

**SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION IN NORTH SRI LANKA (CEYLON)
IN THE MID NINETEENTH CENTURY : A REVIEW OF THE
DIVERSE DUTIES OF A COLONIAL PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATOR**

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The Government Agent in the mid 19th century in Sri Lanka, especially in a relatively far flung area like the Northern province was the sole imperial administrator under whose purview came many and diverse duties. His responsibilities were several, and the administrator in his role as Government Agent of a province provided the only machinery through which the wants of the inhabitants in his area could be satisfied. The work of a Government Agent in mid 19th century Sri Lanka was unique and has no modern day parallel except in the history of district administration either in the sub-continent of India or in Africa during the time of British rule. It is wrong and uninformed to allege that the colonial administrator in the 19th century was only interested in law and order and never in economic or social development. The Government Agent of this time could be described as a maid-of all work : treasurer, magistrate, prosecutor, and defence counsel, road builder and tax collector, all rolled into one¹

Clearly, a Government Agent like Percival Acland Dyke in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka during the mid 19th century seems to have done not only all this work, but had even attended to social and urban improvements which today would have been the function of a municipality. In the absence of local bodies to look after the needs of towns or villages the Government Agent did the work of a local authority. Thus the duties of a district and provincial administrator in the early nineteenth century were many and varied ; he was responsible for conducting almost the entire administration.

For instance in February 1844 public officers were required by the central administration to report forthwith all extraordinary occurrences such as murders, other heinous offences, riots or gross breaches of the peace, shipwrecks and hurricanes.² Naturally the responsibility and authority for dealing with the problems arising from such events were vested in the Government Agent : thus in the Northern area Percival Acland Dyke attended to all such and sundry problems. The welfare of the people and the provision of amenities and relief were major concerns which engaged his attention.

1. Allen, Charles (ed.) *Tales from the Dark Continent*, (London, 1979), see especially Introduction by Anthony Kirk—Greene, p. XIII-XIX, also *Plain Tales from the Raj* (London, 1978), Introduction by Philip Mason, p. 13—19.

2. Dickman, C., *Heads of Minutes, Circular letters, etc.*, (Ceylon, 1849) p. 53 ; for an account of the damage caused by cyclones and floods see Rasanayagam, C. *The British Period of the History of Jaffna*, (Colombo, 1934). pp. 110—111.

Northern Sri Lanka was often prone to experience unexpected calamities owing to the vagaries of the weather especially during the latter part of the year, when the North East monsoon raged frequently with fury. Severe gales accompanied by heavy rainfall accounted for occurrence of floods. Consequently, cultivation, the usual occupation of the inhabitants of the Jaffna peninsula, was adversely affected while even others, such as the coastal fisher-folk, faced various dire difficulties.

In 1829, when Dyke had just assumed duties as Collector of the district in December, severe damage was caused to livestock, and the poor peasants suffered.³ Although headmen had exaggerated the actual extent of the havoc, at least four areas had been badly affected.⁴

Later on, in 1859 similarly a cyclone left behind in its trail severe damage. Cultivation of tobacco, chillies, dry grain, and generally agricultural activity was wrecked.⁵ Between 1815 and 1859 twelve heavy gales wrought terrible havoc to the people of the Jaffna peninsula,⁶ while cyclones and floods occurred with unerring regularity and devastated the district. The governmental authorities were themselves compelled to admit that the recurrence of gales with increasing frequency during the recent past had caused to the inhabitants of the peninsula, a loss-the aggregate of which was considerable ;⁷ vessels and cargo had suffered wreck causing a serious setback to commercial activity. In 1834 the government had to collect funds for assisting the rehabilitation of the victims of a destructive cyclone in the peninsula,⁸ while in 1859 alone damage caused to the Jaffna area by a cyclone was estimated to be in the range of £18,975.

Seasonally, in the North, squally seas, floods, blown down trees and dwellings displaced villagers and others from their dwellings,⁹ and in such distressful circumstances it was the Government Agent's duty to provide relief. Although during the time of the north-east monsoon excessive rainfall was followed by floods there were also constantly times of severe drought during the dry season. However, on both occasions, cultivation ended in failure and the livelihood of the majority of the population was then adversely affected.

3. Collector's Diaries - see entry of 21 November 1829 (no number) ; also see SLNA (Sri Lanka National Archives) 6/671A Collector to Chief Secretary, 15 December 1829.

4. SLNA 6/927B, Collector to Chief Secretary, 3 March 1830.

5. SLNA — 20/1147—416, No. 148 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 29 June 1859.

6. *ibid.*

7. *ibid.*

8. For an account of the damage caused by cyclones and floods in this year, see Rasayanayagam, C., *op. cit.*

9. *ibid.* p. 111

In 1855 owing to a severe drought, the local supply of food failed ; and the price of grain shot up by over hundred percent.¹⁰ There was even a shortage of the common and cheap palmyrah products on which a number of the poor usually relied for cheap sustenance generally. The improverished folk in Jaffna were in a bad condition, and their future appeared bleak while the situation worsened even further since cholera and small pox epidemics also erupted at this time.

To alleviate the misery and hardship of the people, Government Agent Dyke obtained a grant of £ 100 to be expended on providing relief by pleading with the administration,¹¹ and relief work was commenced on the making and repairing of roads.¹² Likewise , on earlier occasions, when crops had failed and food was scarce in the Vanni region the Government Agent had purchased rice and sold it without a profit, even before government could permit him to do so.¹³ This was a move away from the usual laissez-faire attitude of the British at this time ; positive intervention by the government to lessen social and economic misery was unusual.

In 1856 November again the Jaffna peninsula suffered from the destructive effects of a severe storm¹⁴ and the economic life of the villages was badly disrupted. Cultivators lost their cattle and garden produce and a good part of the population who were small scale peasants were placed in a poor plight as a result.

During these years the Government Agent had complained repeatedly about the bad drainage within the district.¹⁵ Following the onset of monsoonal rains, water stagnated and floods usually damaged dwellings of the poorer people while everyone else too was inconvenienced in some way or other owing to difficulty of travel and transport. At the end of 1862, when there fell heavy rain, the inhabitants suffered severe loss while damage caused to the dwellings of the common people was equally enormous.¹⁶ In the following year the outbreak of a severe storm left ship owners and traders saddled with losses of £ 2,952 and 2,832 respectively in addition to other destruction suffered by the district.¹⁷ Thus, owing to the ravages of the uncertain weather, cultivators, traders and fishermen in the North suffered from time to time.

10. SLNA — 6/234 No. 1. Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 11 January 1855.

11. SLNA — 20/272—No. 32, Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 10 February 1855.

12. SLNA — 6/2304—No. 121, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary 9 May 1855.

13. SLNA — 6/972B— Collector to Chief Secretary, 3 March 1830.

14. SLNA — 6/2350 — No. 370, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary—I December 1856.

15. *ibid.*

16. SLNA — 20/1703 — 423 — No. 442 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary—19 December 1862.

17. SLNA — 20/1703 — 423 — No. 332 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary—10 November 1863.

Government Agent Dyke having observed the conditions year after year persuaded the administration to recognise the need for improving immediately the drainage within the Jaffna peninsula.¹⁸ Although some work had been done in the past years and this had lessened destruction and distress, the need for further improvement in drainage was clearly evident. Therefore he proposed a scheme of extensive repairs and improvements.¹⁹ Special steps were taken by the Public Works authorities for improving the drainage in Jaffna, but unfortunately even they proved to be inadequate in the long run.

Improvements to the drainage of the Jaffna town were again executed in terms of the Provincial Assistant Civil Engineer's report in 1863. The Government Agent felt that with a little expenditure a large amount of relief could be afforded to the inhabitants of the town by repairing in time the prevailing faulty system of drainage.²⁰ Thus, the Government Agent by regularly pinpointing the drawbacks in tolerating a bad drainage system and by getting repairs done had tried to improve almost entirely the system in the densely inhabited area of about hundred square miles comprising the Jaffna town and its immediately proximate environs.

Construction of roads under British rule without sufficient consideration being paid to the likely ill effects it may consequently cause and without adopting proper precautions had in fact worsened the drainage system. Hence the Government Agent felt that it was imperative to have improvements effected for mitigating the evil effects of the bad construction of these roads which more often had caused an obstruction to the free flow of rain water.²¹

In December 1865, after a careful study of the terrain, the Assistant Civil Engineer confirmed that the system of drainage within the Jaffna peninsula was still faulty.²² He also added that the works that had hitherto been executed with the Government Agent's guidance, had proved to be of limited use. Government Agent Dyke had lacked technical expertise which was an essential pre-requisite for effecting suitable improvements. Nevertheless it was only because of his sustained agitation, especially between 1862 and 1866, that an annual grant of £200 was given for the proper maintenance of the canals that had owing to neglect fallen into disrepair.²³ These canals had gone into disuse and the British, unlike their Dutch predecessors earlier, had paid no heed

18. SLNA — 20/1703— 423 — No 442 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 19 December 1862.

19. SLNA — 20/786—428 No. 253, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 10 August 1864; also see observations in Provincial Assistant Civil Engineer's report enclosed.

20. *ibid.*

21. *ibid.*

22. SLNA — 20/779 — 292 No. 282, Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 5 December 1865 ; also see annexure, Assistant Civil Engineer to Civil Engineer, No. 709 of 13 November 1865.

23. Rasanayagam, C., *op. cit.* p. 111.

whatever to the functional purpose or value of these canals, whenever they had made changes in the urban complex. Thomas Skinner the Director of Public Works, however, insisted that the local inhabitants should be held responsible for properly maintaining these canals,²⁴ and some change for the better followed.

The streets in Jaffna in the mid 19th century were in a deplorably bad state. They were neglected, unclean and needed immediate attention. Therefore, the Government Agent planned to levy an assessment on the houses and gardens within the urban area for obtaining necessary funds for improving the thoroughfares. In 1849 he also made further arrangements for removal of rubbish ; and such refuse was utilised in filling up and reclaiming public lands.²⁵

As a result of efforts taken by the Government Agent from 1851 onwards, the rubbish from the streets was removed daily and a number of pits in the town, where water collected and created an unwholesome condition, were filled up.²⁶ As even in the rural areas, since headmen had complained about the want of co-operation from the inhabitants to keep the paths and byways free of dirt and obstacles, prisoners were ordered to clean the drains especially in the bazaar areas and to repair village paths.²⁷

Another of the social welfare measures, undertaken during the mid-nineteenth century in Jaffna by the British, was the step taken for the provision of relief at state expense for the maintenance of paupers and lunatics.²⁸ Applications for charitable allowances kept on annually increasing and the government was hard put to find adequate funds. It was hence compelled to exercise a strict scrutiny when providing any assistance : economic conditions of the relations of the applicant and their ability to maintain the distressed individual, were usually carefully investigated before any aid was given.²⁹ Such assistance was minimal and did little to ease the condition of these miserable people.

The Government Agent had to be concerned not only about urban but also about general social improvements in the area under his purview. In 1834, since gaming rents had been abolished in accordance with the new fiscal policy that was based on the proposals of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commi-

24. *ibid.*

25. SLNA — 6/1995 — No. 169—Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 11 December 1859.

26. SLNA — 6/2097 — No. 169—Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 3 July 1851.

27. SLNA — 6/972B — Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 9 January 1830.

28. SLNA — 20/520 — 233 — Colonial Secretary to Government Agent— 6 January 1835, (no number), calls for a report about paupers and lunatics maintained at state expense. For earlier evidence on this see SLNA — 20/879—225—see Colonial Secretary's circular to Government Agent, 31 October 1829 ; also Dickman, C., *op. cit.* p. 27.

29. SLNA — 20/1815 — 226— Colonial Secretary's Circular to Government Agent 1 October 1830.

ssion,³⁰ Jaffna society had been plagued with a growth of disorder owing to the want of proper regulations for preventing public gambling. No rules had been enacted to replace provisions that had governed gaming earlier. Associated with gambling and often as a consequence, there were regular thefts and constant breaches of the peace in the district. Dyke, the Government Agent, hence welcomed legislation for restricting or prohibiting gambling and urged the authorities to provide it.³¹ The government concurred with this view and decided to draw up an enactment for controlling betting and gaming. After a perusal of the views of Dyke a law was promulgated, and this provided some control over lawlessness arising from gambling in the area,³² while gambling itself was continued often surreptitiously. There was no suitable machinery to enforce laws strictly.

A more important undertaking during the administration of North Sri Lanka by Government Agent Dyke was the improvement made of the area around Anuradhapura in Nuwarakalaviya, which had for long been totally neglected. With the encroachment of the jungle, Anuradhapura had been completely ensconced in vegetation and the place itself was unknown except for what was called then the *Peria Vehare*, or the great temple.³³ In 1838 there were hardly any inhabitants at this one time capital city of Ceylon, but for a few monks and devotees of Buddhism.³⁴ Actually, the population of Anuradhapura referred to the scanty scatterings of people in small hamlets quite away from the main "ruined city".

Therefore, advised by the assistant agent, initially the Government Agent decided to clear for travel the impassable roads in the vicinity of Anuradhapura³⁵ The Government Agent also sought funds and used them for clearing the overgrown jungle that had covered the holy city. Anuradhapura received its supply of water from tanks (reservoirs), and the nearest was a mile away³⁶ Hence, wells were constructed for supplying water to the public officers and the visitors or pilgrims to the sacred town³⁷ and thus some improvement was made. But on the whole Anuradhapura lay neglected.

30. Rasanayagam, C. *op. cit.* p. 45

31. SLNA — 20/797 — 234—Colonial Secretary to Government Agent 30 October 1835; also see Circular to Government Agent from Colonial Secretary, 4 November, 1834.

32. SLNA—6/1237—No. 242 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary 19 December 1835.

33. SLNA — 6/1420 — No. 104, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 6 April 1838.

34. *ibid.*

35. *ibid.* ; also see SLNA 20/1946 — 269—No. 68 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 9 June 1853 The Governor authorises expenditure for clearing jungle. Earlier 80 acres around Anuradhapura were cleared, see Rasanayagam, C., *op. cit.* p. 153

36. SLNA—6/1421—No. 216 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, (no date).

37. *ibid.*

Later, a channel was constructed by Lieutenant Mylius, the assistant agent, and the new settlement at Anuradhapura received its supply of water through this channel leading from the low level sluice of the tank Tisswewa into Ottupalam, where a smaller tank was built around 1838.³⁸ The sluice was repaired again in 1845, and an iron gate was constructed in 1850, thus putting the provision for water supply on a better footing: nevertheless many deficiencies still remained.³⁹

The water sluice also was repaired in 1850 by assistant agent Oswald Brodie, yet it continued to be in a precarious condition and the water itself was unwholesome.⁴⁰ It was no surprise then that in 1854, J. L. Flanderka, the assistant agent, lamented about the lack of good and sufficient water in Anuradhapura and concluded pessimistically: "This will ever stand in the way of Anuradhapura being peopled."⁴¹ The want of water was no doubt a severe deficiency, and remained so even after Government Agent Dyke's term of services ended; in 1870, again, the assistant agent lamented that: "The want of good tank water is much felt"⁴².

During the tenure of Dyke, in Mannar too, in 1859 the drainage and water supply systems were improved.⁴³ As a rule the Government Agent also assisted similar schemes for improvement if they were mooted by the inhabitants. When the people living in the arid island of Mannar collected a part of the cost for restoring a tank for obtaining water from it for domestic use, Dyke granted an equal amount of money for executing and completing the scheme.⁴⁴

Within the Jaffna district, in North Sri Lanka, "daily markets" or fairs were conducted but the condition under which these "bazaars" were run or operated were quite unsatisfactory. Because of their importance in the village economy of the inhabitants and their popularity, Government Agent Dyke was anxious to improve their set-up; but as he lacked the needed funds he sought assistance from the central administration.⁴⁵

The Governor, in pursuance of this request, while on a visit to the North in 1850, arranged to have the principal bazaar of Jaffna town enlarged.⁴⁶ Encouraged by this positive response of the Governor, Dyke continued to

38. Ievers, R. W. *Manual of the North Central Province, Ceylon*, (Colombo, 1899), p. 54,

39. *ibid.* p. 54.

40. SLNA—20/786—No. 281—Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 28 August 1864; also see annexure No. 26—Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 26 May 1864.

41. *ibid.*

42. *ibid.*

43. SLNA—20/1790—281—see No. 219 and 220—Colonial Secretary to Government Agent 24 August 1859 and 29 August 1859; also see No. 208 and 209, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 16 August 1859 and 17 August 1859.

44. *ibid.*

45. SLNA—6/1940B—No. 329, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 28 November 1848.

46. SLNA—6/2070A—No. 60, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 4 April 1850.

improve the rural markets in the North. These daily markets were of vital value in the life of the consumer and the village peasant producer. By 1858, with an expenditure of £100 the Government Agent had provided better facilities at the principal markets of Jaffna, Point Pedro and Valvettiturai; even elsewhere too some improvements had been made.⁴⁷

However, in 1862, Government Agent Dyke's plans for gradually improving the markets in the North met with an obstacle.⁴⁸ The sub-committee of the Legislative Council objected to the provisions that were made for improving these daily market places as they were regarded to be works of an "unusual character."⁴⁹ Hence, the government concluded that it could not finance the execution of such improvements from the general revenue.

But Dyke, notwithstanding this impediment, espoused his cause strongly. He argued that improvements to markets had been effected since 1842, and funds had been disbursed for the purchase of land, erection of buildings and enclosures.

He could, therefore, see no reason to justify the discontinuance of assistance now. Since within the Jaffna peninsula there were no tanks, no public money was spent on repairing irrigation works as in other areas : and instead wells were used for irrigation purposes. This practice was peculiar to Jaffna and the farmers in Jaffna had invested a large capital outlay in building such wells. On the produce that was cultivated with the assistance of well-irrigation, the government levied taxes and the contribution to revenue from this source in one year alone had amounted to £ 4,305. In the forthcoming year, the total income to government expected from this source was around £ 4,600. Thus the total amount of the revenue in Jaffna derived from taxes on agricultural produce was relatively higher than the income derived from the same source elsewhere in the whole island : in 1860 out of £ 68,967 gained through this levy by the government, the Northern province alone had contributed £ 14,626.⁵⁰

Since no money was being spent on providing irrigation facilities to the cultivators of Jaffna, as it was being done in the other areas in Sri Lanka, compensation to them was rightly due in some other manner argued the Government Agent. The daily markets or fairs that were peculiar to the peninsula were very useful to the cultivator as well as to other inhabitants. Hence, an improvement of them, would be a most suitable form of compensation, asserted Dyke, the Government Agent.⁵¹

47. SLNA—20/509—404—Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 8 September 1858, (no number).

48. SLNA—20/1454—421—No. 258, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary—12, August 1862.

49. SLNA—20/1703—423—No. 439, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 16 December 1862.

50. *ibid.*

51. *ibid.*

Moreover, he also believed that the sub-committee of the Legislative Council had misapprehended the real character of these markets. Most of the produce sold in these fairs were grown with the aid of irrigation from wells. Since the government received revenue from levies on the produce and no state assistance had been provided for the construction of wells, it was only correct and fair that the government should help in turn in improving the market places, where village cultivators sold their produce. An improvement of the markets was also necessary for bettering sanitary conditions, added the Government Agent.⁵²

The Government yielded to these importunate claims and announced that it was ready to entertain any project under a law devised by the Government Agent for regulating the maintenance and management of market places. It was also stipulated that there should be provisions, however, for obtaining funds for improving and maintaining them in a fair condition. The markets themselves were to be supervised by the provincial road committee, and those who paid the road commutation tax were to contribute additionally another small sum annually, to defray expenses on maintenance. Since most people living around a market were either buyers or sellers of produce the provision of better markets, it was felt, would benefit almost all.⁵³

But this did not appear to be an acceptable proposal to Dyke. Those in the Jaffna peninsula were already paying in the road tax at a higher rate than others elsewhere in the island calculated according to the rate of wages, that was being taken into account—the equivalent of five days' labour in cash. Accordingly, the government obtained from the inhabitants of Jaffna an additional sum of £ 480 per annum than it would have normally received in any other area. Hence, Dyke requested the Legislative Council to grant unconditionally funds for improving the markets as he did not agree with the suggested provisions of the central government for raising funds.⁵⁴

The Council entertained this request but with officious scrupulousness rather than with a proper understanding of an exceptional situation. The Government Agent's recommendations for erecting permanent buildings and bettering markets were accepted; but on the strict understanding that the revenue derived by the road committees was expended for these sole and specific purposes. The buildings in the markets were to be rented out to vendors for collecting any additional revenue to defray costs.⁵⁵

52. *ibid.*

53. See for these views correspondence in SLNA—20/1454—421 No. 258—Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 12 August 1862 and in SLNA 20/1703—423—No. 439, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 16 December 1862.

54. *ibid.*

55. Rasanayagam, C., *op cit.* p. 17

Government Agent Dyke also was interested in providing social amenities for useful recreation for the people under his sway in the North. Donations were granted by him for founding a library and for its maintenance. In October 1842 the first reading room in Jaffna was established and with regular encouragement and aid this institution soon developed into a public library by 1848.⁵⁶ There was a library which had been established by the Dutch inhabitants in 1837 as the "Jaffna Dutch Library", which was called later as "The Jaffna Pettah Library". By 1859, the Roman Catholic inhabitants also erected another Catholic library within the town.⁵⁷ Dyke encouraged all these enterprises considering them as useful and those that deserved government support. Moreover, Dyke, sponsored provisions for welfare facilities and also endeavoured to improve the living conditions of the people of Jaffna whenever the financial situation and the central administration permitted him to do so. Also, missionaries or other influential parties too pressured the government to adopt various such beneficial measures, and invariably the Government Agent was favourably responsive.

However, as a policy, the general attitude of the state at this time was one of non-intervention or laissez-faire, particularly if any practices carried with them the sancity of social custom or were not contrary to accepted norms among the British. For example, even as late as in 1860, referring to the differing practices of disposing the dead prevalent among the adherents of the various religions, it was declared that there was "no wish...on the part of the government to interfere with native customs."⁵⁸ Nevertheless, because of the representations, made for improving sanitation in 1862, the government envisaged the establishment of general cemeteries, which could be maintained clean and under supervision.⁵⁹

Plagued by the persistent requests of Government Agent Dyke, in 1862, the central government concurred with his wishes for effecting improvements within the town of Jaffna. The town comprised the old Dutch Pettah, the suburb of Karaiyur on the East, inhabited mostly by followers of Roman Catholicism, and the Hindu area in the West, which was separated from the Pettah by an esplanade. In each of these divisions there were about 2,016 ; 4,262 ; and 18,309 inhabitants, respectively. A plan of improvement for the town, that was drawn up jointly by the Provincial Assistant Engineer and the Medical Officer, was forwarded to the government for scrutiny and implementation.⁶⁰

56. Martyn, John, H., *Notes on Jaffna Chronological, Historical and Biographical, Etc-with an appendix.* (Tellipalai, 1923), p. 21 and, pp. 335—336 ; also for evidence on the grant of donations in later years, see SLNA —20/1946—269—No. 31 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 21 March 1853 ; SLNA 20/786—428—No. 203, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary 23 June 1864.

57. Rasanayagam, C. *op. cit.* p. 14

58. SLNA. 20/672—283—No. 42, Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 16 February 1860.

59. SLNA—20/645—425—Colonial Secretary's Circular to Government Agent, 19 May 1862.

60. SLNA —20/1454—421—No. 336 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary—6 October 1862 ; for an account of Jaffna in 1830, see Martyn, John H. *op. cit.* p. 235.

One of the principal features of the plan affected the manufacture of fibre, which was being conducted in certain areas within the town in an unhealthy manner. It was hence considered to be a hazard to the general health of the urban inhabitants. However, as it was an industry which was of significance in the economy of a section of the people; even women and children participated in and benefited from the occupation — the Government Agent did not welcome the prohibition of it.⁶¹ Furthermore, he contended that no definite evidence had been adduced to show that the practice of manufacturing fibre accounted for the recurrence of outbreaks of disease even though the medical authorities had felt so.⁶²

Therefore, Dyke urged that other insanitary elements within the town should be eradicated earlier in the interest of maintaining the place in a healthy way. If the manufacture of fibre had still to be banned he pleaded that compensation should be paid to those who were going to be deprived thereby of their means of livelihood as a result; the Government Agent himself had taken an initiative in commencing the coir-making industry as it was a means which could benefit the poorer folk. In 1865, however, this industry was shifted away from Pasaiyur within the town to an islet in the Jaffna lagoon, Sirutivu, since the medical authorities had concluded more positively that a continuance of this enterprise was inimical to the health of the inhabitants within the town of Jaffna.⁶³

An ordinance was enacted by the Legislative Council in 1865 providing for the creation of municipalities for administering the major towns within the island. Recognising that such an establishment should be useful for maintaining the town of Jaffna in a state of cleanliness and order some of the inhabitants requested the government to create a municipality.⁶⁴ But nothing came out of this venture immediately; and the Government Agent continued to discharge the duties of a municipality: and Government Agent Dyke had demonstrated no doubt during his term of office that he could endeavour to be equal to the responsibility in spite of the other several demands on his time. However, on the whole, a local body was clearly needed because even the most energetic Government Agent could not grapple with the problems of an important and growing town in addition to his other duties. The days of the all-knowing generalist were coming to an end; the days of the specialist had begun.

To the manifold duties allocated to the Government Agent was also added the function of paying out charitable allowances to the destitute and needy by a government Minute of February 1838⁶⁵. Normally, however,

61. *ibid.*

62. *ibid.*

63. *ibid.*

64. SLNA—20/989—293—No. 205, Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 8 October 1866.

65. Dickman, C., *Heads of Minutes, Circular Letters, etc, op. cit. p. 27.*

other such similar social services were often undertaken by the Christian missionaries in Jaffna. As early as in 1834 the American mission had commenced a Jaffna Temperance Society while the Ceylon Temperance Society was inaugurated only in February, 1836;⁶⁶ the endeavour of the American mission seems to have been inspired obviously by the temperance agitation in vogue in the United States.

Significant, and in a sense unique in that period, was the creation of a Friend-in-need Society in Jaffna on March 1841. At a public meeting of the English, Burgher and Tamil inhabitants in Jaffna, presided over by Captain Cochrane, this society was organised⁶⁷; the genesis of this society, nevertheless, lay in the efforts of Government Agent Dyke, who had convened in 1840 a meeting for forming a society for helping the needy people and for establishing a hospital for the poor.⁶⁸ He had even contributed a part of the funds initially while the balance had been collected from the people; the Government Agent functioned later as President of the society.

Captain Cochrane, who was the Commandant of Jaffna in 1841, contributed to the good and charitable work done by this society as a founder of the Friend-in-Need Society hospital.⁶⁹ The Friend-in-Need Society in addition had paid pensions to some of the needy people in Jaffna but in August 1864 owing to a want of funds this practice had to be discontinued.⁷⁰ The society hereafter provided only temporary relief to those who were in dire need, and had suffered from any unforeseen calamity owing to accidents or sickness.

The Jaffna Native Improvement Society too was established in August 1843.⁷¹ A fair number of other charitable and public bodies, meant for providing social services and to spread religion, were also spawned in the Jaffna district — the Jaffna Benevolent Society, the Jaffna Auxilliary Religious Tract Society, the Jaffna Branch Bible Society, the Jaffna Tamil Association and the Mallakam Tamil Association.⁷² Some of these societies sponsored indigenous literary and cultural movements, and in a limited yet noteworthy manner contributed towards the seminal stirrings of incipient cultural nationalism at its origins.

66. Martyn, John H., *op. cit.*, p. 1941.

67. *ibid*

68. Rasanayagam, C. *op. cit.* p. 180.

69. Lewis, J. P. *Tombstones and Monuments in Ceylon*, ((Colombo, 1913), p. 230.

70. SLNA—20/786—428—No. 246, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 4 August 1864'

71. Martyn, John H., *op. cit.*, p. 21

72. Casie Chitty, S., *Ceylon Gazette*, (Cotta, 1834), pp. 47—48.

The Christian missionaries in the North concentrated mainly on education and subtle proselytization, but often snatched at opportunities to engage in social welfare activities which could make their preachings more palatable. In 1861, the Roman Catholics founded the St. Joseph's Orphanage for the benefit of housing and fostering orphan children of "heathen-parentage who provided fertile material for conversion. Similarly, the Holy Family Convent of the Catholic nuns made arrangements for supporting destitute and orphan children in their establishment in 1864.⁷³ While the charitable activity of these missionaries was intrinsically valuable it also gave them an opening for inducing conversions.

But in other districts, like Nuwarakalaviya, there were hardly any means provided or organisations instituted for providing relief; and the outlying area lay neglected. In 1840, the headmen reported about the existence of great distress in Mahapotana *korale*. The assistant agent Lieutenant Mylius, applied for permission to give "advances" to the destitute, since, "the paddy crop failed entirely and the kurakkan crop almost entirely."⁷⁴ Government Agent Dyke, however, declined to sanction the grant of such "advances" remarking that, "failure of crops must be expected occasionally to occur, and the people should seek employment in other villages. and also believed that, "the distress too, was probably exaggerated."⁷⁵ This attitude of the Government Agent was unfortunate indeed.

Again, in 1850 in rice was procurable in any of the villages along the Puttalam road: nothing edible could be obtained except for some pumpkins and kurakkan.⁷⁶ This sort of distressing and pathetic situation seems to have been a common experience in the outlying parts of the province: in areas like Nuwarakalaviya, the Vanni, Mullaitivu and Mannar. The government, however, had apparently looked with askance at this sort of misery and took hardly any steps to alleviate the suffering of the inhabitants in the distant areas of the dry zone during such years.

Unfortunately, the wants of Nuwarakalaviya in this respect seems to have been most ignored and for long. Ievers, one time Assistant and later Government Agent of the area, had observed, "so far as I can gather from the records and the oldest headman, no relief either in work or kind was given during the time of the connection of Nuwarakalaviya with the Northern province"⁷⁷ Within Jaffna alone was relief afforded during periods of distress; and the areas and people beyond it had been overlooked and sadly neglected. Dyke's own effort and enterprise although commendable and useful were, however, limited and woefully inadequate; some attention was paid to Jaffna while other parts were left untended.

73. *ibid.* pp. 218—219

74. Ievers, R. W. *op. cit.* p. 54.

75. *ibid.*

76. *ibid.*

77. *ibid.*