

THE IMPACT OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE ON THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY OF SRI LANKA.

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The European Colonialism in South Asia, which commenced with the landing of Vasco-da-Gama in 1498 at Kapad on the western coast of India, is now history. British colonialism, which replaced the Portuguse and Dutch, began to withdraw from the Indian sub-continent, following World War 11. But not before leaving behind restructured political entities and the re-demarcation of political and social boundaries. Sri Lanka was no exception.

Sri Lanka is a multi—ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious country. The political ideology of identity during the British colonial period formed the genesis of friction among the major ethnic communities in contemporary Sri Lanka. Hence, it is necessary to briefly trace the political history of Sri Lanka and to identify the major political episodes of the British colonial era, if one is to understand the present ethnic and identity conflict in Sri Lanka.

While the Portuguse and the Dutch ruled the respective Sinhalese and Tamil Kingdoms separately, the advent of British Colonialism resulted in the unification of the entire Island under a single politico-administrative unit. It was a turning point in the history and the politics of identity in Sri Lanka and had a deep impact in the subsequent developments relating to ethnic relations.

This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the Constitutional and administrative reforms of the 19th and early 20th Centuries with a special focus on how they impacted on the ethnic groups in the contemporary politics of identity in Sri Lanka.