

HOW DID THE BRITISH IDENTIFY ETHNICITIES IN CEYLON 1796 A.D-1948 A.D

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The western colonialism is a process that emerged in Western Europe parallel to the emergence of the Nation States. Colonialism is a cultural, economical and political process which took place centralizing the western European nation states. After the industrial revolution, Britain was able to build its economic and military power and it was the beginning of a new era in colonialism. This is important because the modern economic, political and social structures of the modern post-colonial states were inherited by the British during this period. To achieve the goals of imperialism, the British had to transform the local society. In order to accomplish that task, they understood that they have to study about *local structures* where the identification of ethnicity played a major role. European nation states emerged before Colonialism where the British gave their structures to their colonial states belonged to them. In this study, the historical method is used and reformation reports, census reports, administration reports and the writings of the colonial writers are used as primary sources while the bibliographies of scholars who have discussed about this topic in different perspectives are used as secondary sources. Sri Lanka was a western colony for 350 years and Ceylon was under British rule from year 1796 to 1948. At the beginning of their rule, the British were interested in studying the local society. This is an important sub finding of the study as mentioned above. In addition, the important periods of the British rule can be divided into several subdivisions such as: 1796-1833, 1833-1931 and 1931-1948. From 1796-1833, the ethnic groups were identified according to the geographical areas, ethnicities, castes and religions. After 1833, the present administration system was handed over to the local Administration where it was a *paradigm shift*. After that the ethnic identification became more important but other identifications were linked to it when reformations took place from time to time. During the British rule parallel to the British identification, the local ethnicities created their identities and there were no nationalist movements or any other movements other than *ethnic* movements. In conclusion, the British identified the local ethnicities as separate groups although the geographical, cast and religious factors were linked with ethnicity. Since 'conquer' and 'divide' became the British way of ruling the nation, after the independence the Sinhala and Tamil ethnicities were misled and identified as individual *nations* which led to the post colonial ethnic conflict in the country.