

## **Social Changes, Local Administration and Democratic Governance in Pre and Post-Independence Sri Lanka**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The main purpose of this paper is to explore, how the changing social structure was crucially impact on formation of local administration in the context of local democracy in pre- and post - independence Sri Lanka. The ancient administration system was highly centered and autocratic in the king domain period in Sri Lankan society. Entire administration system was completely controlled by the king and his subordinates' class who had more privileges and civil powers than ordinary people on various social capacities. Due to this privileges and civil authorities of this elite group that people did not have sufficient opportunity to engage in administrative activities or politics on what they need to wish. This trend has been shown not only under the colonial period but also after independency as well. Therefore, a puzzle is creating regarding period of pre- and post-independence administrative and local governance process in Sri Lanka. There was a sufficient opportunity for the people with regard participate of politics and administrative functions. Also, considerable social change has been taken place by the time. There are sufficient structural changes were happened in grass root politics, yet, there was no shown proof evidence about sufficient opportunities for the people regarding participation in politics or administration in the governance activities, why? This study will depend on number of arguments and interpretations which have been given by the previous scholars regarding social changes and political transformation in pre and post colonial Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study is employs critical theory which is one of the main post modern approaches of scientific inquiry as a major methodology for the analysis of existing arguments. Therefore, research will be critically examined the existing nature of the context by using scholarly writings and interpretations. The main limitation of this research is finding relevant secondary sources documents which written by the previous scholars regarding same field. Mainly, this research has been found that class, cast and wealth as well as dominant civil power has been used for maintain and sustain of the politics and administration of local governance in pre and post independence Sri Lanka. Further, final output of this research can be used scholars who desire to do a research on same area with applying same methodology.*

**Key Words:** Social Power, Elites domination, Local Administration, Local Governance

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Local governments and administration is one of the most important factors in any political society with regarding to delivering socio, economic services as well as enhance of the political practices in terms democracy. As a universal concept, it has provided broad and in-depth meaning for the practice of democracy in a given society. Sri Lanka has a long historical

experience on practice of their local administration and local governance. It was a dynamic process in past history. There was a local administration system during the period of king domain in ancient time. That local administration system was completely handled by the noble groups under the law of King. Limited services were delivered by the local administrative institutions regarding community. But, community did not have enough opportunity to take part in their political process or administration system. But, later, Local government institutions were vitally changed under the colonial period with intervention of the colonial administration. Specially, under the British colonial period local governments and their administrative role have been faced radical changes due to British colonial influences. One of the main points was that existing centered and autocratic oriented local administration mechanism gradually shifted from King to people. There are many changers and transformations were happened on socio, economic and political context at the grass root administration in the Sri Lanka.

One of the remarkable points was emphasized under the British colonial administration that is foundering of the formal local government system was introduced which based on western democratic principles. Since, it can be shown, there are many approaches were launched regarding social and political reforms by the Colonial administration. All those attempts were influenced on political and administrative systems grass root society in Sri Lanka. One of the crucial points of pre- independence colonial administration was introduce of the Universal franchise for the ordinary people. The main expectation of this was expanding of democracy by giving opportunities for the people regarding participate to the decision making process from bottom to top. But, it was not realized due to structured social composition of the locality. But, main objectives of the local administration and governance still not realize due to, political practices of powerful social groups, their beliefs and customs. Therefore democratic governance and administration of local society has become unrealistic meaning in term democracy. Mainly, this research is exploring the main reasons and factors which have behind in this back ward nature of Sri Lankan local administration and governance.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL NATURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN TERM DEMOCRACY**

Schumpeter who is pioneer scholar that pointed out, Local governance Institution is a building block for the strong democracy. The modern interpretation about concept of state is an agreement between citizens and existing political authority which based on delivering and protecting basic necessities of the people. Therefore, state has a responsibility regarding establishment of the better socio, economic and political environment for the citizens which base on requirement of the diverse interests of the civilians. Because, legitimize Political authority of the state has been derived from the citizens. All the institutional and implementation mechanism of the state has formed with regard fulfill of these social requirements. Whole system of the state is depending on grass root politics. On the other hand, people who live in local sphere is most important foundation regarding enhance and strengthen of democratic culture of the society.

Political hierarchy of the society mainly depends on community mobilization of the grass root. Therefore, state authority should understand the importance of relevancy of the local politics regarding institutional establishment on civilian interests with in a diverse perspective in term democracy. Danny Burns says, explore the changing context within which these initiatives have taken place: and assess the possibilities for the future of local democracy. In the process, it will show how a relatively simple theoretical idea has become extremely complex in practice (Danny

Burns 2000).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand the term Political modernity has given a broad meaning about social reforms of the society. As a political concept it has emphasized an in-depth understanding about reforms of the existing political and social system in given society. Political reforms, it is automatically involved with enhance of quantity and quality enhancement of the given political system. Further, Political reforms, is an essential process for the democratic principles such as enhancement of the people participation in politics. People participation in politics is one of the main requirements in a political system to establish a better democratic environment. Also, it is significant for the fulfillment of the diverse interests of the civilians. Therefore, the term democracy is emphasizing the term “equal participation” of the people in to decision making process from top to down. Political changers should be happened in parallel to social changers. Nature of this process is power and authority should have to devolve from national level to grass root. This is one of the requirements for democratic establishment in the society. Franklin Roost well who was the president of United States, said that we know it takes time to adjust Government to the needs of society. But...reforms too long delayed or denied have jeopardized peace, undermined democracy, and swept away civil rights and religious liberties. We will no longer be allowed to sacrifice each generation in turn while the law catches up with life... (Sidney, Norman, H. Nie, Jae-on Kim, : 1978).<sup>2</sup> Social Changes is upgrading social structure in whole society while providing vital benefits for the society.

As a concept, democracy can be identified in different dimensions in the changing politics in the modern time. Ultimate consequences or interpretation of democracy will be defined by the people of the society which based on their socio, economic and political achievements. Until, therefore, it doesn't have a concrete definition. Happiness of the people can be identified as a one of the aspects of democracy.

A society is an agent which representing for the well being of the entire people without differences. Therefore, maintain of the happiness of the people is determined by the state which is agent behalf of the society. State is defining needs of people which base on the number of key factors that are directly derived from the aspirations of the people. State is responding regarding those aspirations through their policies and mechanisms. As mentioned, happiness will depend on the policies and services which are delivered by the political system through their institutional mechanism in the society. Also, happiness is determining that scale of enjoy of interest by the people on socio, economic and political interests in their society. In this sense, state has a formal institutional network for delivering these services and enhancing active democratic practices in the society. When, investigating of practical aspect of democracy and administration that grass root is the most important layer of the democratic practices of the given society. Realistic nature of democracy will be reflected from the practices of politics by the grass root politics. Therefore, in the discussions of institutional setup of the state such as local government institutions will be a building block for the democratic enhancement of the given political system. Primarily, agreement between state and citizens has clearly been defined by the modern liberal democratic literature that has emphasized the requirement of proper consensus of the society regarding protect of the people rights. It should be realized through democratic institutional frame work of

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<sup>1</sup> Danny Burns, Can Local Democracy Survive Governance, Urban Studies, Vol. 37, No 5-6, and 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Sidney Verba, Norman H Nie, Jae-on Kim, 1978, A seven nation Comparison; Participation and Political Equality, Cambridge University Press, America.

the state. Mostly, debates are going on but practices are less due to structural related issues such as attitudes, traditions, customs beliefs ext. But, this kind of normative factor as well as qualitative perspective such as norms, attitudes and beliefs also significant in this regard. John Rawl, s pointed out...In the basic structure certain ideas and values, it encompass not only the framework of basic institutions but also the principles structures and perceptions that apply to it as well as new they norms are to be expressed of the characterizes and attitude of the members of society where relies its deals (Rawl,s :1997).<sup>3</sup> There are various scholars who have given many definitions on local government but, it's difficult to come to a general definition regarding local government. James Bryce pointed out that “small communities as the “tiny foundation heads of democracy” (George: 1986).<sup>4</sup> Establishment of better local government system is pioneer requirement for the democratic enhancement and active citizen's engagement in politics in local politics.

Local government is foundation for the political process of any given society. Further, it will provide fundamental requirements and facilities. Further, it will provide necessities for the enhancement of democratic political practice. One of the main services of the local government is recruiting and trains the politicians as future leaders. Most of politicians have initiated their political activities at the grass root. Secondly, those politicians are involving decision making process while listing to the people aspiration on their basic requirements. Since, those political figures are engage in policy making and implementation process at the foundering level. Simultaneously, reforms and changers also are starting from this point. Therefore, Local governance, and administration is crucially important to make radical changes in national politics as well. Although, political leaders who are in local government institutions, they have close association with the society and ordinary citizens. Therefore, the main assumption is they are taking in accurate decisions regarding socio, economic and political necessity of the people. Primarily actions of the people on democratic rights can be shown at the grass root politics or local administration system of the given political system. Local administration means it is like a small government in grass root as it is similar to national government of the country. A staff report released by the Presidential, Commission in America on their political system pointed out Local Governments are to total government which basic issues are to the human body. Without them, the government would have no vitality (George: 1986).<sup>5</sup> Define the term local government is a complex phenomenon in the political science discipline. Generally, Local government is government which is based on particular community or group.

A broad definition has given by the Census Bureau of America it has pointed out A government is an organized entity which , in addition to having governmental character, has sufficient discretion in the management of its own affairs to distinguish it as separate from the administrative structure of any other governmental unit (Advisory Committee on Local Government: 1955).<sup>6</sup>Political structure of the local administration and governance differs from

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<sup>3</sup> Johan Rawl, s, and the agenda of social justice, ed, B.N. Ray. 1999,

<sup>4</sup> George S. Blair. , 1986. Government at the grass root. Palisades Publishers Pacific Palisades, California.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Advisory Committee on Local Government, 1955, Local Government, a Report to the Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, Government Printing Office. US.

country to country because it's depending on the political system and view which countries have accepted. But common feature of the local politics is that it has given a vital room for the grass root community to engage decision making process through their representatives who are well aware about the people aspirations and their interests. However, one of the main opportunities of this local political process is that people can closely monitor of the political activities of the politicians and can ensure their governance. This is providing a considerable space for the enhance citizen democracy at the grass root. Therefore, in theory of local government and administration that has accepted its vital role with regard development of socio, economic and political activities in the in the changing democratic society.

### **3. SOCIAL BACKGROUND AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN PRE- COLONIAL SRI LANKA**

Sri Lanka, known as one of the countries in South Asia has been practicing and adopted democratic traditions in their political system since their post independence. Social composition of the country is highly diverse and dynamic one. As a country, it has a long historical local administration system in their local governance history. In the ancient period, there was an informal approach with regard local administration. It goes back to ancient period which was under the control of the king domain. But, Pluralistic democratic implications were established in Local administration institutions in latter part of the British colonial period. But, its basic foundation goes back to ancient politics and administration which was controlled by the King and his allies in early period. There was a Village administration based on the principles of Autonomy.

Village is the main administration unit in the local governance during the King domain period. But, this autonomy in administration was not realized when compare with modern concept of political autonomy because those administration system controlled elite groups which are privileged and backed by the King. It was clearly reflects that Village administration connected to the central administration through these elite groups regarding regional administration. Many scholars have been argued about that administration system, especially; during Anuradhapura (One of the ancient cities as well as first main capital city of the regional monarchy) period that administrative system was clearly demarcated with several sub units and regions. Regions had capital cities in the King's domain (Rajarata) were named after the four directions (North, South, West, East) and identified as "Pasa" (Pas Dun Korala). A sub division was the unit called as "Rata". The Administrative division of Rata which had sub divisions and it has been continued unbrokenly from early period. Therefore, the Gama (Village) was the smallest sub division in the local administration in early period. Village was important component of the local administration system in pre- colonial era. Administration system was basically founded on lands which belong to the king in pre-colonial Sri Lanka. Whole land of the country was belonging to the King. Regional elites have received lands from the king as an honorable payment for their service. Therefore, ultimately they became as administrators in regional or local politics by the time. Bandarage argued that it was caused to established aristocracy administrative system in the society in early period in Sri Lanka. Due to the shortage of financial resources, large scale lands have been given as the remuneration of officials for their service in during the Kandyan period. In making such lands grants, the rights of tribute exaction from the producer class were

transferred from the king to the nobility (Bandarage: 1950).<sup>7</sup> Further Newton Gunasinghe pointed out that nature of Kandyan social formation on land distribution that will provide a very clear picture about pre colonial social back ground and society. All lands in the Kingdom were theoretically vested with the Crown and were related to an elaborate system of service tenure. The king as the ancient ideology affirmed was the “lord of the soil”. (Gunasinghe: 1990).<sup>8</sup> Robert Knox quoted by Gunasinghe, The country being wholly his king farms out his land, not for money, but service. And the people enjoy portions of land from the King’s appointments. But he hastens to add many towns are in the King’s hand, the inhabitants where off are to till and manure a quantity of the land according to their ability, and lay up the corn for the King’s use. These towns the King often bestows upon some of his nobles for their encouragement and maintains, with all the fruits and benefits that before came to the King from them. (Gunasinghe: 1999).<sup>9</sup> There was a strong combination between King and noble groups regarding governance also could be understood that how they handled resources without questioning from the society in term King Regime. Also, King and his subordinate groups had taken all the governing power not only village but also all entire country. Gunasinghe pointed out that on appointment to various bureaucratic positions, officials received land grants from the Crown. Usually these grants came from the royal *Gabadagama*. But there were some villages specifically attached to bureaucratic positions. Thus the five ‘lower’ villages near Kandy, by tradition went to the King’s first councilor... (*Adikarama*) (Gunasinghe: 1999).<sup>10</sup> The village administration system under the king period fully depended on the kings hegemony and his necessity. It shows, there was a no clear evidence for the democratic participation of the people in local administration or governance. All the governing activities and delivering of services were concentrated in to village. Village was a significant administrative unit by the time. It’s administrated by a person who was most elderly and hereditarily appointed from the noble group by the ordinary community which was called Village Headmen. This was an administration like oligarchical administration system. There was a no civil society or civil society activities. Ordinary citizens were lived as slaver. Citizens were strongly combined with many social traditions, beliefs and customs. Therefore, there was no space for the democratic practice or politics. These factors clearly indicate that socio; political back ground was extremely authoritative one in ancient’s rural administration in Sri Lanka. Those leaders were appointed behalf of the king but not for the people.

These elite groups have taken all the controlling power in their hand. The expansion of aristocrats, Bundara says, villages strengthened the authority and the local autonomy of the aristocratic administrative class vis-à-vis the direct producers as well as the central authority of the king (Bandarage: 1950).<sup>11</sup> Further, this noble group used their socio, economic strength to enhance their political capacity and nobility. Jeremy Moss has pointed out Michel Foucault’s

<sup>7</sup>Asoka Bandarage., Colonialism in Sri Lanka the Political Economy of the Kandyan Highlands, 1833-1886. 1983., Lake house Investment Ltd, Book Publishers, 41, W.A.D. Ramanayake Mawatha, Colombo 2.

<sup>8</sup>Newton Gunasinghe, 1999. Changing Socio-Economic Relations in the Kandyan Countryside, Social Scientists Association, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

<sup>9</sup> Newton Gunasinghe, 1999. Changing Socio-Economic Relations in the Kandyan Countryside, , Social Scientists Association, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup>Asoka Bandarage., Colonialism in Sri Lanka the Political Economy of the Kandyan Highlands, 1833-1886. 1983., Lake house Investment Ltd, Book Publishers, 41, W.A.D. Ramanayake Mawatha, Colombo 2.

interpretation of use of power must be understood in its primary epistemological sense, as the capacity to become or to do certain things (Jeremy Moss: 1998).<sup>12</sup> Socio, cultural back ground of the ancient Sri Lankan Society was a backward and less educated one. Education is one of the key factors that creating capable social audience to understand politics and governance. Therefore, people did not have enough capacity to overcome the activities which have been done by the local ruling class during King Domain period. Anyhow, noble groups have been involved in governance activities under the conditions of the King and his hegemony, because, King had absolute power on the top of policy making and implementation process. Newton Gunasinghe expressed that noble groups done their services within a limited back ground with strong monarchy, the exact nature of the relationship between the crown and the nobles however should be examined in the core-land of the Kingdom in relation to the senior officials. Due to absolute monarchy, the pressure the nobles were able to exercise in formulating the state policy. (Gunasinghe: 1999).<sup>13</sup> All those evidence are providing a clear picture about pre-colonial administration of Sri Lanka. It was an autocratic governing system which did not close to the democracy. Robert Knox who talk about ancient social back ground in his writings, village administration in pre-colonial Ceylon government that he has pointed out, “As to the manner of his (King’s) Government” it is Tyrannical and arbitrary in the highest degree: for the rule absolute, and after his own will and pleasure: his own head being his only counselor (Knox: 1966).<sup>14</sup> It was difficult to find out term justice in term modern democracy.

However, those elite classes have taken all the regional economic and social power to their hand. Most of agrarian lands were belonged to them. They were used their social and economic power to gain political capacity to in their hand. They used politics as a mechanism for enhance and develop their business and nobility in the society. In this kind of back ground where ordinary citizens did not have an occasion to take part in administration process behalf of their voting power in the village level. There is no democratic electoral process in the local administration system under the ancient period. There was a highly feudal structure which had established through practices, customs and traditions. Further, as earlier said , village administration was functioned under the special unit called Village Council or Gam Saba (Small Institution which was set up for the village administration) Malini Adagama says, as a administrative unit, Village Council (Gam Saba) enjoyed considerable independent sovereignty under the pre- colonial period in Sri Lanka (Malini Adagama: 1997).<sup>15</sup> These village councils consisted of number of representatives called village councilors who were appointed from the Village Gentry. But , very difficult to come for the conclusion regarding ancient village system in term of sovereignty because question will be arouse that who were enjoyed sovereignty during that period and who hold sovereignty at the bottom of the society. On the other hand, ordinary people have been compartmentalized by the social traditions, customs and practices which under the leadership of the noble group of the grass root society. In such an environment, people did not have enough

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<sup>12</sup> Jeremy Moss (ed). , *The later Foucault*, 1998. Sage Publication Ltd, 6 Bonhill Street, London EC2A 4PU.

<sup>13</sup> Newton Gunasinghe, 1999. *Changing Socio-Economic Relations in the Kandyan Countryside*, Social Scientists Association, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

<sup>14</sup> Knox, Robert, 1966. *An historical Relations of Ceylon*, Dehiwala, Thissara Prakasakayo.

<sup>15</sup> Malini Adagama. 1997, *The History of Village Council System of Sri Lanka*, Saraswathi Printing and Publishers, Round Road, Diulapitiya.

confidence or organizing capacity to overcome those obstacles. But, terms modern democracy always has emphasized that strength of the people will be depended on the organized movement in the society. These movements will be led structural changes in the civil society. L. Judson Hanifa pointed out about social change on socio, economic and cultural pattern how impact with strengthen community network, he observed that older customs of rural neighborliness and civic engagement, such as debating, speech barn raising, and apple cutting had fallen in to disuse, gradually, these customs become almost wholly a banded, the people becoming less neighborly social life gave way to isolation and community to stagnation (L.Judson Hanifa: 2002).<sup>16</sup> There was no civil society in ancient society; therefore people did not have confidence for collectively mobilize and there could not see any attempt to gain democratic rights.

Divisions of labor gave more benefits for the noble people on their properties and productions. Ruling party purposely had launched divided rule policy not only for social level but also culture at the ground level. Therefore, when they admin the bottom society, they could easily control external behavior as well as internal attitudes of the ordinary people. Such a society can be defined as society which consist victimized citizens. Functions of the village councils encompassed whole administration of villages of rural area. Ancient village depends on the self sufficient economy which based on agrarian activities. Therefore, functions of village councils were concentrated to delivering services for agrarian necessities. Administration of water reservation and delivering of water for the agricultural activities and maintained of water tanks were major functions of the Village councils in ancient local administration in Sri Lanka. In addition, village council handled peace and harmony among the local community. It did not have judicial authority but it had a power to settle miner disputes among the people through calling mediation process (Adagama: 1997).<sup>17</sup> Maintain of peace and harmony was not a smooth function like which is happening in the modern period. During the King domain period that there was a law which has comes from the king. There was no constitution or constitutionalism with regard emerged of rule of law on governance of the society. Judgment was an autocratic one. Final supreme judiciary was King. There was no natural justice. Only and final decision was made by the King. Therefore, could not see any space for the democratic ideology or practices. At the bottom level judiciary power vested under the local elites who were representatives of the village councils. Disputes mediation and settlement was done by these mechanisms. There were not democratic principles every things happened on compromises and consensuses. Mostly, Issues are arbitrator short out the by the ruling and elite parties at the local administration.

There was a most coercion nature of governing system could be shown in the local administration under the King Regime Sri Lanka. Malini Adagama says, there was a tax system implemented in such village councils on villagers. Tax was an important source of income of the controlling group of local politics and administration. Every villager should have to pay tax for the Village council Otherwise they may be subjected to punish. Those punishments were mostly unethical or out of common law of the legal system. Mostly, poor people of the village had faced physical as well as psychological harassments by the leaders of village council. There was no

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<sup>16</sup> L.Judson Hanifa, by Robert D. Putnam, 2002, *Democracies in Flux*, The evaluation of social capital in contemporary society, Oxford University Press, 198, Madison Avenue New York.

<sup>17</sup> Malini Adagama. 1997, *The History of Village Council System of Sri Lanka*, Saraswathi Printing and Publishers, Round Road, Diulapitiya.



good faith no proper and judiciary mechanism in this regard (Adagama: 1997).<sup>18</sup> This is a kind of coercion pattern which was implemented based on economic domination by the powerful ruling class on ordinary people in ancient local administration in grass root society in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it's very clear that governance or democracy did not realize under the pre- colonial socio, economic back ground in Sri Lanka local administration system. There are lack of the space for the form of the civil society, as well as people movement, People had to tolerate all most marginalization, manipulation, coercion, domination, enforcement in their day to day political and social life, and even they did not have their basic human rights in terms of feudal king administration system. Last King of Kandyan monarchy was Sri Wikrama Rajasinghe who was born in India and latter was incumbent as a king in Kandyan country side in Sri Lanka, he could not maintain his position with Sinhala elite for a long time. Due to allegation with King that most of elites had strong objection with Kingship and finally he was dismissed from his position by the elite with the support of the British Colonial Government. Therefore, British could fully establish their control in entire Sri Lanka (Namasiwayam: 1970). At the beginning, there was several Insurgencies erupted against British colonial administration that all the insurgencies were handled by the leaders of powerful elite class who utilized entire socio, economic power and privileges giving by the king. These elite groups were interpreted by themselves as patriots of the Sri Lanka against British colonial rule. Simultaneously, another group of elites cooperated with British colonial government on their benefits and privileges. Colonial government used this dividing rule policy to local administration and they were succeeded. In these incidents that elite who were against the king, they got more favors from the colonial government.

#### **4. Local Government (Administration) System in Colonial Era**

The nature of ancient local government administration system gradually has been changed. Specially, under the colonial period, local government system and its social background was radically changed by the colonial administration. There were three regimes can be identified as colonial hegemony in Sri Lanka but British colonial period was most influential regarding local administration and governance. It marked a turning point in local governance and administration 1865 that is British colonial government was established first local government institutions based on modern democratic principles. One of the important factors that main path was open for the ordinary people to take part in democratic representation in local administration process. People representatives through electoral process were laydown in this period. Initially, limited access of the electoral rights was introduced by the British colonial administration. Therefore, latter part of the politics, people who lived in grass root could elect their representatives for the local democratic institutions on their administrative purpose.

Feudal system and their practices was the main barrier for the colonial government regarding elaborate of the modern political approach in local; administration and governance. Those conservative feudal customs and practices had created an unfavorable environment for the democratic establishment in local administration in Sri Lanka. Local elites were purposely continually maintain this this this system because they needed to survive and sustain their social and civil status further among the ordinary people. On the other hand, colonial administration wanted to achieve their several socio, economic goals but it has been prevented by those ancient

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

social practices and traditions. Specially, to achieve their economic objectives they had to do some radical changes of the entire social system which was controlled by the noble feudal elites. Colonial administration wanted to transform existing stressful and backward local administration system because why colonial government wanted to release State lands that had belongs to elites who controlled the grass root society. Land was one of the important economic factors for the colonial government therefore they needed to release all the state land free from feudal class from bottom to top. That was one of the pre-conditions of the colonial administration for their purposes. But, did not completed all the necessary conditions for the democratic establishment in local politics or administration in pre-colonial era. Significant point is British colonial government was established ennobling environment for the enhance democracy and administration not only at local level but also at national level as well.

As a governing body that local government institutions was most prominent under the colonial period. Handling huge lands at the periphery and people desires was easy to British's through local administration. First time, introduced the modern local government system on democratic basis, it was a crucial bench mark of the Sri Lankan local government history with regard changes of socio, economic and political system in latter which was existing feudal socio, economic and cultural dominations on politics and administration. The major obstacle for this attempt was those noble ruling groups have been functioning in society through their strong social capacity under the King domain period. Existing social structure had strongly combined with this social group and their social practices. British colonial government strategically has launched dividing rule policy regarding weaken of the noble ruling system which base on local elites in local administration.

British colonial administration, gradually encroach local administration system and taken all the socio, economic and political decision making power on their hand. It was caused to do paradigm shift in local administration in Sri Lanka. Because, British wanted to create a new social class which including difference features from the existing noble ruling groups. They interpreted this group as middle class which was emerged from the existing noble group. British's could identify their capacity to raise economy, society and receiving political power as well. Historian, G.C. Mendis pointed out about this noble class; the middle class differed from all other groups. It crossed all existing group boundaries and drew its members from all of them. It ignored the foundations on which other groups rested and based itself on wealth and enlighten. It united for various purposes especially to safeguard and develop its interests (G.C.Mendis :).<sup>19</sup> It's clear that structure and role of the class based society has been changed but social hegemony did not change. Alternatively, it was happened and demonstrated in different perspectives in politics and administration.

Especially, in politics, they could do vital role regarding political development but not democratic development. Although, new middle class was emerged under the colonial period that base on same socio, economic and cultural hegemony which was had earlier noble society. British colonial government did not change their policies regarding recruitment of officers for the local administration. Colonial government was recruited of these officers from the new middle class because they were aware about role of this class regarding social change of the Sri Lankan society. Social change was significant necessity for the British colonial administration to

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<sup>19</sup> G.C.Mendis, 1944. *Ceylon under the British Rule*, Laurier Books Ltd. (October 1, 2005)

archive their objectives. At the national level, these new middle class was disciplined by the western education and new trends of the politics and economy in the globe. Therefore, strategically, all respectable posts were given to these new elite groups. Patrick Peebles pointed out, The British consciously selected those men they considered the highest status individual for each position increased, and the British became increasingly selective with regard to social status (Patrick Peebles: 1995).<sup>20</sup> Colonial government has chosen leaders for the local administration from these groups for their administrative process. Because, all of new elites pro- reformist. Tissa Fernando coated by the Patrick Peebles, expressed ideas, the new elite as those whose English education enabled them to hold position of responsibility in the administrative, political and professional life of Ceylon (Tissa Fernando, Patrick Peebles: 1995).<sup>21</sup> However, the administrative hierarchy in the Kandyan region were the chief headmen (Dissawa) Superior headmen (Ratemhaththaya) and In charge of unit known as Rata and Korala, s respectively. The native headmen performed a wide variety of functions on behalf of the colonial government (Bandarage: 1950).<sup>22</sup> All those positions were held with considerable power and authority in the grass root administration under the British colonial government. Gradually, British government presented some political reforms regarding change of the authoritative power of the elite class not only local administration but also national level. Introduction of Colebrook-Cameron reforms was introduced by the colonial government in 1831 that reforms had provides several pre-conditions for socio, economic changes in the colonial society in Sri Lanka. But, it was clear that new elite class already dominated of existing social foundation. It was caused to create unresolved a vacuum for the democratic administration in local governance.

However, Colebrook Cameron reforms emphasized the necessity of the economic, political reforms regarding political and social modernity of the country. G.C. Mendis in his papers has pointed out; The Colebrook reforms in Ceylon provide a classical example of the application of utilitarian ideas to administrative social and economic problems (G.C. Mendis 1956).<sup>23</sup> British expectations were polarized with such new elite domination. Result of this new social layer that a new trend was become in Politics as a new perspective. Most important changes on social and political were emerged with the introducing of limited voting rights for the people under the Colebrook – Cameron reforms. But, this democratic privilege was narrowly defined at the beginning stage. Therefore, this was enjoyed by the elite class only. Right to vote was subjected to the many pre-conditions such as wealth, education, social status, property ext. that also reflected social hegemony of the existing society. Only for the selected group of people was qualified for the votes. But, in this case the term “citizens” cannot be justified under this kind of conditions. This was completely violating modern democratic principles. Right to vote was subjected to some conditions such as income, property, and education. This is strong undemocratic nature with comparing modern principles of democratic theory and practices. This trend was applied to local politics as well; therefore, ordinary people could not actively participate in politics in tem of “right to vote”. All those opportunities were taken by the elite

<sup>20</sup>Patrick Peebles., 1995. *Social Change in Nineteenth Century Ceylon*, Navarange, Booksellers and Publishers, RB-7 Inderpuri, New Delhi 12.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Asoka Bandarage., *Colonialism in Sri Lanka the Political Economy of the Kandyan Highlands, 1833-1886*. 1983., Lake house Investment Ltd, Book Publishers, 41, W.A.D. Ramanayake Mawatha, Colombo 2.

<sup>23</sup> G. C. Mendis (ed.): *The Colebrook-Cameron papers: documents on British colonial policy in Ceylon, 1796-1833*. 2 vols.: lxx, 404 pp.; ix, 416 pp. London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, Indian Branch, 1956.

class. They had completed all pre conditions requirements which need to use of vote in politics. But, important point of this event is that it was bench mark of local governance and administration in Sri Lanka. It was encouraged local politics towards democratic application through appointing representatives in their institutions on behalf of the people. It was influenced the citizens with regard latter part of democratic development in local administration in Sri Lanka. Reality of this administration was ruling class was represented for their interests but not interests of the ordinary people. British colonial government needed to convert new noble group who depend on plantation economy.

Strategically point of the colonial government was that group to use as reformists to escalation of socio, political and cultural reforms towards favorable to plantation economy. An interest of this new ruling class also was business oriented. They expected to build up their business especially towards Commercial plantation economy under the policies of colonial government. But, local people were completely depended on the agrarian economy in the rural society. One of the main evidences of weak democracy that lack of participation of the general public in administration caused to lack of development in rural agrarian sector due to less consideration by the governing body of the elite representatives. Local administration system had marginalized and neglected general public at the grass roots. Such system excluded public from administration or governance process at the grass root. There was no a compromise in between administration and people or representatives and citizens. That practical aspect of dominant authoritative governing power of the social elite class has been challenged in latter part of the colonial administration. Introducing of the plantation economy that previous elite society and their social status was converted in to a new paradigm. During the period of British administration that colonial government tried to abolish tyrannical type social structure from the Sri Lankan grass root administration. On the other hand, it could be identify as an emancipation of the society from feudal governing system in Sri Lanka which was an ordinary citizens were victimized by these feudal ruling class and their politics. After collapsing of the Kandyan Kingdom, since the beginning stage, to end of the colonial era there was a strong objections erupted against with regard British colonial social reforms from the existing feudal elites. Since beginning, British colonial government strategically used that internal conflict which had erupted in between king and his subordinates regarding ownership of the properties. Also, in latter they used economic interests and social status of the elites to shot out this problem.

Colonial government could success in their reforms easily with the support of these new elites but they become as most powerful political elites in the latter part of the local politics. Most important result of this process was that all the traditional elites have converted in to a new commercial class. G.C Mendis says, British governor use diverse methods to reduce the powers of the Mudliars and to bring the civil servants in to the close touch with the people, Fredrick North back the Nindagam given to the Mudliars for their service and deprived them of the sovereign powers which they exercises in such a villages ( G.C. Mendis 1944 ).<sup>24</sup> Newly created government service adopted all the administrative activities from bottom to top. Sometime these civil service consisted British as well as Sinhalese who come from new middle class. These new class led the society for the next era by growing up cohabitation with British colonial government. The new commercial class has provided necessary socio, economic and political leadership for the local administration in Sri Lankan society under the British colonial

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<sup>24</sup> G.C.Mendis,. 1944. Ceylon Under the British Rule, Laurier Books Ltd. October 1, 2005.

administration. There was a big change was happened in local administration activities under the colonial period in between 1930 and 1947. British needed to do massive structural change', especially, regarding politics and administration activities in the grass root society. British government wanted to start this process at the bottom level because, traditional customs and laws which had deep rooted in the local politics and administration. At the beginning, British did not want to introduce real democratic rights for the Sri Lankan grass root society. They had only one interest that was to establish favorable administration system regarding their commercial purposes. One of the important obstacles for them could be shown that is existing traditional socio, economic and political pattern had been blocked the rights of ordinary people. Therefore, they could not overcome their rights beyond the elite governing body. This also impact with original objective of the British colonial government. British needed to establish liberal labor market and other per conditions for their main purpose. On the other hand, ordinary people could not overcome Rajakariya (Corvee Labor) which is one of the main social barriers where a person could not archive to social mobility on her or her capacity. Existing social system was the main determination with regard determined of the qualification for the person who wants to be as a partner of the politics, economy or administration. Social life of the people was decided by the existing traditions customs and beliefs. Positions and professional life decided by the existing social criteria's. It was a reflected a hereditary perspective. Therefore, this perspective was blocked social mobility of the people in grass root. This was a major aristocratic barrier for the village citizens to enter the politics or administration. It was a major block regarding social activities of the ordinary mass. British wanted to breakdown this system through introducing modern commercial economy and their cultural and social attitudes.

As I mentioned earlier, that Local administration and democracy have faced some radical changers in 1831 under the Cole-brook Commission reforms. It was remarkable in 1898 because British government introduced Regional Boards System under the Act No. 13 in 1898. Important point of this board was that first time in Sri Lankan Local Government history that Government Agent was appointed as a chairman in this board. In addition, there were six members consisted in this board. Three representatives were appointed from the people and other three members were from the public service (Guruge Lionel: 2008).<sup>25</sup> General observation in this regard that local administration body was concentrated only for the delivering of services and collecting taxes from the people who live in urban areas. It was keenly demonstrated that bureaucratic domination was gradually established in local administration system under the new reforms of the colonial Government. Functions of local government institutions were narrowly defined by the existing political necessity. On the other hand, a new approach was demarcated in local administration system by the British Colonial government in 1931. Most notable event was introducing of the universal suffrage for the ordinary people by the British colonial government in 1931. In 1931, British governments brought Dhuonerurmore Commission to find out facts and feasibility regarding further enhance of democratic reforms in the Sri Lankan political and administration structure. This commission was gathered information from various sources. The commission was focused middle class on their investigation and obtains recommendations regarding enhancement of political and local administration capacity of the country. In the

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<sup>25</sup> Namasiwayam, 1970, the Legislatures of Ceylon, Education Department of Sri Lanka.

Commission reports, there was a most important recommendation has been given by the commission that is voting rights (Universal Franchise) for the entire people of the Sri Lanka. This was the most progressive approach on democratic establishment and strengthens of local administration from the bottom to top in Sri Lankan society. What was the desire of the British government is to take ordinary people in to politics and give the active participation in administration body through voting rights. It was clearly indicated that entire elite society and their agents were strongly opposed regarding this decision which had been taken by the colonial government. We could understand this is the reality of democracy and administration of the power elites in not only local but also national administration in Sri Lanka by the time. In simultaneously, British government had set up a local political body with regard to principles of modern democracy. Under the Doneuhermore Commission's report that British government had appointed a commissioner with authorities power for the local administrative sphere which had concentrated all the institutional body subjected to him (Lionel Guruge: 2008).<sup>26</sup> This event also complicated because power and authority were concentrated in to single organ.

But, important point was people could appoint their leaders in their local governance body through Votes. But, reality was completely different from the existing situation. Local elite had established their social power in entire society on their social capital and civil status. Especially, local politics was dominant by these elites groups. Most of lands were belonged under this middle class and they could handle considerable amount of local economy on this capacity. They could handle labor market and agrarian sector by using their capacity. Regional elites were derived from the upper caste so they could manipulate people's interests on this matter as well. When the political power comes to bottom those elite could gain power in their hand by using their civil power. But, universal franchise was demarcated crucial point regarding local administration and governance. K.M.De Silva pointed out that, nevertheless, universal franchise had a powerful influence on the pre-independence political process. First, although the rural vote established its dominance from the outset, universal suffrage strengthened the working class movement and opened the way for its activists and radicalizing role in Sri Lankan politics (K.M.De Silva :1998).<sup>27</sup> When the democracy and governance was strengthen that space for the social capital of the collective mass will be increased then it will impact positively in the society. Judson Hanifa pointed out that collective effort of people will impact and improve mobilizing community as a whole and will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts while the individual will find in this associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, an fellowship of his neighbors.....when the people of a given community have become acquired with one another and have formed a habit of coming to gather occasionally for entertainment, social intercourse, and personal enjoyment they by skilful leadership the social capital may easily be divert of the community wellbeing (L.Judson Hanifa :2002).<sup>28</sup> One of the results of the universal franchise is that people could move each other and become aware about what is politics. On the other hand there was a space opened for the civil society. There is various political and civil society

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<sup>26</sup>Guruge Lionel., *Local Governance in Sri Lanka*, 2008, Community Participation Programme, Center for Policy Alternatives, 24/2, 28 Lane, out flower Road, Colombo 07.

<sup>27</sup> K.M.de. Silva, (ed) Johan M. Richardson Jr: *S.W.R.D.Samarasinghe*, 1998, Sri Lanka; *Electoral Politics and Resilience of Democracy*, International Center for Ethnic Studies, Kandy , Sri Lanka.

<sup>28</sup> L.Judson Hanifa, by Robert D. Putnam, 2002, *Democracies in Flux*, The evaluation of social capital in contemporary society, Oxford University Press, 198, Madison Avenue New York.

activities were started from the local level. Therefore, general public were started to do some influential campaign against existed local institutions and their representatives.

Best result of this was erupted early Marxist movement in Sri Lanka. In between 1920 and 1935 that Marxist movement rapidly has been spreads to the remote areas. One of the main objectives of the Marxist movements was first result of the universal suffrage and strengthens political confidence of local people's through universal franchise. The main reason behind the rapid expansion of Marxist movement by the time was less concerned of the local elite or representatives regarding socio, economic aspiration of the local people. One of the slogans of the Marxist movement was eradication of the poverty and social inequality from the rural society. It was a people movement against capitalist elite middle class and their political homogeny. Colvin R. De Silva who is one of the founder members of Lanka Samasamaja Party which was first socialist party (Lanka Socialist Party) in his 2<sup>nd</sup> annual presidential address in 18<sup>th</sup> December 1937, he expressed that The growing volume of masses protest has alarmed our ruling classes, and the responsiveness of even the present state Council to organized mass pressure has scared them (Wesley Muthiah, Sydney Wanasinghe: 2007).<sup>29</sup> These campaigns concentrated in rural area since 1935 an people were mobilized surrounding these political trends. Initially those movements had dual challenge that is against with regard colonial administration as well as local comprador class regarding local administration. This movement emphasized and identified that existing middle class as local agent for the capitalist movement. People thought that the main threat for their democracy and governance is middle class and their social hegemony. Since, universal suffrage as a popular political implication was become as most prominent in the latter part of political development of Sri Lanka not only at national but also in grass root politics.

Even now days, Traditions and customs as well as beliefs are strongly attached with the grass root society. Therefore cast, wealth and prestige's were major necessities to get the political power at the local level politics. This trend has been continued at the local politics in different perspectives. Singer was quoted as saying by S.T. Hettige, The pattern did not change much even after the withdrawal of the alien rulers primarily because effective power was transferred to an indigenous elite because of their background and their inevitable closeness to their precedence's, had little in common with the masses of the ex. colonial countries (S.T.Hettige:1984).<sup>30</sup> Therefore, elite political culture has deep rooted in the popular democracy in local politics latter part of political modernity in Sri Lanka. In this sense, democratic practices and privileges of the ordinary mass was not realized in the local democratic institutions in pre and post-colonial Sri Lanka. Therefore, elaboration of democracy in practice has been manipulated by specific social factors not only in grass root but also national politics and governance in Sri Lanka. Even post-colonial political culture was dominated by the pre-colonial social groups as a new force in local democratic applications. Especially under the first and second republic constitutions and their electoral provisions has been an encouraged specific social group with regard gain of the power at the grass root governance. Electoral process of the modern local government system is not favorable for the correct democratic practices. As a new electoral approach that proportional representative system which introduced by the 1978 constitutions that has called local

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<sup>29</sup> Wesley Muthiah, Sydney Wanasinghe, 2007, Colvin R De Silva; Selected Speeches 7 Writings, A socialist Publication, 12 , Parakumba Place, Colombo, 06.

<sup>30</sup> S.T.Hettige, 1984, Wealth, Power and Prestige, ministry of high education, Sri Lanka.

government system for a new paradigm. This new electoral system has been created many negative impacts on local democracy and administration. New electoral system is highly competitive and costly electoral process which has created limited spaces for the ordinary people to enter the local politics.

This electoral system has been encouraged richest people to come for the politics than general mass. Costly electoral campaign has been created various kinds of undemocratic actions such as corruptions, misused of the people minds and manipulated of the public property at the electoral campaign. Devas says, However, the strength of this citizens power is dependent on the structure of the electoral system, the regularity of elections and the extent of genuine voter choice (Rakodi 2001).<sup>31</sup> Politicians who have social capital at the grass root that they are handling voting behavior of the local people by utilizing their social networks and economic capacity. Therefore, Local people doesn't have space to maintain their rational choice regarding appoint the suitable people in their institutions. Those powerful classes have been diverted democratic voting rights of the ordinary citizens at the grass root. Vote buying and vote bargaining are common features of local level electoral practices. The latter may offer some scope for the poor to influence outcomes, albeit usually in a clientelistic way (Devas 2001).<sup>32</sup> Under the new electoral system that a new political trend has been created in electoral culture of the local government as well as national level. Patriot client relationships have hegemonies the electoral campaign at the grass root. In this term, citizens have become a politically victimized in front of the politician.

Right of the vote has become a as an object such as buying and selling at the market. Citizens have become as clientlists. It has created electoral deal in between citizen and politician beyond the principles of ethical democratic politics. As agents electoral candidates are delivering various charities and services for the target citizens at the local areas. Some time, politicians are giving psychological bribes for the ordinary people. Money is most important tool for bribes in the local electoral campaign at the grass root elections. Most of rural areas are still suffering under the poverty line. Economic difficulties of the people have been complicated of the rational choice of the voters at the local government politics. Therefore, Charities such as shelter, agricultural equipment's, domestic items and appearing for the public event at the family level such as funeral , weddings are common strategies of the candidates at the local government election campaign in Sri Lanka.

All those actions have been complicated democratic rights (including voting right) of the ordinary people in their local government system. On the other hand, this electoral system and their political culture have opened space for the families bring in to politics than ordinary mass. The new political trend in local administration Sri Lanka is that representatives are coming from same family back ground. That is like hereditary system which was established under the King ruling system. This trend has seriously impact with the democratic governance at the grass root politics in Sri Lankan society. Due to this trend that corruptions, briberies, has been increased in recent history. Max Weber who is pioneer scholar says, Liberal parliamentary – Pluralism, class compromise and leadership democracy with in economy base upon private ownership – are also

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<sup>31</sup> Rakodi C.2001. Urban Politics: Review of the Literature. Urban Governance Partnership and Poverty Research WP30. International Development Department, University of Birmingham; Birmingham.

<sup>32</sup> Devas N, Amis P, Beall J, Grant U, Milton D, Rakodi C, Satterthwaite D. 2001. Urban Governance and Poverty: Lessons from a study of Ten Cities in the South: A Policy Briefing Paper for Donors, Government and Practitioners. University of Birmingham: Birmingham, UK.



strictly contemporary (David Beetham 1985).<sup>33</sup> Sociological perspective of the family politics can be examined through Webern ideology that is the best approach to examine the existing situation at the ground level politics in Sri Lanka. Further, Webber's argument pointed out by Devas that family centric politics always encouraged monopolistically environment at the given society. Under line in this distinction was the more general assumption that what matter in politics, as elsewhere few people of the top, indeed oligarch is inevitable (Devas 2001).<sup>34</sup> Local politics of Sri Lanka has been hegemonies by the elite class or specific group of people again. Therefore governance and citizen participation in to local administration has become an unrealized phenomenon. There are social elites who has dominant economic and social sphere have done significant influence regarding local administration for a long time period. All the social capital has been concentrated in to those elite's class. Therefore, elites behavior also prominent factor with regard back ward nature of the local administration and governance. Max Weber who is prominent German scholars coughed by David Beetham says, Universal suffrage has seen the right of the property and cultural heritage of liberalism threaten by too active a popular involvement in the political process or too serious an encroachment upon the independence economic and political elites (David Beetham 1985).<sup>35</sup> Weak civil society has created a favorable environment for dominant in politics and governance by this elite social class at the grass root Sri Lankan local administration sphere. Therefore, changing process of society has not positively impact ordinary citizens or their political participation in local political; institutions. Finally, that concept of democratic governance or administration is not giving meaningful reality Local government practices in pre or post-independence contexts.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Sri Lanka has a long historical evaluation process regarding their local administration and governance. In this paper, I tried to find out that nature of local administration system since pre-colonial to post-colonial period. The main important point of this paper is it could be identified a common factors which had influenced the formation of local administration and governance. Even, during the period of King Domain politics which social power have done prominent role regarding governance and administration in local sphere. Local governance and administration in ancient period was based on dictatorial hand which power had concentrated in king. Therefore, local administration also highly dominated by the King and his subordinated groups. During the monarchy period that local power was depended on such a social group on their social capacities. Basically, it was determined material factors like land, as well as some social factors like wealth, cast, and status privilege etc. People could not have rights to enjoy with democratic participation or privileges during the monarchical period. There was a feudal social system that always encouraged sustain and maintain autocratic ruling system not only in local but also as national level politics in Sri Lanka. Traditional social practices and customs did not open democratic ruling system. It was happened in local politics and administration as well. Institutional set up was established at the grass root politics where majority ordinary citizens were lived. Therefore,

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<sup>33</sup> David Beetham., 1985. *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics*, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 108, Cowley Road, Oxford.

<sup>34</sup> Devas N, Amis P, Beall J, Grant U, Milton D, Rakodi C, Satterthwaite D. 2001. *Urban Governance and Poverty: Lessons from a study of Ten Cities in the South: A Policy Briefing Paper for Donors, Government and Practitioners*. University of Birmingham: Birmingham, UK.

<sup>35</sup> David Beetham., 1985. *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics*, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 108, Cowley Road, Oxford.

everything was determined with regard administration and governance by the king or his subordinated elite in the entire country. Sometimes, it was like an autocratic system which power concentrated in one hand. But, latter part of political history, there was a considerable enhancement happened in local politics and administration in Sri Lanka. There was remarkable changers were happened under the British colonial period regarding local governance and administration. It was a starting point for the vital change of local governance and democratic practices in rural administration in Sri Lanka. There are radical social changes were happened on class base society that had directly impact on political culture in this country. Introducing universal suffrage had a great impact on democratic enhancement and governance in local politics and administration in Sri Lanka. But, it did not realized under the popular democracy of the latter part of political history. Class based society has been hidden activated under the popular democracy until independence of the country. Therefore local governance and administration was victimized under the new elite base social and political culture. A consequence was democratic practices nominally activated but practically undergone power hegemony of the elite politics. Therefore, democratic rights of the locality were still not realized in term social changers. Electoral system and their actions has been created undemocratic nature at the local administration and governance in Sri Lankan grass root politics.

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