

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF COLONIALISM IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

It is rather difficult for any external force to make a significant impact on any domestic social system. The evolution of Sri Lanka's social system took place for over two and a half millennia. The change brought to the island by the western powers, who were equipped with guns and steel, was a significant turning point in our social fabric. Western countries were drawn to Ceylon largely due to its strategic location and trade. Sri Lanka is connected with trade routes between the East and the West and consists of natural ports, especially Trincomalee, which has become important for the security of the region. Sri Lanka has comprised of numerous bays that anchorages roadsteads provided adequate shelter for sailing ships. The three major western colonial powers; Portuguese (1505–1658), Dutch (1658–1796), and British (1796– 1948) had significant impacts on every part of Ceylon including economy, society, politics, and other sectors. During the British era, trade-based agriculture, such as tea, coffee, coconut, cocoa, and rubber plantations, shifted the economy in a different direction. Furthermore, the political constitutional reforms, as well as the religious establishments have resulted in significant changes in then Ceylon. This paper addresses the social consequences of colonial rule.

Keywords: Colonialism, Geographical location, Social Impact

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka had been under the influence of many foreign powers. The arrival of Vijaya was the first notable foreign immigration on the island. After Sri Lanka was established as a unified nation, there were many foreign invasions and they mainly emanated from the regional powers such as Chola and Pandya kingdoms. Sri Lanka's colonial period started in 1505 with the arrival of the Portuguese. The Dutch and the British followed the Portuguese subsequently. Sri Lanka had to face a gamut of political, economic, and social changes due to the colonial encounters. This paper inquires about the social impact of the colonial powers.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Identifying the social changes of Sri Lanka's during Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial period.

PORTUGUESE AND THEIR EXPANSIONS

The Portuguese are of Southwestern European origin predominantly from Southern and Western Europe. The Portuguese Empire originated at the beginning of the Age of Discovery², and the capacity and influence of the Kingdom of Portugal eventually expanded across the globe. In the wake of the Reconquista³, Portuguese sailors began trading and searching Africa's coast and the Atlantic Archipelagos in 1418–19, using recent navigation, cartography, and maritime technology to find an ocean route to the source of the lucrative spice trade. In 1488, Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope and in 1498 Vasco da Gama arrived in Bharat. In 1500, Pedro Álvares Cabral invaded Brazil on the American continent's coast. When King Philip II of Spain (Philip I of Portugal) captured the Portuguese crown in 1580, 60-year collaboration between Spain and Portugal became known to subsequent historiography as the Iberian Union. The realms continued to have separate administrations as the King of the Kingdom of Spain was also the King of Portugal. Portuguese colonies became the subject of attacks by three rival European powers hostile to Spain: The Dutch Republic, England, and France. Portugal found itself unable to effectively defend its overstretched network of commercialism posts with its smaller population and therefore the empire which began long ago witnessed a gradual decline. In this backdrop, Don Lorenzo de Almeida established primary contact between Ceylon and the Portuguese in 1505–6. It had been mostly accidental, and it wasn't until twelve years later that the Portuguese sought to establish a fortified trading settlement. The Portuguese expanded their influence on the island by exploiting the political rivalries between the divided kingdoms, inserting client rulers on the many kingdoms' thrones directly ruling other areas.

² The Age of Discovery, Age of Exploration or the Age of Contact refers to the early modern period from 15th to the 18th Century in Europe.

³ The Reconquista was a period in the history of the Iberian Peninsula of about 780 years between the Umayyad conquest of Hispania in 711, the expansion of the Christian kingdoms throughout Hispania, and the fall of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada in 1492.

SOCIAL IMPACTS; CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGES

By 1505, the Island was better known to the civilized world as Serendib. Over the centuries, it had experienced a range of cultural influences, and as a result, Serendib became the natural focus at the southernmost part of the ocean routes that connected Asia with the Mediterranean. Therefore, Chinese, Greek, Roman, Persian, Arab and Indian sailors, and merchants converged on the Island and left their cultural imprint to a greater or lesser degree. But the year 1505 saw the start of a different kind and intensity of cultural influence. In pursuit of ships belonging to Moorish and Arab traders, a Portuguese naval fleet was blown off the Maldives' track and ended up at Galle. It was the primary contact the Islanders had with Europeans and their dissimilar life and advanced military equipment. Alien was the Portuguese that the Sinhalese chronicle *Rajavaliya* represented when building a fort at Sri Lanka's capital in 1517 as: exceedingly fair of skin and beautiful. They wear boots and hats of iron: they rest not an instance in one place: they walk here and there. They ate white stone (bread) and drank blood (wine): and provided two or three pieces of gold and silver for one fish or one lime. The report of their cannon is louder than thunder once it fired upon the rock of Yugandhara⁴: their cannonballs fly for a *gawwa* (a *gawwa* is equal to 6.5km. Therefore, this distance is an exaggeration) and shatter fortresses of granite (*Rajavaliya, p.66*)

When Serendib or Sri Lanka was at risk of invasion from the north, the Portuguese' arrival prevented the Island from transforming into an Indian province. Instead, Ceilão, as they named it, gained a unique identity as they were the primary of three colonial powers. The Dutch and British-too have an imposing influence on the culture over 450 years. Not all of the Portuguese influence was helpful. However, the positive aspects have contributed to extraordinarily numerous societies during which ancient aspects have fortunately survived. Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya declares in *The Portuguese Cultural Imprint on Sri Lanka* (2000) that: The Portuguese presence in Asia was typically restricted to urban areas. However, Sri Lanka was an exception. The establishments that outlined the matrix of social interaction with the native context were extended to non-urban areas. The Portuguese have left out their stamp on Ceylon social administration, society, fine arts, and language (*p.86*).

Roman Catholicism was introduced by Portuguese missionaries. However, the over-passionate nature of the conversion is the least tasteful feature of the Portuguese

⁴ One of the mountains of the Himālaya range

cultural imprint. However, they successfully held their converts than the Dutch missionaries who spread Protestantism when the Portuguese were expelled. This is partly mirrored within the proven fact that both Sinhala and Tamils, who embrace Catholicism, comprise 6.1 % of the population (1.2 million) as per the 2012 census, whereas Protestants account for 1.3 percent. Unfortunately, only ruins of Portuguese churches remain. So insignificant design is extant: even several forts that the Portuguese designed were reconstructed by the Dutch, the stronghold master-builders of the era (*Gunasekara, 1995 & Rajavaliya*)

SURNAMES

Names indicate the social change that took place during the colonial period. Many Sinhalese adopted Portuguese surnames-although most were modified to a degree, - but this practice did not necessarily denote the conversion to Roman Catholicism. Such names (and their Portuguese form) include Corea (Correia), Croos (Cruz), De Abrew (Abreu), De Alwis (Alves), De Mel (Melo), De Saram (Serra), De Silva (Da Silva), De Soysa or De Zoysa, Dias, De Fonseka or Fonseka (Fonseca), Fernando (Fernandes), Gomes or Gomis, Mendis (Mendes), Perera (Pereira), Peiris or Pieris (Peres), Rodrigo (Rodrigues), Salgado, and Vaas (Vaz). The Sri Lankan King of Kotte was baptized and given a name called Dom Joao in 1557 and eventually came to be known as Don Juan Dharmapala. The Kandyan princes Kusum Asthana and prince Yamasinha Bandara were also baptized and renamed Dona Catherina and Dom Filipe. There are numerous surnames of Portuguese origin and the most recent example has become well-known in international cricket when the Sri Lankan cricket team looked as if they were a group from Portugal. Chaminda Vaas, Aravinda de Silva, Nuwan Zoyza are a few household names of Sri Lankan cricket.

PORTUGUESE CREOLE

The Portuguese and the islanders' interaction led to the evolution of a new language, Portuguese Creole. This flourished as a link language between the sixteenth and mid-19th centuries and continues to be spoken nowadays (there isn't any written form) by a tiny share of the population (Jayasuriya, 1999). In 1992, it was calculable to be 30,000. Speakers of Portuguese Creole are typically members of the Burgher community (Descendants of the Portuguese and Dutch) who reside in Batticaloa and

Trincomalee. The Kaffir community comprised of the Bantu slaves⁵ escorted to the Island by the Portuguese and later by the Dutch and British were settled down in the Kandyan kingdom. Portuguese Creole is made up of words from Portuguese, Sinhala, Tamil, and even Dutch and English.

SINHALA WORDS OF PORTUGUESE ORIGIN

This vocabulary influence was remarkable: there was a fast absorption of maybe a thousand Portuguese words into Sinhala. These "loan words," as they are termed by lexicographers, rarely seem in the same form as the original; the overwhelming majority have undergone naturalization. Sinhala words for certain types of Western attire/ furniture/ food & drink are derived from the Portuguese. Examples include: *almariya* (wardrobe), *annasi* (pineapple), *baldiya* (bucket), *bankuwa* (bench), *bonikka* (doll), *bottama* (button), *gova* (cabbage), *kabuk* (laterite, a building material), *kalisama* (trousers), *kamisaya* (shirt), *kussiya* (kitchen), *lensuwa* (handkerchief), *masaya* (month), *mesaya* (table), *narang* (orange), *nona* (lady), *paan* (bread), *pinturaya* (picture), *rodaya* (wheel), *rosa* (pink), *saban* (soap), *salada* (salad), *sapattu* (shoe), *simenti* (cement), *sumanaya* (week), *toppiya* (hat), *tuwaya* (towel), *viduruwa* (glass) (*Sannasgala, 1976*).

MUSIC AND DANCE

A biggest influence on Sri Lankan music came from Portuguese. The colonials brought western instruments like the 'ukulele' and the guitar and introduced musical forms like the ballad. A lot of significance was importing the rhythmical instrumental ballroom music referred to as 'Baila', which was fashionable for the Portuguese traders and their Kaffir slaves. Characterized by its upbeat 6/8 time, 'Baila' has nowadays become a trendy genre of Sri Lankan music. It includes funny lyrics and accommodates fashionable instruments-electric stringed instruments, keyboards, and drums, usually played throughout parties and weddings.

CUISINE

Several foods of Portuguese origin are still in style in Sri Lanka; such as 'lingus' and 'pastries'. People assume that Sri Lanka's hot curries were created by the Islanders but ironically, it is the Portuguese who had introduced chilies to the native culinary art. Until then, pepper had been used predominantly in how curries to give them spicy

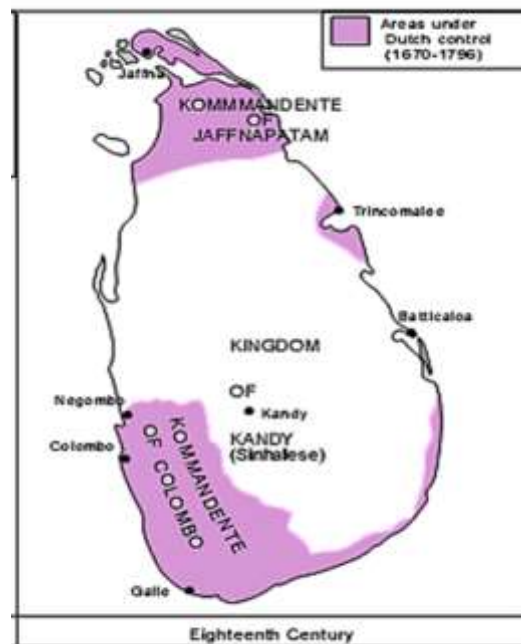
⁵ People who spoke Bantu languages from Africa

or 'heaty' (Sri Lankan English) taste. Not so stunning, considering the native lack of information relating to bread revealed within the comment that the Portuguese ate "hunks of white stone," they were answerable for the establishment of bread-making. They additionally introduced tomatoes. The Islanders took to Portuguese cakes, like the bolo *fiado* or bolo *Folha do*, a cake stuffed with *cadju* (cashews), and sweets like *boruwa* and *fuguete*.

CLOTHING

Illustrations in Portuguese and Dutch descriptions of the Island in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveal that the Sinhalese soldier's dress was similar to that of the Portuguese. There is an engraving from *Description of Malabar and Ceylon* (1672) by the Dutchman Duke of Edinburgh Baldaeus that depicts the reception of his fellow countryman, adventurer Joris van Spilbergen, by King Vimaladharmasuriya I. The king's guards are shown carrying a Portuguese-type helmet, white jacket, and kilt. Moreover, the Portuguese, Dutch, and British kings invariably wore Portuguese costumes, complete with hats and shoes. The same is recorded in Robert Knox's "A Historical Relation of Ceylon" (1681), during which there is an illustration of King Rajasinghe II (1635-1687). "His attire is extraordinary," John Knox remarks, "not when in his own country. He features a long band hanging down his back of Portuguese fashion." These are the sort of cultural influences the Portuguese left behind when the Dutch ousted them in 1658. They are the earliest colonials on the Island. Still, their influence was not diluted or eradicated by Dutch and British as it had become a necessary part of several aspects of the Islanders' lives (*Pieris, 1920*).

Figure 1: The Early Kingdoms of Sri Lanka, Third Century B.C.-Eighteenth Century A.D.



Source 1: Based on information from K.M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981, xv, xvii, xviii

SOCIAL IMPACT OF COLONIALISM IN CEYLON DURING THE DUTCH ERA (1640 - 1796)

The historical backdrop of the Dutch in Ceylon started with the appearance on 31st May 1602 of Chief Admiral Joris van Spilbergen. The first Dutch boats secured off the port of Batticaloa on their first visit to Ceylon. At the point when Portuguese came to control, they encountered colonization dependent on the settlements of Portuguese residents called *casados*. Like the Portuguese, the Dutch additionally attempted to discover a few provinces of Dutch residents called "Burgher." This was especially endeavored interestingly under *Maetsuyker* (Governor from 1646 to 1650), however toward the end of his period and later under Van Goens (Governor from 1662-1663 and 1665-1675), just 68 Free-Burghers were hitched on the island (*Ramerini,1998*).

RELIGION

Religion played a strategic role in the grouping of the nations in the Dutch, but in a slightly different way. From the beginning, the Dutch had spread Protestantism to counterbalance the Portuguese Catholics and the Kandyan Buddhist influence in the regions under their control. The Roman Catholics were the strongest against the idea of converting to Protestantism. The Protestants took over all Catholic institutions like churches and schools. By 1780, the position of Catholics was marginal, and the Dutch

East Company (VOC)⁶ disturbed them with burdensome marriage rules and other issues of ordinary life. Over time, Buddhist measures had been vanished. 'Mudaliyars' and other headmen had to be Protestants to qualify for government jobs. It was the most pressing thing, and some converted only to gain employment and remained Buddhist.

The VOC, with the first Church ministry conducted in Galle on October 6, 1642, nearly 360 years ago, brought the Dutch Reformed Church to Ceylon. In 1658 its constellation in Colombo marked the beginning of the Protestant Church or what is called the "True Christian Reformed Church" (*Waare Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*-in Dutch Language). In Colombo, Galle and Jaffna church councils were subsequently established to establish several Dutch predictors to initiate proselytizing work. This Reformed Church is still functioning and is currently holding its services in Sinhala Tamil and English, while there are churches throughout Sri Lanka. There are two hundred and fifty years old churches in Galle, Matara, Wolvendaal, and Kalpitiya.

The Dutch have contributed many valuable things to the society and culture of Sri Lanka. They introduced the registration of birth, death, marriage, and the policy of sending every child to schools, printing press, wood carving, canal technology, transport facilities, Roman-Dutch Law, which exist to this day. Other valuable services that can be accepted are social service centers that serve persecuted people, hospitals, refugee homes, and the leprosy hospital in Hendela.

EDUCATION

It is reasonable to say that the Dutch used education to accomplish their religious aims. Educational approaches can be defined by their instruction, teachers' curriculum, instructional methods, school management, and rules and regulations for teachers and students. The schools built by the Dutch were called parish schools. The principal of the parish school remained in the country for some time even after 1833. In parish schools, he taught reading, writing, and Christian Protestantism values. Religion was the most important subject of the orphanage's curriculum. The upper classes at Dutch Seminaries were also taught in Latin. Scholarships were granted to gifted seminary students at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, in compliance with the Dutch educational system. The Dutch established the first printing press in Ceylon in 1737. It was used in schools to spread the faith of the Protestants. Under the

⁶ *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*

Dutch, there were orphanages. The program of education was well structured, and these colleges were managed by priests. There was a common curriculum that consisted of reading, writing, mathematics, and religion. Moreover, industrial training (architecture or sculpture) was taught to boys, and sewing to girls. The teaching of professional subjects in schools for ordinary people has never been seen before in this country is a noteworthy specialty. They incorporated subjects like carpentry and architecture in their curriculum (*Devapriya, 16 November 2019*).

ARCHITECTURE

The most aesthetic part of the cultural influence of the Dutch is architecture. The Dutch Hospital in Colombo was opened in 1681 and has been reinforced by its exceptional architecture as one of Europe's most advanced medical facilities. The hospital is renovated, and currently houses upscale shops and restaurants. Furthermore, there is the beautiful building of the late 17th century that houses the Museum of the Dutch period, originally Count Carl Van Ranzow's residence. And in 1749, in Wolvendaal, in Sri Lanka's oldest Protestant church, the Dutch built a remarkable Christian Reformed Church. The fort in Galle is very well preserved in the Dutch period. The main entrance to the fort crosses the first floor and makes it a memorable place on your walk around the Galle Fort. And, there are still some Dutch houses with their unique architecture: low roofs with ornate gables, wide guest doors, colonnaded street stalls (*verandahs*), and courtyards with plants. Galle is also home to De Groote Kerk, or "The Great Church," which, with its gables and stained-glass windows, is possibly the most beautiful architecture of the Dutch period. (*Boyle, 2014*).

ROMAN-DUTCH LAW

The Dutch have introduced Roman-Dutch law, which is now used as the law of Sri Lanka with the combination of English Law. It was established through the combination of the early modern Dutch legislation and Roman civil law. The Dutch Law was first exported by colonists to the Cape of Good Hope, where modern South African legislation was established. (*Boyle, 2014*).

CUISINE

The Dutch introduced a wide variety of food to the island. The *lamprais*, whose name was founded in the Dutch *lumpiest* and was refined in Java by the Hollanders, is the

most popular. In Lamprais, the conventional rice and curry is an improved version. The rice is cooked in stock with hot *sambals* and *frikkadels* (Dutch for meatballs). The whole is moistened by coconut milk, wrapped in a banana leaf for a better taste, and baked to perfection and lamprais is often cooked for special dinners. Then, there is a *breudher* (a broodje from the Dutch, "bread"), a kind of cake usually eaten on Christmas with plums and sultans. The 'Kokis', made from the batter made of rice flour and coconut milk, is deep-fried in a mold in a wheel or flower form. Its name Kokis is derived from Dutch meaning cookie. 'Egg *rulang*' is a spicy chip and *poффertje* a small round chip with grapes. The modest stew appears to have been introduced by the Dutch as a Sinhala title for the dish, and "ismor" is derived from the Dutch smoor, which means "smothered." (Boyle, 2014).

SOCIAL IMPACT OF COLONIALISM IN SRI LANKA DURING THE BRITISH ERA (1796-1900)

All three colonial powers have influenced Sri Lanka, but the influence of Great Britain, the last colonizer of the island before independence, is even more pronounced. Three notable milestones can be identified in making Sri Lanka a British Colony:

1. Establishment of the English East India Company in the coastal areas of Sri Lanka in 1796.
2. In 1802, the British government colonized the coastal areas of Sri Lanka which had been under the control of the English East India Company until then.
3. Conquest of the Kandyan Kingdom by the English in 1815. In 1796, the British were able to oust the Dutch strategically.

Before the British invaded the entire island of Sri Lanka in 1815, only the coastal areas were colonized. Until then, the inner areas were ruled by the Sinhala kings. Between 1815 and 1948, Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon. There were several significant reasons for the British to colonize Sri Lanka. They wanted to expand their territory, export raw materials, expand their trading routes, spread their culture and religion, and mainly for political, economic, social, and cultural purposes. In particular, they knew that Sri Lankan cinnamon was in high demand in the European market and that the Dutch were making huge profits from the Sri Lankan cinnamon trade. When considering the impacts that have taken place in society, we can see Sri Lankan culture is mostly shaped by British culture and style (Schrikker, 2007).

British colonialism changed the social structure of Sri Lanka and introduced modern western ideas and concepts into society. These included Western culture, Western-lifestyle, education, human rights, and religion. The economic activities in the country throughout the colonial period were growing rapidly. Then, to meet the demand corresponding to labor forces to provide the raw materials and industrial plants, populations were in the growing trend. As a result, immigration triggered changes in certain areas of the country. For example, the British hired South Indian Tamil laborers to work in estate cultivation in Sri Lanka who soon accounted for ten percent of the island's population. Likewise, the Tamils lived in some areas, up-country and hill-country. By the 1990s, the bulk of Tamils had acquired Sri Lankan citizenship (*Ekanayaka and Guruge, 2016*).

EDUCATION

Aside from changes in the social structure, the British introduced western education to Sri Lanka, which turned Sri Lankan traditional education into modern education. Sri Lankans were able to learn about western concepts such as liberty, freedom, and nationalism. Under the British rule, industrial and craft schools were formed in Sri Lanka to teach people handicraft skills. Furthermore, the British education system promoted education among the urban middle class, resulting in widespread literacy in the country during the colonial period. The expansion of education fueled the growth of the teaching profession. It also resulted in the rise of an English-educated middle class in Sri Lankan society. The British developed that educated class in Sri Lanka to provide administrative and professional services to the colony. By the late nineteenth century, the bulk of this emerging class had a direct or indirect relationship with the government. Thus, during the colonial period, the country's social structure had changed due to population growth and immigration, and western-styled education had introduced the modern education system to Sri Lanka (*Wickramasinghe, 2003; (Ekanayaka and Guruge, 2016)*).

Economic growth and the spread of education caused changes in culture, including changes in social group relationships. A group of capitalist entrepreneurs and professionals fluent in English arose as a new class that cut across caste lines. This group, generally referred to as the middle class, produced many leaders of social movements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (*Ekanayaka and Guruge, 2016*).

LANGUAGE

The introduction of the British language was the most important and infamous impact the British had on Sri Lanka. Although Sri Lanka has some words that sound similar to Dutch and Portuguese, only English left a lasting impression.

The opening of the Ceylon Civil Service to Sri Lankans necessitated a shift in focus on English education. Over time, the opening also aided in the formation of a Westernized class, the members of which led the drive for freedom in the twentieth century. The Colebrook-Cameron Commission stressed curriculum standardization and called for the use of English in place of local languages. Local English schools were established, and missionary schools that had previously taught in vernaculars began to teach in English as well. In the present context, English has become an indispensable language in Sri Lanka (*Wickramasinghe, 2003; Velarde, 2018; Prasangani, 2014*).

RELIGION

During the British colonial period, the British had a significant impact on religion. The influence of Christianity in Sri Lanka was remarkable during the British era. The arrival of Christianity brought by the British has affected Sri Lankan society and culture (*Schrikker, 2007*).

Following the British conquest of Ceylon in 1815, the government welcomed institutions that could assist in education and welfare. The government also introduced the denominational school system, which aided the rapid expansion of Christian schools. Missionary nuns were asked to work in public hospitals in 1886 (*Ekanayaka and Guruge, 2016*).

The roots of Christianity in Sri Lanka can be traced back to trade, migration, and missionaries-migrants, traders, and missionaries. Because of their vast landholdings, Catholics largely exercised economic influence. At the same time, they dominated education in the country, resulting in Catholics' central role in society and influence on the culture and life of Sri Lankan people (*Ekanayaka and Guruge, 2016*).

SPORTS

The British officers settled in Ceylon brought with them many things, including their recreational sports. Cricket, golf, and rugby were three notable sports carried from their motherland. Today, cricket in Sri Lanka seems to be better than in England. In

Colombo, Nuwara Eliya, and Kandy, British officials designed three unforgettable golf courses with adjoining rural clubs, all of which are still operational. (*Velarde, 2018*).

From language to food, attire, and sports, the Sri Lankan people continue to live and practice British-style customs. While the Portuguese and Dutch governed the Sinhalese and Tamil Kingdoms separately, British Colonialism culminated in the unification of the entire Island under a single political-administrative entity. It was a watershed moment in Sri Lankan history and society, with far-reaching consequences for subsequent ethnic relations as well.

That is why Britain's influence is the most visible, as the last colonizer before the island's independence. Among the Portuguese and Dutch, the British were the most prominent and influential colonial power in Sri Lanka. Besides, the immigration of numerous Tamil and Burgher people into the country and the English-educated Sri Lankans transformed Sri Lanka into a multicultural society. As a result, Sri Lanka evolved into a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious nation.

CONCLUSION

The Portuguese (1505-1658), Dutch (1658-1796), and British during these 443 years (1796-1948) ended the colonial rule in Sri Lanka in 1948. The three periods had a significant impact on Sri Lankan society. As a result of the colonial influences, Sri Lanka transitioned from traditional kingdoms to modern traditions. The aspects of cosmopolitanism were brought to Sri Lanka by colonial rule. This impact paved the way for Sri Lanka to be a country that is multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious. Even today, the influences of European powers exist in Sri Lanka.

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