

DIGAMADULLA UNDER THE BRITISH COLONIAL RULE: AN HISTORICAL STUDY

M.V. CHANDRASIRI

Senior Lecturer, Department of History, University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to make an historical study of the British colonial rule in Digamadulla in the 19th century which was later transformed into the Ampara District, under the delimitation act of 1961 with a view to launching there a more effective administration network. Digamadulla was popular as the granary that flourished in the rich alluvial plain of the southeastern Sri Lanka, during the Anuradapura period. Due to various invasions the irrigation system that was vital for the boost of agriculture got gradually dilapidated. The arable lands that used to be constantly irrigated by a network of reservoirs, dams, anicuts, and canals deteriorated and was in no time devoured by the wilderness. As their livelihoods were threatened the people abandoned their habitats in the area. Under the British colonial rule the inhabitants did not have any support to reorganize their livelihoods. So the remaining inhabitants fled to the upcountry. The Rebellion 1817-1818 aggravated the situation further. The remaining inhabitants joined the *vedda* community in the neighbouring jungles. As the land was under wilderness even the little support from the colonial rule could not reach the area because of the difficulty in transports. Modernization associated with westernization brought about by estate plantation ventures in the central hills in the wet zone had the least influence in these areas. Neither the trading activities of the Muslim and Tamil communities living in the eastern coastal areas of Sri Lanka had any impact on them. As such, Digamadulla remained a distant solitary area throughout the 19th century and up to the middle of the 20th century. Therefore this paper investigates where there was any administration there in this period.

KEYWORDS: Administration, Organization, Colonial Rule, Democratic Ruling, Village Council