

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MUNICIPAL COUNCILS IN SRI LANKA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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### **Introduction**

Local Government in Sri Lanka, as we know it today is a modern development dating back to the latter half of the 19th century. With the introduction of Municipal Councils in 1865 to manage the affairs of the then three principal towns of Colombo, Kandy and Galle we inherited, a system of local government designed on the lines of the English model.

However the concept, and the mechanism of Local Government were not unknown or completely alien to Sri Lanka. Although it is difficult to say how ancient they were, it is evident from chronicles and the works of several writers who have done few studies in this field of study that there existed Local Government institutions in our country from about the 4th century B.C. and that functions which are now considered belonging to local government were being exercised by these institutions.<sup>1</sup> Archaeological evidences corroborate literary references which confirm the existence of developed and well planned cities. Hence it is believed that the idea of local people having democratic responsibility for the solution of their problems connected with local needs goes back to very ancient times.

King Pandukabhaya who established Anuradhapura as the first capital of Sri Lanka, as early as 4th century B.C. was also responsible in introducing two different local government institutions to administer the affairs of the city and the villages. After the great victory over his uncles Pandukabhaya, on the advise of Astrologers and Architects organized Anuradhapura as the capital of his kingdom. It is evident that since the time of king Pandukabhaya, Anuradhapura had been a planned city. Mahavamsa provides us with a clear picture on the planning of the city and the administrative system designed by him for the city.<sup>2</sup> In planning the city he set a part specified areas for the royals, for ykkhas who helped him, for places of worship, for parks and convalescent homes, for lying-in-homes, for cemeteries, for dwellings of foreigners, huntsmen, and chandalas, etc. Hence it is evident that urban facilities such as in modern towns had been available in Anuradhapura in the 4th century B.C.

In organising the administrative machinery for the city several officers and communities were assigned to perform different duties and services. The head of the city government was known as Nagaraguttika<sup>3</sup> or the guardian of the city and was considered to be a very important and a high official. He

was in-charge of the government at night.<sup>4</sup> This high official could be identified to be similar to the City Mayor in modern times. As a mark of gratitude for the help given at the war against the other uncles Pandukabhaya appointed his eldest uncle, Abhaya, for this high office. To keep the administrative machinery in operation he set five hundred Chandalas to the work of cleaning the town, two hundred Chandalas to the work of cleaning the sewers and hundred and fifty Chandalas he employed to bear the dead and as many Chandalas to be watches in the cemetery. He built a separate village for the cemetery workers close by the cemetery so that they could continuously carry out their duties as was expected. It could be seen therefore that the services of the city government was organized under separate departments like in the modern times and sufficient employees were appointed to perform the services regularly. Moreover it is interesting to note that the king himself was considerate and attentive for the welfare of the employees to the extent of providing them with living quarters as well.

The Mahavamsa report also has recorded that "ten years after his consecration did Pandukabhaya the ruler of Sri Lanka established village boundaries over the whole Island of Lanka."<sup>5</sup> However unlike its report on the organization of the city of Anuradhapura the Mahavamsa report on the villages does not specifically say whether king Pandukabhaya introduced a new system to administer the villages or whether he regularized an existing system. It has been suggested that a local government institution known as "gamsabe" and in charge of the administration of the village affairs existed from the date at which king Pandukabhaya established village boundaries and it is believed that the purpose of establishing village boundaries was to divide and demarcate the areas of jurisdiction of numerous village corporations or Gamsabhawas spread all over the Island.<sup>6</sup>

Hence the existence of developed cities and well planned systems of municipal administration in Sri Lanka is evident from the time of the 4th century B.C. The successive capital cities of Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya, Yapahuwa, Kurunegala, Gampola, Senkadagala and Kotte as well had been well planned cities and administered by some sort of urban administrative system. It can also be suggested from designations like Niyam-gam and Patunagam - such as Yapapatuna that there existed few smaller towns as well. However the number of towns were few and very often they were limited only to the capital city and the principal harbours. Most of these lesser towns were administered by a local institution known as "Rata saba" an institution on which we have very little information since very little or no research has been done on them.

On the other hand the whole society was basically rural and the village as a unit played an important role in almost all the day to day activities. Accordingly "Gamsabe" or the Village Council played a prominent role as a local government institution and hence Gamsabe could be identified as the principal local government institution that existed in ancient and mediaeval Sri Lanka.

The duties and functions performed by Gamsabe was mainly rural in character. This situation is quite evident from the fact that the promotion of agriculture and maintenance of irrigation were the prime responsibilities of the Village Councils.<sup>6</sup> This system of local administration was adequate for the needs of the sort of rural society that existed in ancient and mediaeval Sri Lanka. But with the vast changes that took place under the Western imperial rulers, by the middle of the 19th Century, there arose a crying need for a system of local government that would suit the needs of the day.

The modern classification of the term urban used in contrast to rural connotes certain characteristics. An urban area has a compact form, characterized by the patterns of buildings, street systems and component open spaces. Secondly, it has a dense population which is revealed by the varying spatial arrangements of residential types. Thirdly its way of life linked with commerce, business, governmental administration, and industry is different to its counterpart in the rural economy.<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly the society in Sri Lanka from the earliest times up to the early 19th century can mainly be described as rural. Agriculture was the main occupation of the Sinhalese from ancient times. They did not buy or sell in abundance. They provided themselves with their own food, clothing and shelter or rendered services in return for them. There was hardly any money in use and the little trade that took place was based on barter system. Communication was slow and difficult. Accumulation of wealth is evidently, found to be an essential feature of an urban society and in traditional Sri Lanka the basic structure of the social fabric and the constitution of its ethos were such that there was no inducement for individuals to exert themselves in the accumulation of wealth.<sup>8</sup> The few cities that existed were mainly administrative centres and trading ports. The importance and development of them depended mainly on the changes of the capital city of the kingdom, an event that has been taking place very often up to the 16th century. Therefore there were very few towns or urban societies in the modern sense of the term and the following description by Robert Knox explains the type of Sri Lankan towns in the 17th century.

I will now add a little concerning their towns. The best are those that do belong to their idols wherein stand their Dewalas or temples. They do not care to make streets by building their houses together in rows, but each man lives by himself in his own plantation... Their towns are always placed some distance from the highways for they care not that their town should be a thorough-fare for all people but only for those that have business with them. They are not very big, in some may be forty, in some fifty houses and in some above an hundred and in some again not above eight or ten.<sup>9</sup>

## THE CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND THE PROCESS OF URBANIZATION IN SRI LANKA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Urbanization is characterised by those factors associated with the emergence, growth, development and spread of towns and their socio civic affairs. Some of these factors influencing a concentrated pattern of settlement are tied up with the economic opportunities, civic facilities, amenities and utilities available in towns. Most of the modern towns in Sri Lanka came into existence in the 19th and 20th Centuries and urbanization in general were mainly the outcome of British policy and related activities. By the middle of the 19th Century the three main towns of Colombo, Kandy and Galle were in the process of urbanization. The common factors like administrative reforms, the growth and development of transportation, communication and plantation industry together with particular factors peculiar to these several towns led to the organization of urban areas in the modern sense of the term functioning as "service centres" and offering certain public utilities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Administrative Refroms.**

The British Colonial Policy during the period from 1796 to 1833 was directed to consolidate their authority and to introduce British system of institutions wherever practicable to replace the medieval administrative institutions of the country. With the subjugation of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815, the experience gained during the period, and the financial problems confronted with, demanded a major reform scheme in the Island. A Commission of Inquiry was appointed and consequent to the recommendations made by the two Commissioners William Colebrooke and Charles Hay Cameron, a reform scheme affecting almost every aspect of political, economic and social spheres was implemented in 1833. The provinces of the Kandyan Kingdom was unified with the Maritime Provinces and a single and unified system of administration was introduced. The country was divided into five provinces and initial steps towards legislative and executive reforms were introduced. The medieval system of Rajakariya labour was abolished while several measures of encouraging foreigners to own land, invest on business enterprises and settle down in the Island were also introduced. These reforms were so broad based and the results of implementing them were so wide that the scheme is considered as a turning point in the history of the Island.

It is evident that these administrative and socio-economic reforms played an important role in bringing up several new towns in different parts of the country and expanding the existing ones. With the implementation of the administrative reforms several administrative centres came into existence. In each capital of the five Provinces, a Government Agent who was an English civil servant was stationed and his office, the Kachcheri was also established in addition to making the supportive staff reside in the vicinity of the centre. Likewise several government departments also stationed their provincial

officers in different provincial centres. These administrative centres not only contributed in the emergence and the development of several provincial towns such as Matara, Jaffna, Ratnapura, etc., but also to the expansion of the existing towns of Colombo, Kandy and Galle.

The influx of foreigners and foreign capital also contributed in the process of urbanization in the country. Not only in places, in and around the centres of plantation industry where the foreign capitalists resided but also in places like Nuwara-Eliya, Bandarawela, Welimada, etc., where they used to spend their holidays also had to be provided with their daily needs. Hence to cater to a foreign population who were accustomed to live in European style, these local towns had to be developed in the lines of modern European towns availing urban facilities. It is evident therefore that the reforms of 1833 based on the recommendations of the Colebrooke Gameron Commission contributed immensely to the growth of towns and urbanising process in Sri Lanka.

#### **Transport And Communication**

The greatest material change from rural to an urban society is due mainly to the vastly improved means of internal communications. Though roads were not unknown in Sri Lanka prior to the coming of the British, those that existed were limited to the environs of the emerging towns in the maritime provinces and to a broad track running along the coastal belt. Strategic and administrative considerations led Governor Edward Barnes who assumed the governorship in 1820 to take the initiative in opening up a few lines of communication into the interior of the country. Due mainly to his efforts, before he resigned in 1831, he could complete a highway, from Colombo, the capital of the Island to Kandy, the central hill capital. He also succeeded in making every other place of importance approachable by a carriage road.<sup>11</sup>

Governor Barnes, however, left an immense deal to be done in bridging the rivers and extending the roads in the interior. Governor Sir Henry Ward (1855 to 1860) with but limited means did a great deal to open up the remote districts and to bridge the rivers which in the wet season were well-nigh impassable. He also began the railway to Kandy which was successfully completed during the time of his successors Charles McCarthy (1860 to 1863) and Hercules Robinson (1865 to 1872). Governor Robinson also laid the foundation for the construction of the Colombo Breakwater and the scheme was continued by his successor William Gregory (1872 to 1877). This scheme ensured for the capital of Sri Lanka one of the safest, most convenient and commodious artificial harbours in the world.

Thus the network of roads linked the two principal towns of Colombo and Kandy with not only the plantation districts and the new plantation settlements but also with every other town of importance in the Island. Colombo however was the hub of the island's route system and by 1863 there were four main roads from Colombo to Kandy. One of them was a

direct line, while the other three were indirect lines running through Kurunegala, Ginigathena and Ruwanwella respectively. There was also one continuous line of road starting from Colombo running about seven hundred and sixty miles round the entire circuit of the coast. Thus Colombo was linked by trunk roads with such places like Galle, Badulla, and Trincomelee.

Kandy too had its share, however, and a network of roads—main and minor—linked it with such far away places like Jaffna, Talaimanar, Dambulla, Puttalam, Rattota, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, and Badulla. This network of roads and afterwards the railway, led, not only to the growth of Colombo and Kandy into cities but also to develop few other big towns like Galle, Nuwara Eliya, and Jaffna while also creating several other junction-towns of varying sizes and functional importance.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Plantation Industry And Socio-Economic Changes**

The Plantation industry, introduced by the British on a commercial basis warranted urbanization and thus contributed towards the growth of several towns in Sri Lanka. The most suitable land for the cultivation of coffee was found in and around Kandy and hence there was a rapid utilization of the land for cultivation by 1830's. As a result of this new industry, new modes of socio-economic behaviour and a host of concepts foreign to the native system were introduced and no time was lost before the new system encroached into the very foundation of the existing structure. Economically the virile commercial agriculture soon displaced in importance the traditional pursuits of the people to the extent that within a short period of time coffee had made itself responsible for almost a third of the Government income.<sup>13</sup>

Naturally in these years the problems of the planters came to be regarded as synonymous with those of the country and in the quest for their solution much that was old was swept away and much new replacements were introduced with startling rapidity. In the process a new economic structure began to evolve. The factors of production—land, labour and capital—took a new meaning and alone with these developments a money economy emerged. It brought with it a consciousness of the prices, profits and wages and started off a variety of socio-economic developments, the like of which the indigenous population had not encountered before. Political affairs were invested with novel significance and a "middle class" in the modern sense of the term—a notion totally foreign to the prevalent system began its slow growth.

The plantation industry grew so rapidly that there was a heavy demand for labour. Abolition of Service labour or Rajakariya in 1833 did not bring about the desired result, the free market of labour. This was due mainly to the firm attachment of the indigenous people to the traditional social and economic system they had cherishly inherited for over 2000 years. Consequently the

planters had to import labour in large quantities and this influx of immigrants was of much significance to the growth of small towns in and around the plantation districts. For the first time a landless working class proper, and a class tied to its employers by the cash nexus alone, came into existence and as a result there emerged the need for market places to provide with the requirements of this new community. As the scope of economic activity increased, a considerable widening of the existing administrative structure became imperative. New posts had to be created and many fresh departments set up. Personnel for the higher appointments were normally recruited in the metropolitan country while other positions were filled from amongst the local population. The widening of economic and administrative activities led to the establishment of provincial capitals and district centres. This situation stimulated the growth of several towns.<sup>14</sup> Consequently a class of white-collar and petty officials, came into being, with the ability to speak English as their main qualification for employment. Being aware of the advantages of educating their younger generation, this new class or social category produced from its ranks within the next twenty-five years, a number of professional men, lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc., equal in calibre to their counterparts in the West. Out of these widely differing strings of clerks, doctors, lawyers, merchants and planters was woven the new Sri Lankan "Middle Class". It was essential for this new class of people to live in towns, not only to carry on a prosperous profession but also to maintain their peculiar way of life. Hence the growth of towns in Sri Lanka was more or less an automatic outcome of the requirements of the plantation industry.

These socio-economic developments changed the functional environment of the towns as well and specially that of Colombo and Kandy underwent rapid changes. With the increasing number of firms expanding their business, Colombo which was once only a military fort, developed to be the centre of great commercial activity. By 1860 the coffee trade alone had brought about twenty to thirty commercial firms into action in Colombo and many mills, storehouses and transport facilities accompanied them. Similar firms and institutions dealing with the export of other products like cocoa, cardamoms and coconut produce were also established.

With the growth of a money economy a number of banks as an essential concomitant made their appearance in the Island. In 1841 the Bank of Ceylon began operations in Colombo and in 1843 opened a branch in Kandy. Shortly after "The Western Bank of India" came into being, with branches both in Colombo and Kandy and in 1845 changed the name into "The Oriental Bank". However the Bank of Ceylon did not last long. The depression of 1848-49 found the bank so heavily involved that it was unable to meet its liabilities and its closure was imminent when "the Oriental Bank" took over its debts. The two banks were formally amalgamated in 1851 by a fresh charter under the

title of "The Oriental Bank Corporation". From 1851 to 1854 it was the only bank available in the island. In 1854 the Mercantile Bank opened branches in Colombo and Kandy with Messers. Ried and Co. as its agent in Galle. The Bank of Madras and the National Bank of India also opened their branches in 1867 and 1871 respectively. C. Pridham thus describing the city of Colombo in 1849 has given a vivid picture of its many and beautiful shops and markets.

Some handsome and well stocked shops have also opened by Europeans, a number of others belong to respectable Burghers of Dutch decent and Main street, Pettah, is now one series of shops and stores. The Moormen own the greater number of shops, the grain stalls are shared by Tamils and Moormen and a few wealthy Parsee tradesmen transact an extensive business in the street... There are several bazaars or market places in the Pettah for fish, flesh of every kind, fruits, grain, garden hearbs, etc.<sup>15</sup>

The effects of the plantation industry were equally felt in Kandy. There were a number of plantations in and around Kandy and hence it became the most important distributing centre in the hills. Most of the coffee, produced in the plantations was transported to Colombo via Kandy in carts. These carts on the way back transported the provisions and equipment required in the plantation districts. The goods were next stored in Kandy and thence sold to plantations. As a corollary, by 1850 there emerged in Kandy numerous firms, retail and wholesale dealers, merchants, druggist and apothecaries and cartsmen.

As an administrative centre it was second only to Colombo and hence numerous offices, residences, schools, churches, hospitals, etc., were established very soon. Following the few streets that existed within the town two principal streets were constructed. The Colombo street ran from east to west dividing the town into two nearly equal parts and Trincomalee street which ran from north to south met Colombo street at right angles. A few more streets ran parallel to these and by 1857 the principal bazaar was at the intersection of Colombo and Trincomalee streets. With numerous firms, stores, and boutiques the bazaar was more or less similar to that of Colombo.<sup>16</sup>

With the development of the plantations, Kandy experienced a heavy influx of immigrant labourers, planters, low-country Sinhalese and Muslim traders. Consequently, it lost its homogeneity and as a result long standing impregnable traditional Kandyan rural social system which had hitherto withstood all threats and dangers, succumbed and started breaking up. There were indications from as early as the mid 1850's that large sections of the Kandyan peasantry were falling victims of the new economy and becoming money conscious, profit minded, market oriented and all that they signified. The conversion to commercial agriculture was so rapid that in prosperous fifties and sixties it was estimated that of the total acreage of 130,000 under coffee about fifty thousand acres belonged to the peasantry.<sup>17</sup> This illustrates the



growth of a receptive attitude towards the new economic phenomenon, a system which had no significance at all under the traditional local system. Economic individualism was evidently growing stronger and its expansion was hurried by the wide spreading network of roads and railway, the flood of hard currency with the coffee "mania" and the settlement of thousands of wage earning labourers. All these factors led to the disintegration of the traditional "kandyan" system and the growth of a new system where towns, cities, and urbanization were essential. This we see in Kandy as early as 1850's the expansion and development of a city in the modern sense of the term. Emerson Tennent has thus described the situation of Kandy in 1860.

The silence of this mountain solitude has been broken by the din of industry and the seclusion of their village invaded by bands of hired labourers from the Indian coast. Their ancient habits have been interrupted and their prejudice started.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Growth of Population**

The increase of population in towns is a reflection of continued prosperity of trade, commerce and other business within them. Hence the demographic features may be considered useful factors of guidance in the study of this rapid urbanization experienced by principal towns in Sri Lanka. The first official census was taken in 1824 on a classification of the population into numbers, sex and age groups. The enumerations in the towns were recorded by streets, which of course were of varying lengths and consequently the numbers varied accordingly, giving us no indication as to which were the crowded areas. The enumerations included only the number of the tiled houses and all other modes of habitation were excluded. Hence most of the houses, especially in the town of Kandy, ought to have been omitted because the privilege of having tiled houses was once reserved for the royalty and the lodgings of the public were mostly thatched with cadjans. In 1824 the Galle town was reported to be more populous than that of Colombo.<sup>19</sup>

The growth of population in these towns was continuous.<sup>20</sup> Several factors like the natural increase, migration, and the extension of the town limits contributed towards the augmentation of population in towns. However since 1824 the migration emerged as the factor mainly and mostly responsible for augmenting the population of these towns. The migratory tendency was connected with those forces which "pulled" the individuals to the towns.<sup>21</sup> These pulling forces were the job opportunities tied up with the increasing trade and commerce of the ports and towns and the administrative activities centered in the towns. Not all who found employment in a town cared to reside within its limits. As a result there began the trickle of commuters that has since grown up in considerable streams. Consequently, the town of Colombo being the capital city of the Island, the principal port of the Indian Ocean, the seat of Government and the principal centre of trade and commerce, had a large

floating population. Their avocations brought them to the town, thus augmenting the day population of the city. In 1881 Lionel Lee, who compiled the census of that year, caused an enumeration to be made of these persons, coming on three days to the town by the principal roads and by train. The average for the three days was estimated at 8,684.<sup>22</sup>

## THE FACTORS OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE TO THE GROWTH OF THE RESPECTIVE TOWNS OF COLOMBO, KANDY AND GALLE

### **The Town of Colombo**

Beside the common factors that contributed to the growth of towns in general there were several factors of particular importance to individual towns. The importance of being the capital of Sri Lanka and its port played a major role in the urbanization of Colombo and hence in the emergence, development and growth of the town of Colombo. However, Colombo was a port long before it became the capital of the Island. Sri Lanka by virtue of its midway position in the Indian Ocean, has throughout her history been a meeting place of foreign merchants and travellers. About 700 A. D. "Kolamba" or "Kolantota" became a Muslim trading settlement and was one of the first six settlements on the west coast of Sri Lanka. The Muslims had built warehouses (bangasalas) and carried on trade in cinnamon and elephants. They also brought to "Kolamba" gold, silver, cotton and silk-stuffs from Cambay. This trade attracted a concourse of merchant's and the port was both rich and populous. Thus the settlement of "Kolamba" developed in its size and functions from about 1330 A. D. and it was at that time "one of the finest and largest cities of the Island of Serendib, the residence of wazir, lord of she sea".<sup>23</sup>

Under the Dutch, from 1658 to 1796 the port of Colombo changed very little in its form although its functions increased. Cinnamon was one of the most important articles of foreign trade and the port of Colombo with its rich cinnamon hinterland was the centre for storing, packing and shipping of cinnamon to Europe and India. Colombo shared also in the foreign trade with Madura and Coramandal Coast. The Dutch imported large quantities of rice and clothing to be sold in Colombo where the traders met to barter their arecanuts, etc., for them. In the port to port trade, Colombo provided the other ports mainly with goods imported from foreign countries. In this respect the port of Colombo was gradually establishing itself as the chief port and the trading centre of the Islands.

Though the functions of the port was much increased, the Dutch failed to provide adequate facilities for shipping. Hence until 1870, when the British decided to improve the harbour by the construction of breakwaters and the installation of port facilities, Colombo remained "nothing more an open road affording safe anchorage to ships within only four months of the year."<sup>24</sup> Despite the limitations and meagre port facilities, the trade of the port of Colombo increased as its hinterland provided goods for both export

and to the local markets. By 1830 coffee exports reached 885,728 cwts. while rice imports reached 4,735,832 cwts.<sup>25</sup> The Colombo port being the largest importing point attracted to its vicinity numerous industrial, commercial and business establishments which largely depended on imported items like foodstuffs, textiles and manufactured goods. With the construction of breakwaters and the provision of harbour facilities the port of Colombo had by the turn of the century come to be called the "Clapham Junction of the East".<sup>26</sup> It had surpassed all other port towns that thrived on commerce and business during the 17th 18th, and 19th centuries.

The selection of Colombo as the capital of Sri Lanka also contributed immensely to the growth and development of the city. The Portuguese who were carried by the monsoons to the shores of Sri Lanka in 1505 set up a garrisoned factory close to the Muslim settlement, Kolomba.

The choice of the site was no accident. But it owed more to considerations of local strategy than to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean. The port of Galle offered the Portuguese a better site for shipping in their colonial ventures. But by establishing themselves in Colombo it was easier for the Portuguese to come into contact with the king who resided at Kotte, a mere six miles distance. Colombo was also the centre of the cinnamon trade and thus enjoyed an advantageous commercial position. Thus by the beginning of the 17th century the Portuguese had established themselves in the Sinhalese Kingdom of Kotte and had gained effective control of the trade and shipping along the western seaboard of Sri Lanka. The administrative as well as the economic affairs of the provinces under the Portuguese were centered round the capital of Colombo.

Ever since, Colombo continued to be the capital of the Island and its internal situation was improved under the Dutch and British. The agricultural settlements and road policies of the Dutch helped to improve and develop Colombo considerably. A period of peace and economic stability under the British, barring the depression of 1844—49, brought progress and prosperity to Colombo. The privilege of being not only the capital but also the principal port and the trading centre automatically contributed in transforming Colombo into the administrative centre as well. Consequently the headquarters of all the government departments and the Queen's House or the Governor's residence, hospitals, churches, parks and places of recreation principal schools, etc., all amenities required to the growth of a city, were concentrated in Colombo and by the middle of the 19th century Colombo was at the height of a growing city in the modern sense of the term.

### **The Town of Galle**

The urbanization of Galle also can be attributed mainly to its natural harbour. It was by far the most venerable emporium of foreign trade and the resort of merchant ships at the earliest stage of commerce. It was also one of the Muslim trade settlements and one of the entrepôts, whence the Moorish

traders of Malabar drew the produce of the remoter East, which they sold to the Genoese and Venetians to be distributed over the countries of the West. Consequently when the Portuguese landed in Galle in 1505 the port of Galle was much more prosperous and was also strategically better situated in the Indian Ocean than that of Colombo. However choice of Colombo as the capital by the Portuguese was a turning point in the history of the city of Galle, because it contributed immensely to the decay of the port of Galle and this loss on Galle was a gain on Colombo. However during the 17th and 18th centuries Galle continued to be the emporium of the Portuguese and afterwards that of the Dutch.

As the port of Colombo grew rapidly, Galle's share in Sri Lankan trade fell in equal rapidness. The Port of Colombo, being in the vicinity of or nearer to the coffee and cinnamon districts, accounted for the export of the largest proportion of the local products. Therefore the trade of Galle was restricted mainly to coconut products, for which the Southern Province is so well known. Besides, the large population of Moors who held sway over the gem trade as well, engrossed themselves in the trade of rice and other commodities. But the local prosperity of Galle depended mainly on the merchant vessels which made it their focus. There grew up numerous hotels, lodging houses and shops to supply the necessities of the foreign travellers and the town was sufficiently prosperous to support these establishments.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Town of Kandy**

The origin and growth of the town of Kandy owes much to its political importance. It was the seat of the last Sinhalese Kings and when the British obtained control over the Kandyan kingdom they treated it as a separate territory and introduced a different system of administration as well. Even after 1833, when the Kandyan areas were administratively amalgamated with the rest of the island, Kandy continued to be an administrative and strategic center, which is second only to Colombo in importance.

Moreover Kandy was the centre of plantation districts and its economic importance contributed immensely to the growth of the town. Not only the planters but also many others like low-country Sinhalese and Muslims migrated to Kandy from other parts of the Island for business ventures. The cool and healthy climate in the Kandyan districts suited not only for coffee cultivation but also helped to attract foreigners. Hence with the expansion of coffee plantations more and more foreigners and other businessmen together with the Indian labourers settled down in the Kandyan areas. As a result, to satisfy their growing needs and requirements, a kachcheri with a first class government Agent who was also a member of the Legislative Council,<sup>28</sup> a regiment of the army, branches of almost all the government departments, markets, schools, parks and recreations all came into existence and contributed in making Kandy a fast growing town.

## THE EMERGENCE OF URBAN PROBLEMS

Hand in hand with the growing socio-economic fabric of Sri Lanka, various problems connected with those towns and the lives of the dwellers also emerged. Improvement of transportation and sanitation, maintenance of peace and health, supply of water and lighting the streets were some of the problems that demanded urgent attention of the government. The few lines of communication opened on strategic and administrative considerations during the early decades of the 19th century were merely trunk roads. It is true that they were of some value to coffee planters. But with the flood of investments on coffee during the 1840's the call for more and more roads became insistent. The government was not in any way hostile to this need but so many roads were demanded within so short a period that the providence of finances and labour required in constructing them were found to be serious problems. Moreover the construction costs were unseemingly heavy especially because the roads had to be constructed in the hill country where the coffee industry was located. High maintenance costs also had to be expected because of the heavy rainfalls, extreme heat and the thin iron-rimmed wheels of the carts which ran between estates and the shipping centres combined to cause serious damage to even the newest road surfaces within very short periods.<sup>29</sup> The annual expenditure on these items increased heavily every year, the figures for 1842, 1844 and 1846 being £ 23, 147, £ 35,451 and £ 64,947 respectively. Yet the planters who were dissatisfied and accusing the Government of discrimination, intentional neglect and indifference, launched a political movement notable for its open hostility to official policy and personnel.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover the local requirements of public health such as a supply of good and wholesome water, drainage, sanitation and market facilities were found to be deplorably deficient. With the gradual growth of populous and congested towns where sanitary facilities were of a primitive nature, epidemics formed a grave problem. Unpredicted epidemics of smallpox and cholera were recurrent. In 1828 saw an epidemic of smallpox in the island and with the influx of Indian labourers cholera ravaged it in 1845 and 1846. The outbreak of cholera in 1845 was unprecedented in its severity, carrying off almost entire villages in the plantation districts.

Social conditions in the growing town of Colombo, especially in Fort and Pettah, grew to be completely different from those which had existed in the early decades of the century. These two localities which once formed the residential areas of Europeans and Burghers and well-to-do citizens had now been converted into places of extensive business and commercial enterprises. The houses were converted into stores and the space for dwelling decreased. Some of the business houses had their wares stored in a part of the building and the outhouses were used as dwellings for a larger number than they could accommodate with comfort. This situation was thus described in the press

“many other four walls which before had sheltered in or around a dozen of wretched idolators were by the aid of this social ‘Jack-Screw’ made to hold twice the number and King Dirt reigned supreme throughout the drainless territory”<sup>31</sup>. The surface drains in the cross streets were broken and damaged by the carts and no measures were taken to repair them.

It may be stated as a broad fact that with comparatively rare exceptions, there did not exist in any of the houses of poorer classes in these towns any provision whatsoever to meet in privacy the natural wants. The only exception was the cesspits that existed in the houses of well-to-do citizens and even they were not emptied for several decades. Obviously, these cesspits contaminated the soil, air and water, the three basic sources of disease. Hence they were as much of a nuisance as the public thoroughfares and open compounds where the poorer people had in common to relieve the call of nature.<sup>32</sup> These primitive sanitary measures which even did not suit the limited population did not in anyway suffice the congested localities. In all the towns the densely populated areas were rampant with filth and there were heaps of dirt collected in the house yards. The open drains which were found on either side of the streets were commonly used as urinary closets and for committing other types of disgusting nuisance. H.C. Sirr thus described the situation in the Kandy town. “The town of Kandy is insalubrious as it lies in a basin, open drains running at either side of the principal streets and the effluvia from these receptacles of filth, especially after rain is absolutely pestiferous”.<sup>33</sup>

None of these towns was supplied with pure water and the water used by the inhabitants was unwholesome. In Colombo the only means of supplying water to the town was wells. Lack of drainage and the existence of cesspits in the close proximity to these wells subjected their water to contamination. Hence the water used by a large population of the inhabitants of Colombo was utterly unfit for human consumption.<sup>34</sup> H. C. Sirr wrote as follows with regard to the supply of water in Galle.

The town of Galle although a clean picturesque little spot has one serious drawback namely the want of pure water and neither Europeans nor the natives will use the water that is procured in the Fort for drinking or culinary purposes as it is peculiarly unwholesome... water of the best and purest description is procured in the vicinity of the fort and the water carriers gain a good livelihood by furnishing the inhabitants of the town with this essential requisite to health and comfort.<sup>35</sup>

Although Sirr was of the opinion that no one used the unwholesome well water it is evident that the mass of the people could not afford to buy the pure water, which was very expensive, and hence had to content themselves with water so impure as to be even offensive to the senses.<sup>36</sup> Every requirement for

the protection of health such as pure water, drainage, sanitation, scavenging, slaughter houses and cemeteries was found to be deplorably lacking and the prevention of epidemics resulting from filthy environments was found to be a serious problem.

Preserving order in these growing towns too was found to be a difficult task. Generally in each and every town, and especially in the Kandyan areas where the lawlessness followed the wake of plantation, there had emerged a need for a police service to safeguard life and property.

#### A VACCUM IN THE FIELD OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Amidst these growing socio-economic problems there had emerged an administrative want in the field of local government. The ancient rural economic system which was based on agriculture and land-holding entailed the land-holders in a counter obligation on their part to render to the State either a part of the produce of the land or personel service.<sup>37</sup> This personel service or "Rajakariya" as it was called formed one of the main sources of revenue of the kings, and he used it for the maintenance of irrigation, roads and paths or in other words the public works of the localities. However owing to various difficulties such as lack of communication, the king could not exercise his direct authority over, the distant parts of the country. Hence the king regulated this customary service or Rajakariya and maintained the public works of the localities through the "village councils".

The little evidence available on the early local government system of Sri Lanka shows that the Village Councils discharged both administrative and judicial functions.<sup>38</sup> The administrative functions were in the areas of apportioning Rajakariya and the duties connected with irrigation which had to be performed by different cultivators. The settling of disputes amicably was their main judicial function. However their usefulness as an administrative body was very much lost after the abolition of Rajakariya in 1833.<sup>39</sup> When the system of Rajakariya was abolished the Village Councils had to part with their administrative powers and functions and hence ceased to exist as administrative bodies.

The people personally appreciated the advantages of their exemption from Rajakariya. But with this abolition, on the one hand the Government had to give up suddenly all claims whatsoever to a portion of the services of the people which, according to their customs, they had from the time immemorial been liable to render to the government. On the other hand the people themselves had to part with their right of governing their own affairs or the right of local self-government which they had enjoyed from ancient times. However

with the abolition of Rajakariya and the substitution of hired labour instead, the anticipated "free market" of labour did not take place. Hence the indirect repercussion of the measure was the neglect of internal communication and irrigation. Governor Torrington in his long and comprehensive despatch forwarding the Road Ordinance of 1848 thus described the neglected situation of public works as a result of the abolition of Rajakariya.

The banks and tanks and water courses still in use have been gradually going out of repair and a retrograde movement has been in many parts too apparent. A sufficient quantity of hired labour even for the principal roads was not easily procured, and the little they were able to get formed the indispensable resources of Government for the maintenance of these works. The minor lines of communications, canals, etc., and other very desirable works of much local importance in a tropical country have received little attention.<sup>40</sup>

In the meantime the administrative and financial reforms implemented in 1833 contributed very much to aggravate the situation. The Island was divided into five provinces and the whole administration was centralized in the hands of the Governor in Council. A Government Agent who was responsible with regard to every minute detail of administration of the province was appointed to each of these five divisions. Several European as well as native officers who assisted the Government Agent in his administrative function came under his strict authority.<sup>41</sup> While a large province with heavy and enlarged administrative duties was thus placed in the hands of the Government Agent, some of the other government offices were abolished and their duties were entrusted to officers of inferior grades. With all the enhanced burdens entrusted to these officers their salaries were reduced. Hence all the minute public works which under the traditional local system were managed by the local people with the supervision of the Village Councils were thus placed under the Civil Servants who were overburdened with heavy duties. Moreover these officers had no knowledge of the local systems, people or their language. Hence naturally these administrative and financial reforms led to the deterioration of public services during a "time of trouble" when they had to be performed promptly and efficiently. Hence very soon it was felt that the central government could no longer attend to all the minute wants of each and every locality or spend on them out of the general revenue.<sup>42</sup> The logical and eventual solution which also suited the "colonial policy" of the period was to fill the vacuum in the field of local administration with some form of local government institution.



## THE EARLY EXPERIMENTS OF A MUNICIPAL SYSTEM

**The Policy Involved**

The early experiments in Municipal Government in Sri Lanka were carried on in accordance with the contemporary colonial policy of the British Empire. Several ideas and concepts that dominated the "Reform Age" in England contributed considerably in shaping this aspect of the colonial policy. It is evident that since about 1840, colonial policy was aimed at establishing and improving as far as possible the representative institutions in the colonies.<sup>43</sup> This was the outcome of the influence of the preachings of several important ideological groups such as the Whigs, the Radicals, the Free traders, the Wakefield school of Colonial Reformers, and the Evangelicals.

The outcome of the American War of Independence and the loss of the thirteen colonies built up a feeling of depression and pessimism in England with regard to colonies in general. It was believed that independence was the ultimate destiny of the colonies and there were advocates of separation already in the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century. The Radicals were inclined to see the empire as a heavy burden and advocated in favour of the dissolution of the empire. However these separatist ideas were not dominant due to the activities of the Wakefield School, a small but energetic and vociferous group of "Colonial Reformers".<sup>44</sup> They had ardent faith in the future of the Empire which they wanted to preserve by granting a large measure of self-government to the colonies. It must however be observed that the self-government contemplated by these Reformers was subject to certain limitations. They made a distinction between local and imperial affairs and it was only in respect of local affairs that they recommended the granting of responsible government. Imperial affairs however were to remain under the control of the home government. They were also Free Traders who opposed the imperial preference system and emphasized the affinity of colonial self-support to colonial self-government.

In 1850 a Colonial Reform Association came into existence under the inspiration of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Its main objectives were the promotion of colonial self-government and colonial self-support. It was clearly evident from the composition of this association that their ranks included Tories, Radicals, Evangelicals and their major principles enjoyed the approval of such prominent statesmen such as Lord John Russel,<sup>45</sup> Earl Grey,<sup>46</sup> Gladson and Disraeli. Hence their concepts dominated the colonial office from about 1845 to 1860. The Free Traders always insisted that free trade for the colonies ought to be accompanied by colonial defence. Accordingly with the growth of free trade in the 1840's "self support" of the colonies became a principal feature of the colonial policy. In keeping with these principles emerged a belief that there should be a local contribution towards the expenses incurred on defence within the colony.<sup>47</sup>

Influenced by these concepts, it was Earl Grey as the Secretary of State for the colonies in the Whig Ministry of Lord John Russel, who took initial steps in modifying the colonial policy by incorporating the ideas of self-defence, self-support and self-government. Earl Grey however believed that in some colonies representative governments could not safely be created and also that the same form of representative institutions was by no means applicable to colonies in different stages of social progress. If a large proportion of the population in any colony, consisted of non-Europeans who had not made such progress as to be capable of exercising with advantage the privileges of self-government, Grey specified such circumstance as a principal bar to the establishment of representative Government. His best example of this type of Eastern colony which did not qualify for self-government was Sri Lanka.<sup>48</sup> However Grey being an ardent admirer of the educational value of representative local institutions<sup>49</sup> believed that the exercise of the powers usually entrusted to Municipal bodies is the best training that a population can have for the right usage of a larger measure of political power. Hence during his period of office as the Secretary of state for the Colonies, his policy was to instruct the Governors of those colonies which he thought unfit for self-government to introduce representative local bodies and give them a training in the art of self-government.<sup>50</sup> Besides these factors that influenced the policy makers, the financial difficulties of the Sri Lankan government induced the administrators to design some means of relieving the General Revenue from its minute burdens of local interests. The economic crisis of 1846 brought about disaster and Sri Lanka had to pass through difficult days. From 1846 to 1850 the budgets had shown an annual deficit amounting to £ 180,839. Moreover with the financial crisis a policy of rigid economy enforced by the Colonial Office prevented much money being devoted to the public works of the country.<sup>51</sup> Faced with these deficit budgets and a consequent policy of rigid economy, a worried Government had to find some means of supplying the various necessities of the country. At this juncture a measure of self-help and the concept of local improvements carried out with a local fund, was thought to be an ideal device for promoting economy. Several witnesses who gave evidence before the Committee of the Executive Council on the Fixed "Establishment of Ceylon" in 1852 urged the necessity of a system of Municipal bodies and the members of the Committee<sup>52</sup> were much impressed with the opinion. Dawson, a merchant of Colombo giving evidence suggested having in every town of sufficient size and population a Municipal body to collect the assessment tax, to keep the town in order and possibly also for police purposes. He was of the opinion that the Government of the Colony had too much work to do and any system that could relieve the Government and make the people think for themselves would be much more advantageous and satisfactory to the community than the prevalent system. He also advised the Government to begin with the towns and to extend the system to the rest of the country.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Introduction of a Police Service**

In fact, since 1844, Ceylon Government implemented several measures which introduced local funds for local purposes. In 1844 an Ordinance for establishing an efficient police in certain towns was passed.<sup>54</sup> This Ordinance empowered the Governor to establish a police force wherever he thought it necessary for the effective protection of persons and property within such towns. It also empowered the police to enforce most of the urban, requirements such as preserving health, preventing nuisance, regulating weights and measures and maintaining of roads. It is interesting to note here that this Ordinance made provisions for a local fund in the form of an assessment rate on the property within such towns sufficient for the maintenance of the local police force. The assessments were to be done by a Committee of Assessors which consisted of not more than five and not less than three members appointed by the Governor. The collection of the tax was to be done by the government Agent of the Province. Hence it is evident that although the theorists who influenced in forming the colonial policy advocated the correlation of the two principles this measure was aimed at only the principle of self-support and not that of self-government or any form of training for self government.

### **The Road Committees**

The first step in establishing local bodies with a local fund and with a measure of local representation was the establishment of "Road Committees" in 1848. Governor Torrington's idea was to establish Municipal bodies with limited responsibilities in the first instance and to extend them gradually. But ultimately the Ordinance which was introduced by P. E. Wodehouse, the Government Agent of the Western Province at the time, and passed in the Council, did not establish Municipal Councils as such. But it brought the construction and maintenance of roads, which was a major problem faced by the government, under the supervision of Road Committees.<sup>55</sup>

This new measure provided for a Provincial Road Committee to be established in each of the six provinces of the Island where the Government Agent of the province was to be the chairman. The commissioner of Roads or one of his assistants was to be a member of the Committee. In addition not less than three and no more than five other members, of whom at least two should be persons not holding office under the Crown, were to be appointed by the Governor from year to year. Subordinated to these Committees there were to be District Committees in as many districts in each province as the Governor with the advice of the Executive Council may think expedient to proclaim. Each such Committee was to be composed of three members appointed by the Provincial Road Committee and the Assistant Government Agent was to be the Chairman ex-officio. The most important feature of the Ordinance was the provision for the election of an officer in each division who was to be styled "the Division Officer". He was to be elected by the male

householders of the ages between 18 and 55 residing within the Division in respect of which the election was held. The "local fund" provided by the Ordinance to defray on the buildings and the maintenance of means of communications in the several provinces, consisted of labour or commutation supplied by every male in each province, between the ages of 18 and 55.

It is evident that this Ordinance had two main objectives.<sup>56</sup> Obviously the financial objectives were in the forefront. In other words the Ordinance was devised mainly to relieve the General Treasury of a heavy burden and to provide for a local fund to improve the means of communication in local areas. However, the second motive was that this scheme would educate the mass of people to be aware of matters of common interest, teach them the advantages of combined action for the general good and moreover initiate some measure of local self-government. By about December, 1849 the Ordinance was put into effect. Provincial and District Road Committees were constituted to regulate the labour and Commutation money made available under the Ordinance. Although Governor Torrington used every possible means to present the measure as a first step towards self-government it is more the semblance of a reintroduction of the compulsory labour system which had been abolished by the Order in Council of 12 April, 1832. Neither of these committees, nor even a part of it, was elected by the people. All the members of the Provincial Committees were nominees of the Governor while the District Committee was a product of the Provincial Committee. The only elected element was the "Division Officer" who was not a member of either of the Committees that regulated the labour and the Commutation money collected by him and supplied by his electors. Obviously the people did not take sufficient interest in the election of the Division Officers who were looked upon by them in the role of only a tax-collector,<sup>57</sup> However when the scheme was put into practice it was quite clear that it was nobody's business to promote the elective principle of the measure. Governor Torrington who promoted the measure in 1848 as a step towards self-government thus wrote in 1850 after putting the measure into practice.

In the meantime we are not in a position at once and suddenly to delegate to the people even the local management of their own, concerns...we are not yet prepared to relieve the Government of any considerable portion of that minute supervision and careful provision for the wants of the people which in a more advanced stage might be better entrusted to themselves.<sup>58</sup>

Throughout the working of the Ordinance the authorities were concerned only with the financial and administrative objectives, that is to improve and maintain the roads with the labour and commutation money supplied under the Ordinance. As a result even when the country was financially in a prosperous state the Government could escape from increasing the amount of expenditure out of the government funds on roads. In 1851 Governor Anderson wrote to the Secretary of State and said:

Whilst there is an increase in revenue in 1850 of £ 4,301 the decrease of expenditure amounts to no less than £ 20,743 . . . . under the head roads, streets and bridges there is a decrease of £ 4,335 in regard to which some explanation seems to be necessary. It must not be supposed from this circumstance that a lesser sum was expended on roads than in former years. On the contrary if the funds derived under the Roads Ordinance which have been appropriated for the construction and repair of roads be taken into account it will be seen that a larger expenditure was incurred in 1850 for those purposes than in former years.<sup>59</sup>

However from the beginning the working of the Road Ordinance was beset with several problems and representations were received from time to time from various Government Agents and Provincial Road Committees pointing out the difficulties with regard to its implementation and suggesting amendments to meet them.<sup>60</sup> One of the main problems was that the people did not take a sufficient interest in the election of the Division Officers who were looked upon by them only as tax collectors. Therefore in 1861 an Ordinance relating to the public thoroughfares in the Island was passed.<sup>61</sup> The only objective of this measure was to overcome the problems involved in the working of the Road Ordinance of 1848 and to consolidate all laws relating to roads. It did not however effect any changes in the basic principles of the Ordinance of 1848. However on the recommendations of the Sub-Committee of the Legislative Council appointed to report upon the draft of the bill, provision was made for three unofficial elected members in the District Committees. Following the example of the Colebrooke Commission which introduced the principle of communal representation into the Legislative Council of the central government in 1833, the ordinance No. 16 of 1861 introduced the same principle in to the machinery of local government by laying down that the three unofficials be elected by the Europeans, the Burghers and the Natives from each of their communities.<sup>62</sup> The elections were to be held on different days for the three communities. Unlike in 1848, the new ordinance provided for the "Division Officers" to be appointed by the District Committees.

Still the main body incharge of making rules, preparing estimates of income and expenditure and making recommendations on ways and means of spending two-thirds of the labour and the commutation supplied under the system was the Provincial Road Committee. In the same way as was in 1848 the Provincial Committee was appointed by the Governor. However the introduction of the elective principle into the District Committees which had the power to appropriate one-third of the labour and money collected from the people, can be reckoned as a step forward in promoting one of the main objectives of the Road Ordinance of 1848, viz, to give the people a direct opportunity in the working of the system.<sup>63</sup> In 1861 it was expected that when the people begin to feel that their nominees had a voice in the

appropriation of their money and labour and in the suggestion and execution of local improvements they would take a more lively interest in the election of the District Committees than they had hitherto done in the election of Division Officers. Hence it can be considered an improvement over the measure introduced in 1848.

Accordingly the system of Road Committees which prevailed in Sri Lanka since 1848 and with its improvements in 1861 was an institution which in a sense foreshadowed the Municipal bodies introduced in 1865. One can see that in spite of all its shortcomings, it was a fairly successful experiment which gave a training to Sri Lankans in the art of the British system of local administration before introducing a Municipal system fashioned entirely on the British model. More than the Ordinance of 1848 the ordinance of 1861 received the approval of the general public and one newspaper even considered it as a forerunner of a great charter of municipal privileges.<sup>64</sup> Obviously the introduction of the elective principle to an institution which had some, though little, power to appropriate the money and the labour supplied by the electors was a sure step though not of the highest importance in the future progress of the country. Not more than four years passed since the introduction of the Road Ordinance in 1861 when the system of Municipal Councils was introduced in 1865. As an early experiment in the way of a municipal system the Road Committee system can be described as one of the highest importance in meeting successfully some of the urban problems of the emerging towns and in achieving local self government.

### **The Boards of Health**

In the meantime the problem of preserving public health, which was connected with impure water, lack of drainage, scavenging, latrine facilities, etc., and the filthy condition of the towns, was calling for serious attention of the Government. The provisions made by the Ordinance No. 17 of 1844 were quite inadequate for this purpose and numerous representations were also made at the same time to the Government complaining of the oppressive character of the quarantine laws. Under these circumstances Governor Anderson, appointed a Committee consisted of the Government Agent of the Western Province, the Collector of Customs and the superintendent of Vaccination, Colombo to inquire into the subject.<sup>65</sup>

The Report<sup>66</sup> prepared by the Committee showed that quarantine laws had not answered the purpose for which they were made and that a deep and wide dissatisfaction with them existed in the country. It was pointed out that no advantage had been gained by their being in operation due to the ease with which they could be evaded. Hence an Ordinance, based on the recommendations of the Committee was prepared to amend the laws relating to Smallpox Quarantine and for the prevention of spread of certain contagious diseases

in the Island. The Ordinance<sup>67</sup> made provisions for a "Board of Health" in each Province with two or more persons — of whom one shall always be the Government Agent of the Province — appointed as members by the Governor. At the same time the Ordinance empowered the Governor to appoint as many persons as he, with the advice of the Executive Council, may deem necessary as vaccinators within each Province. It also empowered the Board of Health in each Province to make such rules for regulating the proceedings of vaccinators for the vaccination of inmates of public hospitals and jails, for extending as far as possible the benefits of vaccination to all persons in such provinces and for the management of the hospitals or other places provided for the reception of persons connected with contagious or infectious diseases.

It is evident from the beginning that the new measure proved to be a complete failure owing to several inherent defects of the measure. At the time there were several authorities namely the Health Department, the Police and the newly created Boards of Health, which were entrusted with various powers and duties regarding public health. But there was no clear division of the powers and the duties entrusted to these different authorities. Consequently, from the beginning the efforts of the Boards of Health to expand and establish its powers and of the Department of Health to preserve its authority led to contention between the two bodies and obviously this hindered the successful working of the scheme.

The main task entrusted to the Boards of Health was to regulate the vaccination work in the Provinces. There were several officers such as the Superintendent of Vaccination, Medical Sub-Assistant, and vaccinators who were engaged in vaccination duty, the management of which was now entrusted to the Boards of Health. However these officers were government servants appointed and paid by the government and worked under the authority of the Principal Civil Medical Officer who was the Head of the Department of Health. The Boards of Health were entrusted only with the regulation of their duties and hence it was impossible for the Boards to perform their duties effectively. Consequently there were disagreements between the Health Department and the Boards and the Boards were helpless. C. J. MacCarthy as the Colonial Secretary submitting a minute of dissent on the proposed Rules of the Board of Health for the Western province, very clearly explained this controversial situation and indicated the proper place the Boards of Health should be entrusted with.

...in as much as they (the rules of the Board of Health) appear to me to be based throughout on the assumption that it is expedient that this body should exercise certain executive functions which have hitherto been carried out by the Principal Civil Medical officer. I am of opinion that such executive functions should be exercised only by the responsible head of the Medical Department and that the Boards of health should be a consultative body only.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover the Boards of health were not given sufficient powers and hence it was impossible for them to comply with the objectives of the new measure. At the very start the Board of health of the Western Province recognized the difficulty of working within the powers entrusted to them. The Boards were aware that the maintenance of cleanliness, was equally as indispensable as vaccination and quarantine to prevent diseases. But to prevent the spread of diseases the Boards were entrusted only with the duty of vaccination and the maintenance of cleanliness was a duty entrusted to the police. However the services performed by the Police were insufficient to maintain cleanliness, especially in Kandy and Colombo where the towns were growing fast. Furthermore the Boards had no financial powers whatsoever. Hence the Boards had no alternative but to refer all matters to the Colonial Secretary and communicate with several officers to get necessary funds approved — a procedure which took several months to attend even to a minor work like cleaning a drain. This situation was brought to the notice of the Government not only by the Boards of Health, but also by the Principal Civil Medical Officer, the Government Agent, and also by the public through petitions and news papers as well.<sup>69</sup> Although the Boards of Health went into the matter in detail and understood the problem and offered solutions, they had no power, adequate enough, to implement them. They could only advise the Government and invite the attention of the Government. But most of their reports were summarily dismissed for the simple reason of lack of funds.

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF MUNICIPAL COUNCILS**

### **The Failure of The First Step**

It is a matter of interest to note that Governor Anderson in 1853 took steps to establish a Municipal Council in the town of Colombo.<sup>70</sup> He was to experiment with the system first in Colombo for the purpose of enabling its inhabitants to regulate certain local matters and to extend the system to other towns at a later stage. The draft of the Ordinance was published in the Government Gazette<sup>71</sup> and in fact the first reading before the Legislative Council took place on 19th October, 1853. The draft of the ordinance provided for a Council of ten elected Commissioners and every male above the age of 21 who occupied a house within the limits of the Municipality either as a proprietor or tenant of the yearly value or rent not less than ten pounds was to have a vote in electing these Commissioners. This Council was to be provided with a Municipal fund which consisted of several local resources such as an assessment tax, labour and commutation supplied under the Road Ordinance and tolls within the Municipality. The Council also was to be entrusted with the discharge of various urban services such as construction and maintenance of roads, upkeep and establishment of markets, supervision of weights and



measures, erection and regulation of ponds, lighting of streets and provision of all necessary measures to improve and preserve health. Accordingly it is evident that this proposed measure was an advanced step towards self-support, self-government, and representative institutions of the colony.

However "so great a difference of opinion prevailed in the Executive Council and such strong objections arose in the minds of the people in respect of some of the most important requirements attending a municipality"<sup>72</sup> that the Governor was compelled to withdraw it. While the proposed measure was considered illiberal the main target of criticism against it was that the Municipal Commissioners who were to be selected under its provisions had only the status of scavengers and tax gatherers. Thus the first attempt at establishing Municipal Councils proper had to be abandoned.

#### **Agitation For A System Of Municipal Administration**

In contrast to the Road Committees which had access to local funds, worked on a limited elective principle and were successful to a certain extent in maintaining roads and giving some training in representative institutions to the people, the Boards of Health which had neither a local fund nor a representative principle was a complete failure. As a result the urban problems connected with public health became so grave that the situation not only invited prompt action from the authorities but also induced public to demand some remedial measures. The Board of Health of the Western Province proposing some remedial measures for the prevalent inefficient and insufficient system of administering public health of the country had as early as 1856 forwarded some suggestions for the consideration of the Government.<sup>73</sup> It has suggested that the Boards of Health should be given more powers to act freely and authority to levy local rates for the administration of matters of local interest in their respective towns. Again in 1861 the same Board pointed out how powerless the Board was and suggested either that it should be constituted so as to endow it with powers similar to those of the Board of Health in England or that its members be relieved from duties attached to them under a title calculated to mislead the public.<sup>74</sup>

Likewise the Government Agent of the Western province commenting on the problem of demolishing St. John's warehouse showed that the proper time to establish a system of Municipal Councils had come. He suggested that the warehouse should be advantageously converted into a public market, a want very much felt for a long time by the public. In the course of his letter he argued that the public market so established should be placed under the management of a Municipal Council which must be introduced without delay. He also reminded the Colonial Secretary, W. C. Gibson that these plans formed a part of Sir George Anderson's proposed Municipal scheme of 1853 although he had to abandon the whole project owing to supposed insufficiency of Funds. While providing also a statement of funds available for the purpose of a Municipality<sup>75</sup> he finally wrote:

Circumstances are at present so much altered that I apprehend no obstacle to the enactment of such a law now. The funds from the various sources available for the conservancy of the town. . . appear to me with the possibility of levying a reasonable tax on all carriages plying within the Gravets of Colombo to be ample and were it not moderate, a moderate increase on the assessment on houses would meet every requirement<sup>75</sup>.

Very often the educated groups of the society agitated through the news papers for the introduction of a Municipal system in the Island. The Ceylon Times as well as The Observer accepted the fact that the Government had no time to attend to such minute matters connected with health and comfort of the people.<sup>76</sup> Equally they criticised the Government for deceiving the public by creating Boards of Health which had neither the time to attend to these duties nor the power to discharge them. As a remedy they demanded that inhabitants of Sri Lankan towns (especially those of Colombo) be entrusted with that which most deeply concerned them namely the care of their health. The Ceylon Times also said that "the public have taken it into their matter of fact heads, that they could manage their affairs, and that with the aid of local taxation administered by the citizens, they could in due course accomplish much in the matter of public cleanliness."<sup>77</sup> These agitators believed that the true remedy for the then existing social evils lay in Municipal institutions, a system they looked upon as so well suited to meet their wants. They also showed that this system had been fully tested in the Presidency towns of India and claimed that if India could have Municipal Councils, Sri Lanka also could have similar institutions, at least on a smaller scale. They strongly urged that the sanitary condition of Colombo, Kandy and indeed in all the large towns should be given a place among the matters of urgent, to be laid before the new Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson and also urged the support of General O'Brien in this endeavour because he had seen for himself the state of things in the country.<sup>78</sup> It was crystal clear that the numerous problems that cropped up in the new urban societies were altogether beyond the efficient supervision of the Central Government<sup>79</sup> and hence either a separate Government Department or some form of local government system was necessary to provide for those wants.

### **The Motives Behind The New Scheme**

Governor Hercules Robinson's decision to establish a Municipal system in Sri Lanka was declared in his opening address to the Legislative Council's session of 1865, on 27th September<sup>80</sup> where in he explained the objectives underlying his decision. Although, according to him, it is evident that he was motivated in taking this decision by three main factors or objectives, on further examination it could be seen that there were two more important factors responsible for the Governor's decision.

### **Expediting the Local Improvements**

Among the Governor's objectives, the desire to expedite local improvements was in the forefront. By local improvements the Governor meant better sanitation, street lighting, water supply, market facilities, etc., of which the prevalent situation appeared to him to be "deplorably deficient".<sup>81</sup> Robinson considered the sanitary problem to be of great importance not only because of its acknowledged efficacy in checking the outbreak and spread of epidemics, but also because it was the foundation upon which all social improvements are been built. He believed that without sanitary reforms all efforts for bettering the masses would be rendered comparatively negatoy. Governor Robinson was quite correct when he said that the sanitary situation was deplorably deficient. In 1864 a severe epidemic of Cholera which carried off about 2,157 out of about 3,578 victims contributed very much to make the situation even worse. Hence when Robinson arrived in Sri Lanka the situation regarding the public health in the Island was critical and warranting immediate attention. This situation was described in the following manner by the Colonial Secretary in moving the first reading of the proposed Municipal Councils Bill.

Hitherto there had been no Municipal institutions in the Colony. Sir George Anderson's measure had been withdrawn as being much in advance. But the necessity of some local agency of the kind had been more and more felt after His Excellency's arrival when in consequence of the prevalence of Cholera and Smallfox, an amount of filth in Colombo was discovered calling for prompt attention.<sup>82</sup>

### **Educating the Nation**

As indicated by Governor Robinson the second motive in introducing the Municipal system was to educate the nation in the art of self-government. He said :

If even the bulk of the population can be fitted for the right use of a larger measure of political power it can only be effected through the training which exercise of municipal functions affords. They can thus establish a right to claim further concessions by proving that they are prepared to make personal sacrifices for the public good, that they can exercise with fairness, moderation and self-restraint, the powers and privileges conferred on them, and can carry on local government with justice to contending interests and classes.<sup>83</sup>

The Downing Street<sup>84</sup> as well as the administrators in Sri Lanka<sup>85</sup> were of opinion that this Island was not ripe for self-government. In 1849 the Commissioners who reviewed the schools system on the establishment of the Central Schools Commission strongly recommended the introduction

of the principle of self-support in the field of education. They were of the opinion that the best method of carrying this principle was the organization of local and Municipal bodies for the assessment of village-rates, town rates, etc. But at the same time they wrote, "without trespassing on purely political grounds or entering upon questions of general administration and government your Committee may perhaps be allowed to express their apprehension that the population of Ceylon is not ripe for such an exercise in self-government and self taxation as the scheme would involve"<sup>86</sup>

However it must be admitted that the country was not used to the sort of representative institutions of the type. Still the working of the limited representative element introduced with the Road Ordinance of 1848 and extended to some extent in 1861, with the objective of training the people in the art of self government, had proved by this time to be comparatively satisfactory. Perhaps the government, thought of extending the principle of representation through a municipal system, which was also considered to be of highest importance towards self-government. Besides the Governor, himself, there were more energetic reformers who saw in this Ordinance a stepping stone towards privileges with regard to a council of greater importance than a municipal assembly.

G. D. B. Harrison,<sup>87</sup> the only member to have opposed the Bill, conceded the necessity to get the best possible machinery to secure sanitary reforms and scavenging services in the towns, but at the same time he believed that it was useless to raise the question of self-government. He quoted from Earl Grey<sup>88</sup> to prove that the British considered Sri Lanka to be unfit for representative institutions and argued that they were not sincere when including "national education" as one of the objectives of this measure. Harrison while questioning the sincerity of the government argued that these words were intended as "sugar plums" to blind and deceive the natives into further taxation.<sup>89</sup>

In the course of this debate Muttu Coomaraswamy<sup>90</sup> spoke with all the peculiar eloquence, which was at his command, of the grand results expected to follow the introduction of Municipal Councils into the Island. He believed that the aims and objectives of the British rule in the Eastern Colonies was ultimately to train them for self-government, and had no doubt about the sincerity and honesty of the Government. Hence he had no reason to think that such was not the case when introducing this scheme and further said that "I strongly believe and have no doubt that Municipal institutions are calculated to do immense good in the way of political education and other respects and I therefore cordially support the Bill."<sup>91</sup>

The Colonial Secretary, W. C. Gibson, in answer to Harrison said that the time had come, when, however formidable the expense, the responsibility of carrying out the most necessary work of cleanliness must no longer rest with the government, and he believed that the best means

to avert the extravagance and inefficiency would be a means where much depended on the people. Gibson further argued that such a system, where much power and responsibility in the local matters would be given to the people, ought in the long run to train them for self government. He also quoted Grey<sup>92</sup> to the effect that the right use of Municipal privileges would be the best training for higher franchise. The Queen's Advocate, Richard Morgan, who was the designer of the Bill and had much to do with the scheme agreed that the training towards self-government would, of course, be facilitated by a correctly implemented system of Municipal Councils. But he was of the opinion that such a result would be in the far future and for him the most immediate objective was to provide for the cleansing of the towns and for introduction of sanitary reforms in general.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly there were no dissenting voices over what was supposed to be the first objective of the scheme, namely to expedite local improvements. It is equally clear that there was not the same unanimity of opinion on the second objective described as "national education". Moreover it is evident that those who considered it to be a sincere motive, accepted it as one that could be fulfilled only in the long run. Hence any conclusion on the different opinions on the honesty or sincerity of the government in declaring "national education" as an objective in establishing Municipal Councils could be arrived at only after examining the working of the system for a sufficient period of time.

#### **Provide For An Efficient Police Service**

The third motive was to provide the towns with an efficient police service.<sup>94</sup> The country needed a good and efficient police to protect life and property. There were police forces in several towns established under the Police Ordinance of 1844. However the prevalent state of these police forces was disgraceful and bribery and corruption was the rule. Hence, connected to some extent with the Municipal Ordinance, an Ordinance was passed in 1865 to provide for an efficient police in the Island.<sup>95</sup> Accordingly the Municipal Councils where they existed, were entrusted with the duty of providing police services within their limits.

#### **Controversy Over the Military Contribution**

It can be seen that besides the factors which Governor Robinson expressed as motives by which he was moved to take this step, there were two more dominant considerations that led him to initiate this measure. They could be identified as economic and constitutional considerations. As in 1848, the general colonial policy of the Empire was very much responsible in shaping these considerations and in moving Governor Robinson towards introducing this new measure. It is evident that ever since 1801 when the Maritime Provinces of Sri Lanka were taken over by the British Crown it was expected that the Colony would be a source of revenue to the mother country.<sup>96</sup> But during the first half of the century the expenditure of Sri Lanka had very frequently exceeded the revenue, the deficit being met by the imperial treasury.

In the meantime by about 1860 the influence of the Colonial Reformers in matters of colonial policy had waned and a new school of Radicalism came to the fore with separatism as its central theme. The political and economic doctrines by which they were chiefly guided were called the Manchester School and the chief political leaders of this School were Cobden and Bright. The chief characteristics of the Manchester school were the distrust of the interference of the State in economic matters and the advocacy of a policy of *laissez faire*. They wanted to relieve the mother country from the burdens of the Empire, even if the process made the dissolution of the Empire inevitable.<sup>97</sup> The separatist ideas of these free traders were so widespread that many of those who sincerely wished to maintain the unity of the Empire tended to despair of it. The financial burdens, specially that of military expenditure, which the Colonies thrust on the mother country was naturally a favourite theme with the anti-imperialists. The Manchester School always insisted that free trade for the colonies ought to be accompanied by colonial defence<sup>98</sup>. It was no mere coincidence that the advent of free trade synchronized with the beginning of self-government. They were related causally, and with them came logically a change in the system of military defence in the colonies. Earl Grey made clear the connection between these three subjects:

I think it will follow that when this country no longer attempts either to levy a commercial tribute from the colonies by a system of restriction or to interfere needlessly in their internal affairs, it has a right to expect that they should take up themselves a larger proportion than heretofore of the expenses incurred for their advantage... Our military expenditure on account of the Colonies is certainly very heavy..... This expenditure ought, I think, to be very largely reduced and the Colonies, now that they are relieved from all that is onerous to them in their connection with the mother country, should be required to contribute much more than they have hitherto done to their own protection.<sup>99</sup>

Since the American War of Independence, numerous garrisons were deemed necessary to guard the dependencies of the British Empire which were scattered all over the world. The expenses of maintaining them was borne almost wholly by the mother country. This system of colonial military defence at the expense of Great Britain continued with but slight modifications until the sixties. The total military expenditure of the Empire for the year ending 31 March, 1858 was £ 3,968,599 towards the defrayal of which the Colonies contributed only £ 378,253 or less than one-tenth leaving £ 3,590,346 as the cost to the Imperial Government. Out of the total contribution of the Colonies about two thirds were paid by the three Colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, and Sri Lanka while several Colonies contributed nothing.

When the anti-imperialists' demand for reforms was insistent a Select Committee was appointed by the House of Commons to inquire and report whether any and what alterations may be advantageously adopted with regard to the defence of the British dependencies. This Committee recommended as a general rule, that military charges on account of Colonies not falling within the category of Imperial Garrisons or Settlements should be borne by Colonial Revenues and regarding the situation in Sri Lanka the Report particularly stated that "the expenses of the troops in Ceylon should be in a greater degree borne by the Colonial Treasury".<sup>100</sup> This Report was approved by the Imperial Parliament and the Secretary of State in 1864 sent a memorandum instructing the Government of Sri Lanka that by 1870 it must pay for the whole of its military expenditure and forwarded a plan which facilitated this payment.<sup>101</sup> It could be seen that this decision of the Imperial Government, though indirectly, was very much responsible for the establishment of Municipal Councils in Sri Lanka. By 1864 the annual cost of the garrison in Sri Lanka was about £ 200,000 of which the treasury of the Island paid £ 100,000. For many years the amount of the annual military contribution had been an outstanding cause of contention, the colonies protesting that it was excessive and the Imperial Government complaining that it was insufficient. However after about 1853 the prosperity of the coffee industry transformed the financial situation and by 1864 the annual surplus of revenue had increased up to about £ 100,000.<sup>102</sup> The Secretary of State also agreed with the colonists that the military expenditure of the Island could be reduced and consented to appoint a Commission as demanded by them "to ascertain and suggest the proportion which the Colony ought to pay as a fair and just compensation for the protection it received from the mother country."<sup>103</sup> It was evident that the commission's Report however would not be available for several years and the imperial treasury was reluctant in the meantime to pay £100,000 annually on the colony's garrisons, when the colony had a yearly surplus of the same amount. The secretary of State for Colonies therefore instructed the Governor to pass in the Legislative Council a provisional Ordinance by which the annual military contribution of the colony would be increased from £100,000, the amount contributed in 1864, to £ 135,000 pending the final settlement.<sup>104</sup>

While in this manner the imperial Government was calculating the surplus revenue of the Colony and designing plans to increase its contribution to the military expenditure the calculations of the colonists on the other hand were completely in a different direction. On this problem the colonists had several charges against the government. In their repeated agitations, the colonists argued that the demand for an increased contribution, thrust upon the colonial revenue for the purpose of military expenditure was unjust and impolitic. The Planters Association in a memorial addressed to the Secretary of state in 1863 described it as

“unjust in as much as the only ground on which the demand has been founded can be shown to be incorrect, impolitic in as far as such demand is calculated seriously to interfere with the continued execution of public works.”<sup>105</sup>

They further quoted from the 1861 Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the problem of military expenditure, to prove that Sri Lanka, though by no means the wealthiest or largest, of the Colonies of the Empire, made in 1860 by far the most liberal contribution towards the military expenditure and the sum paid by this Colony was absolutely £ 2,500 more than that paid by any other colony. The colonists further showed that the two garrisons at Trincomalee and Galle were maintained purely for imperial purposes and in no way affected the internal security of the Colony.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, whilst the garrisons were being maintained for imperial purposes and also when the Colony was contributing most liberally towards this item, they saw no fair reason that could justify the additional contribution that was demanded.

Furthermore these agitators charged the Government for the neglect of the public works, and for misapprehending the financial situation of the colony. Governor MacCarthy in 1863, speaking on the revenue of the Colony said that the surplus of 1862 which amounted to £ 132,481 was due mainly to increased productiveness of revenue and not to any reduction of expenditure.<sup>107</sup> But the Colonists maintained on the contrary that the surplus of the last few years was the result of the strict economy in expenditure. In view of these differences of opinions the Planters' Association quoted the following figures on which they based their statement:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Revenue</i>	<i>Expenditure</i>	<i>Surplus</i>
1860	£ 767,100	£ 705,440	£ 61,660
1861	£ 751,997	£ 635,230	£ 116,767
1862	£ 759,136	£ 626,654	£ 132,482 <sup>108</sup>

The Association pointed out that these figures showed a slight growth of revenue, but a heavy decrease in expenditure and hence an increase of the surplus. Therefore they argued that the surplus was due not to any productiveness but to the parsimonious policy of the Government. It could be seen that in 1862 the increase of surplus amounted to £ 15,715 but of which only £ 7,139 was due to the increase of revenue while £ 8,756 was due to the reduction of expenditure. When comparing the figures of 1860 and 1862, it is clear that the increase of the surplus in 1862 over that of 1860 is £ 70,822 while the revenue of 1862 is £ 7,764 less than that of 1860. Therefore it is obvious that the surplus of 1862 was gained merely by reducing the expenditure by £ 78,789 than that of 1860. Accordingly the colonists described this annual surplus as a misapprehension of the financial situation of the Colony. They



maintained that this parsimonious policy of Governor C. J. MacCarthy (1860-1863) speedily produced its results in the frustration of all the institutions of the Colony, the roads became impassable, the Public Works Department was disorganized and all were in disorder and discontent.<sup>109</sup> This discontentment over what they described as an unjust and impolitic financial policy, reached its climax when in November, 1864 the Governor with the help of the official majority and in the face of the unanimous opposition of the unofficials in the Legislative Council secured the passage of an Ordinance providing for an increase in the military contribution. Hence all the unofficial members<sup>110</sup> led by George Wall resigned their seats in the Legislative Council.

On examining this controversy it is evident that there are several factors which are beyond dispute. Admittedly Governor MacCarthy had practised a strict economy on the orders of the Colonial Office, thereby proving the charge of the colonists that whilst a surplus accumulated, the public works of the Colony had been neglected to a considerable extent. In a collection of notes on a tour which he had made public in the Colony, Major General O'Brien while administering the Colony had strongly condemned the state of public works of the Island.<sup>111</sup> He further applied for permission from the Secretary of State to introduce an ordinance to charge on the surplus funds of the colony an estimated cost of certain urgently needed public works.<sup>112</sup> In the meantime all the Heads of the Departments had complained repeatedly about the inefficiency of their Departments. They also ascribed this inefficiency to insufficiency of funds and salaries. Out of the Government Departments the Health Department was in a very bad state. The principal Civil Medical Officer in his annual report and reporting on various individual cases pointed out the necessity for increasing the salaries of officers of each and every rank in his Department.<sup>113</sup> The inefficiency of the Public Works Department and the Police Department was in such a deplorable situation that the Government had appointed in 1863 and 1864 respectively, two Commissions to inquire into these Departments. In the report on the Police Department, the Commissioners<sup>114</sup> said "it is now our unpleasant duty to report that we consider the force generally very inefficient. This inefficiency we mainly ascribe ...thirdly, to the insufficient pay of the lower ranks at all events, if not of nearly all ranks. From the evidence we have personally made we are satisfied that with the present increased cost of all the necessaries of life the pay is not sufficient to induce good men to enter the force or to remain in it, and this consequently leads to fourthly, the inferior style of men who are candidates for admission."<sup>115</sup> The report of the Commission on public works also ascribed this inefficiency mainly to the inadequacy of salaries and funds allotted to the Department and they suggested an increase in the salaries and funds as well.<sup>116</sup>

Governor Hercules Robinson, one of the most energetic of the Governors, arrived in Sri Lanka at the height of this dispute in early 1865 and admitted that there were many urgent works of public utility which he thought should be undertaken as soon as practicable.<sup>117</sup> However the Ordinance No.

15 of 1864 had provided for an increase of the military contribution and in answer to the complaints contained in the letter conveying the resignation of the unofficial members, the Secretary of state, Cardwell thus wrote to Governor Robinson.

You will be aware that Major General O'Brien while administering the Government condemned strongly the state of repair of certain roads and buildings in a collection of notes of a tour... and I believe no doubt that you will be able to put any defective works into proper order from the funds at your disposal.<sup>118</sup>

Accordingly the ultimate responsibility of reserving an extra £ 35,000 as military expenditure and bringing the country to a proper order with the remaining resources was placed on Governor Hercules Robinson.

### **Agitation for Constitutional Reforms**

The constitutional issue that was prevalent ever since the establishment of the Legislative Council in 1833 was also renewed in 1864 in connection with the financial problem. Since 1848 the reformists in the Island demanded various important changes in the constitution of the Legislative Council. Equalising the number of Official and Unofficial members, free expression of opinions, freedom for the Official members to vote in conformity with their consciences and convictions and that the Governor should have only a casting vote and should not take part in the debates of the council, were some of the amendments demanded by these reformers.<sup>119</sup> However the opinions of Downing street as well as the administrators of the island were on the contrary. They believed that the Island was not ripe for these concessions which would lead up, more or less, to self-government. In 1848, replying to a letter from Ackland where he had suggested these alterations, in the constitution of the Legislative Council, Earl Grey had expressed his opinion that the changes recommended by Ackland could not be in general introduced with advantage.<sup>120</sup> Again in 1851 when the Chamber of Commerce claimed the same rights Grey wrote:

In the state of society which now exists in Ceylon it would be impossible to create a representative legislature in which the great body of people of the Island could be effectively represented..... I would further remark that although it is impossible in the present state of society in Ceylon to establish a representative legislature. I think it most desirable that local Municipal bodies should be created as the representative principle to manage local affairs and to be the organ for making known the wishes and wants of the people to the Government.<sup>121</sup>

At about the same time in 1853 a letter from D. Wilson as Chairman of a public meeting held on 28 June, 1853 and a public memorandum praying for the extension of the Legislative Council and for certain alterations in its constitution were forwarded to be transmitted to the Secretary of State. In

recording their opinions on these prayers all the members of the Executive Council expressed their conviction that Sri Lanka was not ripe for self-government and that generations must pass before the changes sought could be safely or wisely granted.<sup>122</sup>

However, the agitation for reforms in the Legislative Council reached a climax, when orders from the Secretary of State were sent to the Governor in 1863 and 1864 to increase the military contribution and when the Unofficial members resigned their seats in the Legislative Council over the same issue. The members who resigned, from the Legislative Council formed The Ceylon League and led the agitation, with the object of obtaining an unofficial majority in the Legislative Council through which means they expected to have a popular control over the budget. Public meetings were held all over the country and memoranda from all parts of the country were sent to the Secretary of State.<sup>123</sup>

Although the underlying philosophy of the colonial policy advocated the reciprocal relation of the two principles of self-support and self-government, the administrators in the Colonial Office in Britain and in Sri Lanka still believed that the principle of self-government could not with advantage be introduced in to the Island. Governor Robinson in a despatch enclosing a petition from The Ceylon League fully argued that the conditions indispensable to the successful operation of representative institutions did not exist in the island and hence free institutions would be in the highest degree inexpedient. He wrote, "... the great body of native population is notoriously so backward in civilization as to be incapable of exercising with advantage the privileges of self government."<sup>214</sup>

Under these circumstances the administrators in 1865 also believed, as those in the 1840's had done that Sri Lanka was not ripe for free institutions and that the Sri Lankans should first be trained for self-government through the medium of Municipal institutions. Hence it is evident that Governor Robinson sought solutions for his financial as well as constitutional problems in the Municipal system. As was evident he had to provide the wherewithal to reserve an extra £ 35,000 immediately for military expenditure and also bring the country to a proper order by improving the local necessities which were found to be deplorably deficient. Besides, he had to calm down the Ceylon League which was at the height of its agitation and it was equally necessary to provide an outlet for the ambitions and aspirations which had been created by the education and material progress—a common necessity in all the Eastern Colonies.

Accordingly, it was believed that the metropolitan country could no longer look after the defence of this Colony, and that the time had arrived for her to provide for its own self-defence or bear the military expenditure. Passing down this same principle to the localities of the Island, it was believed that the time had arrived when it was impossible for the General Revenue to spend on local

improvements and it was necessary for the inhabitants themselves of larger towns to contribute to the conservation and improvement of their towns. Equally, the time having thus arrived when it was impossible for the central government to attend to all the local wants of particular towns, either a separate department or Municipal institutions were necessary to fulfil these wants. Municipal Councils being a popular means for local taxation and also being the approved remedy for the constitutional problems of the Eastern Colonies, Governor Robinson decided to establish Municipal Councils in the larger towns of Sri Lanka.

Under these circumstances it can be argued that whatever be the declared motives Governor Robinson, as described by Harrison, used this proposed Municipal scheme with an elected majority as a "sugar-plum" to dissipate the agitation for an elected majority in the Legislative Council. At the same time there were among the colonists who identified this scheme as fulfilling to some extent the demands of the Ceylon League and wrote.

it is significant too that in the control of expenditure these Municipal Councillors are placed in precisely the same position for which the "League" has been contending in regard to the Legislative Council viz, the Unofficial members are in a majority.<sup>125</sup>

As late as 1885, the Ceylon Examiner described this measure as a concession to public opinion which also served as a sop to the Leaguers, then at the height of their agitation.<sup>125</sup>

The Governor's decision to establish Municipal Councils in Sri Lanka was equally approved by Downing Street, the councillors in the Legislative Council and also the general public.<sup>127</sup> Although the colonists who were agitating for some sort of local government institutions approved the measure, there was also some discontentment over this scheme. Whilst, as was evident, the dominant motive of the Government was to finance the local improvements by local taxation and thereby to relieve the General Revenue of that burden, the colonists from the beginning warned the Government of this discordant factor. The colonists estimated this measure as a boon thus conferred on them only because the institution had very advanced representative principles. Knowing that the tendency of the government doubtless was to relieve the General Revenue and impose heavy local taxation they wrote: "But considering the extent and nature of the taxation already in force, we warn the Government that any material pressure of fresh burdens is not likely to be patiently submitted to."<sup>128</sup> Further they pointed out that although small measures pertaining to the cleanliness and conservation of the town may be spent out of a local taxation, the first cost of larger schemes such as supply of water and drainage and specially that of police must of course be borne by the General Revenue. In support of their argument they also quoted examples from India. They

also tried to encourage the investment of foreign capital over these major projects instead of taxing the local inhabitants.<sup>129</sup> More than any other item the expenditure on Police establishment appeared to be the cause of discontentment.<sup>130</sup> The colonists wanted the clothing of the police to be borne by on the Central Government and Muttu Coomaraswamy in the course of the debate on the Municipal Councils Bill proposed, to this effect and was seconded by G.D.B. Harrison.<sup>131</sup> But they were unsuccessful and this controversial factor was to add very much to the future struggle between the central government and the municipal councils. Despite all these underlying shortcomings the inhabitants welcome the measure with enthusiasm and participated in the first elections under the new Ordinance with great enthusiasm.

The Ordinance No. 17 of 1865 aimed at establishing Municipal Councils in the Island and made provisions to establish municipal bodies in Colombo and Kandy, the two principal towns in the Island. On the application of a reasonable number of inhabitants of any town, or, even without such application, if it should appear expedient, the power was vested with the Governor to apply the provisions of the ordinance also to other towns as well. Hence, very soon on the application of the inhabitants, the Governor and the Executive Council decided in favour of establishing a municipal council for the town of Galle. However on the advice of the Government Agent of the Province, the request of the inhabitants of Jaffna was turned down by the Governor. Accordingly before the end of the 19th century there came into existence the three municipal Councils of Colombo, Kandy and Galle and consisted of an elected majority. They were also entrusted with wide legislative, executive, and judicial powers to perform the municipal services within their city limits.

## ABBREVIATIONS

1. A. R.	Administration Report.
2. CJHSS.	Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies.
3. CLR.	Ceylon Literary Register.
4. CCR.	Ceylon Census Report.
5. CMC.	The Colombo Municipal Council.
6. C. P.	Central Province.
7. G. A.	Government Agent.
8. GMC.	The Galle Municipal Council
9. KMC.	The Kandy Municipal Council.
10. SLNA.	Sri Lanka National Archives.
11. S. P.	Sessional Paper.
12. UCR.	University of Ceylon Review.
13. W. P.	Western Province.

## NOTES

- The name "Ceylon", was officially changed to "Sri Lanka" in 1972. Hence the term Sri Lanka has been used in this article except in the quotations.

1. Wilhelm Geiger, *Mahavamsa* (1950) pp. 74—75.  
R. K. W. Goonasekera, *CJHSS*, Vol. 1 (1958), pp. 138—54.  
Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*, (MCMXI), p. 84.  
Forbes, *Eleven Years in Ceylon*, (1840) p. 71.  
S. Paranavithana, *CLR*, 3rd Series, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1931) p. 49.  
It is believed that "Gamsabhawa" existed from 425 B.C. or the date on which King Pandukabhaya established boundaries over the whole Island to demarcate the areas of Jurisdiction of the several village corporations.
2. Wilhelm Geiger, *Mahavamsa* (1950) pp. 74—75.
3. *Ibid.* p. 74.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
6. R. K. W. Goonasekera, *CJHSS*, Vol. 1 (1958), pp. 138—54.
7. B. L. Panditharatna, *CJHSS*, Vol. 7, No. 2. (July-Dec., 1964) pp. 203—18.
8. Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*, (MCMXI), pp. 156—157;  
Ralph Peiris, *Sinhalese Social Organization*, (1956), p. 110. *UCR*, Vol. 9. No. 3, (July 1951), pp. 171—85.  
I. Vandendriesen, *CJHSS*, Vol. 3 No. 1 (Jan.-June, 1960) pp. 1—17.
9. Robert Knox, p. 10.
10. B. L. Panditharatna, *CJHSS*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 203—18.
11. James Emerson Tennant, *Ceylon*, (1860) Vol. 2, p. 120;  
C. R. de Silva, *Ceylon Under The British Occupation*, (1943) p. 263.  
John Ferguson, *Ceylon in 1883* (1883), p. 12.
12. B. L. Panditharatna, *CJHSS*, Vol. 7, No. 2 pp. 203—18.
13. I. Vandendrieson, *CJHSS*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 31—61.
14. B. L. Panditharatna, *CJHSS*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 203—18.
15. Charles Pridham, *Ceylon And Its Dependencies*, (1849), Vol. 2, p. 629.
16. George Barrow, *Ceylon Past and Present*, (1857), pp. 107—8.
17. I. Vandendrieson, *CJHSS*, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 1—17.

18. James Emerson Tenent, (1860), Vol. 2, p. 95.
19. Ceylon Census Report, 1824. See Appendix 1.
20. See Appendix 1.
21. Charles Pridham, (1849), pp. 1—16.
22. Ceylon Census Report, 1881.
23. Ibban Batuta, Travels in Asia and Africa, Translated by H. A. R. Gibbs, (1936), p. 260.
24. R. Percival, An Account of the Island of Ceylon, (1805), p. 129.
25. Fergusons Directory for 1863, p. 65.
26. B. L. Panditharatna, CJHSS, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 71—91.
27. James Emerson Tenant, (1860), Vol. 2, p. 109.
28. There were only two G. A. S. among the members of the Legislative Council and they were those of Kandy and Colombo.
29. SLNA, 5/50, No. 147 of 1 Sep. 1863; SLNA, 5/61, No. 70 of 26 Oct. 1874; SLNA, 5/65, No. 171 of 9 June, 1878; Earl Grey, Colonial Policy of Lord John Russels' Administration, Vol. 2, p. 166.
30. SLNA, 5/33 No. 70 of 10 Nov. 1846; SLNA, 5/35 No. 53 of 8 March, 1848; SLNA, 5/33 No. 187 of 16 Oct., 1848; SLNA, 5/38 No. 41 of 25 March, 1851.
31. Ceylon Times 14 July, 1865.
32. SLNA, 6/3031, Report of the Sanitary Committee of The CMC on Public Latrines 26 June, 1866.
33. H. C. Sirr, Ceylon and The Cingalese, (1850), Vol. 1, p. 88.
34. SLNA, 6/3031, Report By The Committee of The CMC Appointed To Consider The Subjects Of Water Supply And Drainage 1865.
35. H. C. Sirr (1850), Vol. 2, p. 16.
36. SLNA, 6/8805, Report Of The Sub-Committee Appointed By the CMC To Consider The Question of Water Supply For The Fort Of Galle 31 Dec., 1888.
37. Ralph Pieris, UCR, Vol. 9, No. 3 (July 1951), p. 171—85. C. R. de Silva, (1942), Vol. 385.
38. R. K. W. Goonasekera, CJHSS, Vol. 1, (1958), pp. 138—54. S. Paranavithana, CLR, 3rd Series, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1931), p. 49.
39. Forbes, (1840) p. 71.
40. SLNA, 5/35, No. 91 of 6, May, 1848.
41. SLNA 4/18 Part 1, No. 14 of 23 March, 1833. G. C. Mendis, The Colebrooke Cameron Papers, Vol. 1, pp. 52-30.
42. SLNA, 5/35 No. 91 of 6 May, 1848, No. 25 of 15 Jan. 1850; SLNA 33/3151 No. 639 of 9 Dec., 1853; Appendix to the "Report of the Committee of Executive Council on Fixed Establishment of Ceylon, 13 Dec., 1849, p. 254; Eighth Report of the Committee Appointed for the Revision of Schools on the Establishment of the Central School Commission.
43. Earl Grey, Colonial Policy Of Lord John Russels Administration (1853), Vol. 2, p. 27.
44. C. A. Bodelson, Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism (1960) p 16. Most prominent among the group were Edward Gibbon Wakefield, Lord Durham, William Molesworth, Charles Buller and C. B. Adderley.
45. Lord John Russel was the Prime Minister from 1846 to 1852.
46. Earl Grey was the Secretary of State for Colonies in the Whig Ministry of Lord John Russel from 1846—1852.
47. Earl Grey, (1853) Vol. 2 pp. 170—71; SLNA, 5-35 No. 91 of May, 1848; Appendix to the Report of the Committee of the Executive Council on Fixed Establishment of Ceylon, 13 Dec., 1849, p. 254.
48. Earl Grey, (1853), Vol. 1, p 27.
49. Earl Grey, (1853), Vol. 2, p. 174.
50. SLNA, 4/51, No. 92 of 4 July, 1857. U.K. Hicks, Development From Below, (1961) p. 36 Quoted here is a Despatch from Earl Grey to Governor of British Guiana in 1848.
51. Earl Grey. (1853), Vol. 2, p. 170.
52. Sir Thomas Emerson Tennent, J. F. Templer, and C.J. MacCarthy were the members.
53. Report of the Committee on Fixed Establishment of Ceylon (1852), p. 168.
54. Ordinance No. 17 of 1844, "An Ordinance for Establishing an Efficient Police in Certain Towns."

55. Ordinance No. 8 of 1848, An Ordinance to make provision for the Formation and Improvement of the means of Communication in the Island.
56. SLNA, 5/35, No. 91 of 6 May, 1848 and No. 203 of 14 Nov., 1848.
57. SLNA, 5/48, No. 209 of 29 Oct., 1861; S. P. 5 of 1861.
58. SLNA, 5/37, No. 35 of 15 Jan., 1850.
59. SLNA, 5/38, No. 3 of 6 Jan., 1851.
60. Governors' Addresses, Vol. 2, p. 252.
61. Ordinance No. 16 of 1861; An Ordinance to Consolidate and amend the laws relating to Public Thoroughfares in the Colony.
62. S. P. 5 of 1861; Examiner, 4 Sep., 1861; Ordinance No. 10 of 1861, Section 20.
63. SLNA, 5/35 No. 91 of 6 May, 1848.
64. The Examiner, 4 Sep., 1861.
65. SLNA, 5/37 No. 111 of 10 Sep., 1852; Governors Addresses, Vol. 1, p. 252.
66. SLNA, 5/37, Enclosure of No. 111 of 10 Sep., 1852.
67. Ordinance No. 10 of 1852; An Ordinance to Amend the Laws relating to Smallpox Quarantine and for Preventing the Spread of Certain Contagious diseases in the Island.
68. SLNA, 6/2742, From The Board of Health, W. P. to the Colonial Secretary, 21 July, 1853 and 10 Nov., 1853.
69. SLNA, 6/2874, From the Board of Health, C.P. To the Colonial Secretary, 22 July, 1859; SLNA, 6/2862, From Acting Principal Civil Medical Officer, To Colonial Secretary, 27 Aug., 1864 and 26 June, 1865; SLNA, 33/3144, From the G.A., W.P. To Colonial Secretary, 17 March, 1864; SLNA, 7/1369, From Colonial Secretary To the Board of Health W. 8 Dec., 1862; Enclosed is a petition from M. J. Driberg and others reporting the filthy receptacles and burial ground adjoining Pettah; SLNA, 6/2874 From the Board of Health W.P. To the Colonial Secretary 28 Feb., 1862, Enclosed is a petition from householders residing at Slave Island complaining of a burial ground which had become a public nuisance; Ceylon Times, 31 Jan., 1865.
70. Governors Addresses, Vol. 1, pp. 242, 260, 267.
71. Government Gazette, 15 Oct., 1853, Preamble of the draft of a proposed ordinance for establishing a Municipal Council for Colombo.
72. SLNA, 5/41 No. 79 of 6 May, 1854.
73. SLNA, 6/2674, From Board of Health, W.P. To Colonial Secretary 25, July, 1856.
74. SLNA, 6/2874, From Board of Health, W.P. To Colonial Secretary, 14 March, 1861.
75. SLNA, 33/3144, From G.A., W.P. To Colonial Secretary, 10 March, 1863.
76. Ceylon Times, 14 July, 1865; Ceylon Observer, 20 Jan., 1865.
77. Ceylon Times, 14, July, 1865.
78. Ceylon Times, 31 Jan., 1865.
79. Governors' Addresss, Vol. 2, p. 65; Ceylon Times, 14 July, 1865 ; Digby, Fofity Years of Official Life in an Oriental Crown Colony, (1879), Vol. 1, p. 125.
80. Governors' Addresses, Vol. 2, p. 64.
81. Ibid.
82. Ceylon Observer, 16, Oct., 1865.
83. Governors, Addresses, Vol. 2, p. 64.
84. Digby, (1879), Vol. 1, p. 27; SLNA, 4/51, No. 92 of 4 July, 1851.
85. SLNA, 5/53, No. 78 of 23 April, 1866.
86. Appendix to the Report of the Committee of the Executive Council on Fixed Establishment of Ceylon.
87. G. D. B. Harrison was the Chairman of The Planters' Association in 1870. He was a member of the firm Keir Dandas & Co., one of the leading firms in Kandy. They were the owners and agents of nearly one hundred coffee estates in the Central Province and carried on an extensive business. In 1865, when Governor Robinson nominated members to fill the vacancies created by the resignations of the un-official members in 1864, Harrison was nominated to represent the planters interests in the Legislative Council.
88. Earl Grey, (1953), Vol. 2, p. 27, There he wrote "the ceylonese had not made such progress in civilization as to be capable of exericsing with advantage the privilege of self-government owing to their low state of civilization."
89. Ceylon Times, 12, Nov., 1865.



90. Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy was the first Tamil Knight in Sri Lanka and the first non-christian in Sri Lanka to be called to the English Bar. He succeeded Mudliar S. Ederemansingham in the Tamil seat of the Legislative Council in 1861 and 13 years later was succeeded by his nephew Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan. Sir Coomaraswamy was in England when J. H. Eaton who was acting for him in the Council together with the five other un-official members resigned in body. Sir Coomaraswamy however refused to be bound by the action of Eaton and on his return resumed his seat in the Council. He was unanimously elected a member of the Municipal Council to represent the Slave Island Ward in 1866 and remained so till 1873 in which year he left the country.
91. Ceylon Times, 21, Nov., 1865.
92. Earl Grey, (1853), Vol. 2, p. 174.
93. Ceylon Times, 21 Nov., 1865.
94. Governors' Addresses, Vol. 2, p. 65.
95. Ordinance No. 16 of 1865, An Ordinance to Provide for the Establishment and regulation of a Police Force in the Island.
96. SLNA, 4/1, Part 1, No. 1 of 13, March, 1801, SLNA, 4/6, No. 1 of 21, Aug., 1821.
97. K. E. Knorr, British Colonial Theories, 1570—1850, (1968), p. 407.
98. R. L. Schuyler, The Fall Of the Old Colonial System, (1945), pp. 212—13.
99. Earl Grey, (1853), Vol. 1, p 18.
100. SLNA, 4/84, No 176 of 26, Sep., 1864.
101. Ibid.
102. Ceylon Blue Book, 1865.
103. SLNA, 5/41, No. 60 of 30 Oct., 1854; SLNA, 5/50, No. 172 of Sep., 1863; SLNA, 5/51, No. 15 of 14 Jan., 1864; Ceylon Times, 24 March, 1864.
104. SLNA, 4/84, No. 176 of 26 Sep., 1864.
105. SLNA, 5/60, No. 123 of 31 July, 1863.
106. Ceylon Times, 10 July, 1863; Ceylon Observer, 12 Dec., 1864; Digby, (1879), Vol. 1, p. 267; SLNA, 5/51, No. 15 of 14 Jan., 1864.
107. Governors' addresses, Vol. 2, p. 39.
108. Ceylon Blue Book, 1865; SLNA, 5/50, No. 172 of 30 Sep., 1863.
109. Ceylon Observer, 17 Sep., 1863; Lakrivikirana, 7 April, 1865. Digby (1879), p. 263; SLNA, 5/51 No. 265 of 30 Nov., 1864.
110. C. A. Lorenz, George Wall, W. Thompson, J. Capper, J. de Alwis, and J. H. Eaton were the six members.
111. S. 6 of 1864.
112. SLNA, 5/51, No. 217 of 17 Sep., 1864.
113. SLNA, 6/2941, From Acting Civil Medical Officer to Colonial Secretary, 4 May, 1865. A. R. of the Health Department for 1864; SLNA, 5/52, No. 134 of 16 Sep., 1865.
114. The Commissioners were F. Saunders (Treasurer), H. A. Gillman (Commissioner of Requests), T. Berwick (Deputy Queens' Advocate), W. J. MacCarthy (Registrar General of Land) and D. E. de Saram (Police Magistrate).
115. S. P. 15 of 1865; SLNA, 5/52, No. 219 of 13 Dec., 1865.
116. S. P. 1 of 1864.
117. SLNA, 5/52, No. 49 of 4 June, 1865.
118. SLNA 4/86, No. "Separate" of 27 March, 1865.
119. SLNA, 2/41, 19 Sep., 1853. Minutes by the mebers of the Executive Council on the letter from D. Wilson as chairman of the public meeting held on 28 June, 1853 to Secretary of State Grey; SLNA, 5/37, No. 41 of 25 March, 1851, Enclosure is a memo from The Chamber of Commerce.
120. SLNA, 4/44, No. 216 of 19 May, 1848.
121. SLNA, 4/51 No. 92 of 4 July, 1851.
122. SLNA, 2/41, 19 Sep., 1853. Detailed Minutes recorded by the mebers of the Executive council.
123. Lakrivikirana, 9 June, 1865; Ceylon Times, 27 Jan., 1865. Overland Observer, 3 July, 1865; Overland Times, 4 July, 1865.
124. SLNA, 5/53, No. 78 of 23 April, 1866.
125. Ceylon Times, 1 Dec., 1865.
126. Ceylon Examiner, 13 March, 1865.
127. SLNA, 4/90, No. 66 of 17, Feb., 1866; Ceylon Times, 21 Nov., 1865; 28 Nov., 1865; 12 Dec., 1865; 3 Jan., 1866; Governors' Addresses, Vol. 2, p. 74.
128. Ceylon Observer, 3 Aug., 1865.
129. Ceylon Times, 12 Dec., 1865.
130. Ceylon Times, 10 Nov., 1865.
131. Ceylon Times, 24, Nov., 1865.

## APPENDIX I

## Growth of population within Colombo, Kandy and Galle from 1824 to 1900

Name of locality	1824	1868	1871	1881	1891	1901
Colombo Fort and within four Gravets	5713	—	—	—	—	—
Colombo Municipality	—	54802(a)	92649(b)	110502(b)	126825(b)	154691(b)
Kandy Town	2930	—	—	—	—	—
Kandy Municipality	—	15919 (a)	16881	22026	20375	26386
Galle Fort and four Gravets	14742	—	—	—	—	—
Galle Municipality	—	—	47059	31743	33590	37165

(a) A rough Census of the inhabitants of the Colombo and Kandy Municipalities was taken in 1868.

(b) Excluding the military and shipping personal.

Source: Census Reports.