158. CHARLES MARSHALL to Commissioners of Inquiry, 30 March 1830, C.O. 416/17/F 42.

159. *Ibid.*

160. RICHARD OTTLEY to the Commissioners of Inquiry 2 January 1830, C.O. 416/16/F 41.

161. BROWNRIGG to BATHURST, 17 July 1818, SLNA 5/9 No. 290.

162. *Ibid.*

163. *Ibid.*

However, this minor incident triggered a series of investigations into caste duties in which the collectors brought out detailed accounts of caste services that was in practice in different parts of the island that ended with the enforcement of a new regulation¹⁶⁴ that authorised headmen to seize, take, arrest, send and employ in the service of government, all and every person or persons, who by his or their caste, tenure of land, or other customs of these settlements is or are bound to serve government as coolies or otherwise. "The result according to Colvin R. de Silva "was neither British law nor Sinhalese custom, but a new law with important consequences."¹⁶⁵

The second incident took place in Jaffna against a conviction by the collector as Justice of Peace, of a slave making use of a palanquin in charge of which he was sent to bring a bride for his master's family.¹⁶⁶ The Supreme Court acting in accordance with 82nd clause of the Charter of Justice of 1801.¹⁶⁷ was quashed without any individual complaining against the conviction on the ground of its being illegal. The Governor questioned the validity of the Court to set aside a written law on which the collector has acted and enacted, the Regulation No. 2 of 1821,¹⁶⁸ defining the meaning of Andol, the Tamil term for palanquin used in Dutch plakkaart and giving the Magistrate discretionary power to inflict corporal punishment on misdemeanous slaves. Thus the exigency of service forced the British Governor to uphold caste distinctions which were condemned in his own country.

"The political power" according to George Balandier "arouses respect for the rules on which it is based and defends the society against its own imperfections and limits within itself, the effect of competition between individuals and groups."¹⁶⁹ The British often went for wealth, caste and social status of the candidate in their appointments to the native ranks. The forms of patronage such as land grants, medals, honours, titles and gestures of respect extended on them perpetuated high social status within the society. Thus the "exclusiveness" built over the years by the officiating headmen's caste was presented by means of documents to the British officials. In 1816 Adrian de Rajapaksa, the *Maha Mudaliyar* of the *Salagama* caste wrote to Alexander Johnstone that "the whole class of the Mahabadda are solely occupied in performing the government service, and in their own agricultural pursuits as they will serve no caste, however, poor they may be."¹⁷⁰ The first claim for super-

164. Regulation 5 of 1818, on 07 May 1818, C.O. 54/71 No. 290, Enclosure 3.

165. DE SILVA, COLVIN R. *Ceylon Under the British Occupation 1796-1833*, Vol. II, 1953, p. 387.

166. BARNEŞ TO BATHURST, 11 March 1821, SLNA 5/10 No. 64.

167. Section 82 of the Charter of Justice of 1801 conferred a general superintendence over all inferior Magistracies to be exercised as nearly as may be in the same manner as the Court of King's Bench exercise a Superintendence over Magistrates in England.

168. Regulation 2 of 1821, C.O. 416/17/F 47.

169. BALANDIER, GEORGE. *Political Anthropology*, p. 35.

170. SIR JOHN MARSHALL to Commissioners, 30 March 1830, C.O. 416/17/F 42.

iority of caste came from him as he claimed a *Brahmin* origin for *Salagama* caste.¹⁷¹ Subsequently, Christoffel de Saram, the fourth *Maha Mudaliyar*, claimed the highest position for the *Goyigama* caste by placing the different castes on a hierarchial order, in his report of 1818 on caste services.¹⁷² This was further elaborated in January 1832, in the *Maha Mudaliyar* Abraham de Saram's report on caste services presented to Governor Sir Wilmot Horton (1831-1838).¹⁷³ These two documents gave a hierarchical position to the castes in Sri Lanka similar to some of the accounts given by the foreign authors.¹⁷⁴ Subsequently these two documents became virtually the handbook of the British Governors and Civil Servants in determining issues emanated from caste.

In spite of its inconsistency with some of the liberal and humanitarian policies of the British government, the Sri Lankan government continued the state machinery to which, caste system is coupled with occasional modifications till it was officially abandoned by an Order in Council on 12 April 1832,¹⁷⁵ while abolishing the *rajakariya* or the service tenure system. On the recommendation of Colebrooke, the government appointments were thrown open to duly qualified native inhabitants irrespective of caste or creed!¹⁷⁶ The caste services¹⁷⁷ and the *badde* organisations were abolished with much of the monopolies enjoyed by the government and the caste distinctions of dress were discontinued.

Mahabadda was the last *badda* organisation to be dismantled. The compulsory labour service of the *Salagama* caste however was abolished in September 1831.¹⁷⁸ with the increasing demand for cinnamon in Europe, the specialised skills of *Salagama* not available to others were mobilized, under the native infrastructure and were caressed with specialized concessions and privileges, but with the decline of the demand they were withdrawn, one after the other. The decline in the importance of cinnamon reflected in the decline of the patronage on *Mahabadda* and the *Salagama* caste.

The nett result of the reforms of 1832-34 carried out on the recommendations of Colebrooke and Cameron was the gradual strengthening of the authority of the *Goyigama* caste. The economically weak and numerically insignificant castes honoured this change with occasional protests, while the economically

171. Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society, 1816-1817, pp. 533-534.

172. 4th *Maha Mudaliyar's* Report on Caste, C.O. 416/23/H 24.

173. ABRAHAM DE SARAM'S Report on Caste and Services, 1906.

174. See Valentyn's account of 1726.

Saram refers to sub-castes in *Goyigama* and *Karava* castes. But there were other divisions in the *Salagama*, *Navandanna* and *Durawa* castes.

175. Ceylon Government Gazette, 29 September 1832.

176. GODERICH to HORTON, 14 September 1832, C.O. 54/74 No. 79.

177. Caste services attached to the *Nindagamas*, *Devalagamas* and the *Viharagamas* were however allowed to function. Only the caste service rendered to the state was discontinued in 1832.

178. BARNES to GODERICH, 11 October 1831, SLNA 5/18 No. 29.

powerful and numerically strong *Karawa* and the *Salagama* castes kept their protests alive. Governor Horton was quite aware of the conflict due to the change and reported that "many persons of the lower castes are possessed of wealth and intelligence in an equal degree with those of the highsr, and such castes, particularly the *Chaliyas*, [sic] view the claims of the *Vellale* to superiority with much jealousy. . . . and were impressed with the conviction that they have an equal right with the *Vellalas* to public employment."¹⁷⁹ He further reported that this impression was gaining ground from day to day and expected continuous caste conflict in the low-country.

The reforms of 1832-34 marked another landmark in the ascendancy of the *Goyigama* caste for higher status in the social ladder. Under the new set up in addition to their monopoly in territorial headmanships, they held the positions extended under the institutional framework of the new administration such as the membership in the Legislative Council, the Assessorships and Jurorships, and the few positions in the judiciary. Horton himself set aside his own admission that the *Salagama* caste was equally qualified to hold higher positions when selecting a member for the Legislative Council¹⁸⁰ and for the *Mudaliyarship* of Galle Wellaboddepattu.¹⁸¹

Horton wrote to Lord Stanley, the Secretary of State for the Colonies that he could not find suitable persons to be appointed as unofficial members to the Legislative Council outside the government service and remarked that any such selection would not serve the purpose in view and also would not carry "weight or influence over the countrymen," but would degrade the Council in the eyes of the public.¹⁸² He rated the second *Maha Mudaliyar* A. de Saram as "One of the first representatives" and regretted to see another admitted to the Council overlooking his claims.¹⁸³ Later he appointed the *Interpreter Mudaliyar* of the District Court of Colombo, John Godreigh Phillip, and the Tamil Interpreter to the Governor, Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy, of *Goyigama* and *Vellala* castes as Sinhala and Tamil unofficial members.¹⁸⁴ These appointments were overwhelmingly approved by the *Maha Mudaliyar* and a deputation of over 400 leading headmen who presented the Governor with a letter of appreciation of his step, containing the signatures of 34,384 persons.¹⁸⁵ Coomaraswamy family held the seat till 1898 with a brief interruption between 1844-1845, while Phillip's family popularly known as "Dias Obeysekera family" held till 1920, with a brief interruption in 1888-1895.

179. Horton to Stanley, 23 November 1833, C.O. 54/131.

180. HORTON to GLENELG, 29 June 1836, SLNA 5/23 No. 99.

181. Petition of the Native Chiefs of *Mahabadda* to Mackenzie, ND. March 1841, *Sri Lak Indo Studies*, Vol. 3, 1977, pp. 62-70.

182. HORTON to STANLEY, 8 March 1834, C.O. 54/134 No. 42.

183. *Ibid.*

184. HORTON to GLENELG, 29 June 1836, SLNA 5/23 No. 99.

185. HORTON to STANLEY, 11 February 1836, C.O. 54/150 No. 35.

In abolishing the *badde* organisations and the *rajakariya*, along with some monopolies, the Secretary of State for the Colonies advised the Governor to give preference in future vacancies to qualified and faithful servants thus getting displaced.¹⁸⁶ Accordingly some of the displaced *lekams* of the Kandyan monarchy were appointed to the *Ratemahatmaya* posts, equivalent to the *Mudaliyar* in the littorals.¹⁸⁷ Some of the minor headmen of the *Karawa* caste were appointed to serve under the assistant collectors of customs to prevent smuggling. But when it came to the appointment of the *Mudaliyarship* of Galle Wellaboddepattu with a population well over 65% being of the *Salagama* caste, the candidature of *Mudaliyar* Theodoris Mendis Wijayasiriwardane Wickramasinghe, the ex-Dadalla *Mudaliyar* of the *Mahabadda* with a service record of 36 years to his credit, was set aside in favour of Don P. F. A. W. Obeysekera, an inexperienced youth of the *Goyigama* caste, being the younger brother of the *Atapattu Mudaliyar* of the Galle Kachcheri.¹⁸⁸

Due to many reasons emanating from local circumstances and the opinions of some prominent officials, the recommendations pertaining to caste based official positions were not enforced in its true spirit of the proposal. A close examination of the nett result of the aftermath of the reforms reveals that the results were beneficial to the *Goyigama* caste only. The headman service in which most of the castes enjoyed a share of appointments till then, became a virtual monopoly of the *Goyigama* caste. These castes repeatedly pressed the government for a fair consideration of their claims and often contested for the vacancies whenever gazetted without success.

The *Goyigama* aristocracy as they now assumed and retained through the patronage of the Governors and higher officials were cautious of the developing challenge from the other castes benefitted by the socio-economic changes that were taking place in the country with the spread of English education and the plantation capitalism. As early as 1840, *Maha Mudaliyar* Earnest de Saram feared that this class would bring up their children with higher educational qualifications even in England, to compete with "the respectable portion of the aboriginal natives" throwing them "into the background and be virtually shut out from all respectable public offices,"¹⁸⁹ and prayed for a higher salary.

The noteworthy achievement of the reforms of 1832-34 was the administrative unification of the island and the establishment of a uniformly graded headman service open in theory to natives duly qualified, irrespective of caste or creed. The *Maha Mudaliyar* being a *Mudaliyar* of a district, was at the head of the system with *Korale* and *Pattu Mudaliyars* incharge of territorial units varying in size. The *Maha Mudaliyar*, was always chosen from the

186. GODERICH to HORTON, 23 Marcy, C.O. 55/74 No. 114.

187. HORTON to GODERICH, 20 May 1833, C.O. 54/128 No. 88.

188. Petition of the Native Chiefs *Mahabadda* to Mackenzie, ND March 1841, *Sri Lank Indo Studies*, Vol. 3, 1977.

189. PIERIS, P. E. *Notes on some Sinhalese Families*, Part VI, p. 45.

Goyigama caste during this period under review and the higher territorial headmen always being selected from the *Goyigama* caste were either the son or brothers or nephews of the retiring headman. In 1845, Government Agent of the Western Province P. E. Woodhouse, ventured to make his selection outside the chosen group and selected Manuel de Fonseka, a *Karawa* caste headman as the *Mudaliyar* of Raygam Korale and Kalutara.¹⁹⁰ But this attempt was frustrated due to the objections raised by the Colonial Secretary. But in 1846, he succeeded in appointing Joseph Mendis a *Karawa* caste headman for the *Mudaliyarship* of the Northern division of the Alutkurukorale.¹⁹¹ This appointment brought to surface many objections from the *Goyigama* caste *Mudaliyars* who assumed such posts as an exclusive right belonging to them and expressed the view that the pursuance of a different policy would endanger social stability. Only a few Government Agents ventured to make their selections for regional appointments outside the favoured group.

The claim to "first class" exclusive status by the *Goyigama* caste *Mudaliyars* received the first blow in 1843 over the Juror's issue in the Legislative Council. Queen's Advocate, in moving the first reading of the Jurors Ordinance in determining the qualifications of Jurors and Assessors observed that "the working of the jury system and its efficiency is lamentably and frequently impaired by the counterworking of the system of caste."¹⁹² He also observed that the selection of the Jury determined the verdict and the trial was a mere waste of time.¹⁹³ When the second reading of the bill was taken up J. C. Dias, the Sinhala member of the Legislative Council presented a petition signed by some inhabitants expressing their view that the proposed bill affects their long established social rights, customs and usages individually as well as collectively, and prayed that their grievances be heard in the Council by Counsel.¹⁹⁴ Another petition was presented to the House by the Queen's Advocate requesting that no such distinction of classification be permitted.¹⁹⁵ Looking at the signatories of the former petition, the Colonial Secretary expressed his surprise to see the highest and the best educated Sinhalese to make such a claim and observed that instead "the absurd prejudices of caste had abated under the influence of education and Christianity" it had "aggravated by heaping caste upon caste."¹⁹⁶

The Council accordingly decided to hear the submissions of the Counsels for and against the retention of caste distinctions in selecting the Jury. On the day of the submission, some more petitions were presented to the house in

190. WOODHOUSE to ANSTRUTHER, 25 January 1845, SLNA, 33/93 SLNA 33/93 No. 55 (Old).

191. WOODHOUSE to TENNENT, 19 August 1846, SLNA 33/3156 No. 365 (Old).

192. JAMES SWAN. Report of the proceedings of the Legislative Council of Ceylon, 1843. Sessions, Colombo Govt. Press, 1844 (Proceedings of L.C. 1843), p. 64.

193. *Ibid.*

194. *Ibid.* p. 86.

195. *Ibid.*

196. *Ibid.* p. 87.

favour of doing away with caste distinctions by the *Karawa* caste, Moors of Colombo, and of more than 1000 signatories hurriedly collected.¹⁹⁷ James Stewart appeared to defend the claims of the "first class" *Goyigama* who requested the retention of the distinction of caste and class while Richard F. Morgan defended the claims of the *Karawa* and other caste petitioners appealed for the abandonment of such distinctions.¹⁹⁸

A large number of people assembled at the Council room evinced the interest excited by the matter on argument. James Stewart argued for the retention of the caste and class distinctions as they were founded on long established usages peculiar to the East and should be considered through the medium not of English but on Eastern ideas.¹⁹⁹ "The rights of individuals" long established, "are not to be taken from them" he argued, "but for some corresponding advantage to the society. To proceed beyond that is an exercise of tyranny which no wise or liberal government can sanction."²⁰⁰

Morgan arguing for the discontinuance of caste and class distinction referred to the original instruction of the Supreme Court in empanelling the Jurors referred to class among the Burghers and Moors and for the castes of the Sinhalese and Tamils.²⁰¹ But the headmen had used it to support their claims and placed themselves and their connections and friends in the first class. The wealth and the influence of the first class were sufficiently strong to prevent any opposition being raised by the poorer classes and as the Judges were anxious to consolidate the natives to a system seeing no opposition did not examine the list with scrutiny.²⁰²

The "first class" list of the *Goyigama* caste which the Judges used frequently according to Morgan contained the names of 120 persons interrelated to eight or nine families interspersed with a father here and a son there.²⁰³ Two thirds of the cases tried up to 1839 according to a Judge of the Supreme Court were decided with such juries.²⁰⁴ They finally acted as a family tribunal consisting of young relatives acting under the guidance of one or two elders.²⁰⁵ The Judges had noted that the Jurors questioning the witness and parties on matters not appearing in evidence with a full previous knowledge and bias.²⁰⁶ Morgan questioned the honesty and fairness of the verdict of such a

197. *Ibid.* p. 121.

198. CAMPBELL to STANLEY, 7 January 1845, C.O. 54/216 No. 4.

199. Proceedings of L.C. 1843, p. 130.

200. *Ibid.* p. 125.

201. *Ibid.* p. 134.

202. *Ibid.* p. 135.

203. *Ibid.* p. 137.

204. OGLE CARR's Observations on Marshall's remarks on Charter of Justice 1833, 1 January 1839, Scottish Record Office (SRO) GD 46/9/7.

205. *Ibid.*

206. *Ibid.*

jury and remarked that "justice to be perfect, must be above suspicion and satisfactory to all parties."²⁰⁷ Referring to the men of different castes and classes sitting together in public offices attending to the day to day work, Morgan referred to the "shock to the feelings" expressed by the "exclusives" as imaginary and pointed out that a Jury thus regulated on caste lines opposed to the British constitution and the principles of Trial by Jury.²⁰⁸

The Legislative Council finally decided to do away with the distinction of caste and the Jurors qualifications were determined by Ordinance 19 of 1844, inspite of the opposition from the Judges of the Supreme Court.²⁹⁰

Thus on the whole, the modernising forces which accompanied the alien rule gradually worked towards the transformation of the traditional society and this in turn provided impulses for the people themselves to adjust to the modernisation of their law, customs and traditions. The administrative machinery at the commencement showed some readiness to the continuation of the native apparatus which in due course was transformed and made a component in the overall machinery alien in origin and carried out in an alien language. The majority of the people found access to it through the special mediators such as the interpreters and the petition drawers who in turn enlarged their place and role in a remarkable fashion. The laws and customs found repugnant to the norms of the rulers were abolished and substitutions were made wherever necessary while the new sovereign retained and exercised his right to make new laws. In case of the social groups whose customary laws did not exist in a readily acceptable written form the traditional laws underwent a transformation with the enactment of new laws. These neglected groups were forced to accept the changes, but not without protests. On the otherhand, the patronage extended on castes useful to their economic exploitation and political stability led to the emergence of groups economically sound and politically powerful. Riches and dominance were common goals to all castes and the competition for them between and within the castes was rampant and continuous. Gradually ideals of endogamy, position and rank were incubated in the minds of this patronised and up and coming groups. They in turn stood for the resilience to changing social circumstances. Thus, as a whole the alien rule of nearly three centuries in the littorals of Sri Lanka tended to change the caste system confusing its outlook, fabrics and interwoven balancing links of the social order. A new concept of hierarchical position was cast over the whole system. All in all, the ultimate result was that the alien intervention in the caste system of Sri Lanka caused greater havoc, by further widening the gulf between the "high caste" and the "low castes". There is ample proof of this seen in Sri Lankan politics of the twentieth century.

207. Proceedings of L.C. 1843, p. 137.

208. *Ibid.* p. 138.

209. OLIPHANT to ANSTRUTHER, 21 May 1844, C.O. 54/216 No. 4 Enclosure.