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The Forest Division and Colonial Governance during the British Era: A Study of Batticaloa District

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Abstract

The British colonial administration constructed a systematic and enduring set of policies in Ceylon during the middle of the 19th Century. The first Forest Ordinance in Ceylon was enacted in 1885. A special ordinance was introduced in 1907 for the forest department to facilitate revenue collection. This directed to extensive resource utilization throughout the island, including the Eastern Province. According to the Administration Report of Ceylon in 1900, Mr. Alfred served as the Assistant Conservator, while Mr. R.A. Jayman was the Forest Ranger, in the Eastern province. Via Edward Said's theory, primarily articulated in *Orientalism* (1978), according to E.Said, this discourse justified Economic Extraction by promoting the idea that colonized regions required Western control and development. Framing these regions as 'less advanced' enabled colonial powers to rationalize resource appropriation and impose exploitative economic structures. The Batticaloa district was notably rich in natural resources since the ancient period, Indigenous people traditionally utilized forests for sustenance, gathering food, fuel, medicine, and materials, without causing major harm. However, the British administrators utilized and controlled these resources for profit, transforming them into valuable assets for annual revenue. In particular, British colonial policies directed forest resource administration under the supervision of the Forest Department. The objectives of this study are to identify the influences of colonial policies pertaining to the forest division and to examine the impact of the socio-economic aspects in the district of Batticaloa. Further, whether the British policies affected the forest division of Batticaloa and what aspects were highly disturbed, are the research questions. The hypothesis is the British policies on the forest division of Batticaloa were primarily designed for economic exploitation. Based on historical methodology, the research examines the British colonial records, survey maps, field visits and interviews. This study aims to reveal the colonial government's approach on resource conservation and how the natural resources were utilized in Batticaloa under British rule. Specifically focused on the forest policies during the British era, the role of the forest office and administrators in the Batticaloa district, the utilization of natural resources, and the social impacts of imperialism on forest resources.

Keywords: *Colonialism, British policies, Exploitation, Forest*