

# **The impact of British colonial rule on Tamil-speaking communities of the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka from 1850 to 1948 AD**

## **Abstract**

This study examined the impacts of the British colonial administration on the Tamil-speaking communities, especially the Tamil and Muslim communities of the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka between 1850 and 1948. The colonial period caused significant transformations in political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects.

The research questions are how did the British colonization affect the Tamil-speaking communities in the Eastern Province, in what ways did the influence of British colonialism differ between the Tamil and Muslim communities in the Eastern province and what major changes occurred in the Tamil-speaking communities of the Eastern province as a result of British colonial rule.

This research is carried out through historical methodology and qualitative approach by using a wide range of British colonial records such as administrative reports, Blue Books, Government Gazettes, Sessional Papers, Census Reports, and Survey Department maps. The Postcolonial Theory of Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of *Hybridity* and *Mimicry* is applied to study, how the Tamil-speaking communities handled colonial powers through partial assimilation and cultural adaptation.

The thesis is organized under four areas i.e geographical and historical context, administrative restructuring, socio-cultural transformation, and economic change. The research traces the evolution of Tamil-speaking settlements and administrative systems from the pre-colonial period through Portuguese and Dutch rule and move on to discuss the British impact. It can be concluded that Tamil-speaking individuals of the area were incorporated into the colonial administration and they adopted colonial modes of conduct and identity in ways that reflect Homi Bhabha's mimicry theory. At the same time, colonial policies affected the traditional caste hierarchies, religious practices, and gender roles particularly through missionary education and women's schooling resulting in hybrid identities and cultural dislocations, aspects which are discussed in the same theory.

Newly introduced Land revenue systems, priority to cash crops in agriculture, and the integration with the colonial export economy severely changed the traditional livelihoods. It can be concluded that the Tamil community was affected more than the Muslim community

due to their internal caste divisions, openness to Western education, and religious flexibility. Compared to them the Muslim community maintained a strong religious and social unity. They overcame the economic challenges through their pre-existing trading networks.

Overall, this research contributes to a deep understanding of the colonial impact on Tamil-speaking communities in the Eastern Province and it helps to explore how the cultural hybridity, mimicry, resistance, and socio-economic adaptation formed postcolonial identity and community structures in Sri Lanka.

**Key words:** British Colonialism, Tamil-Speaking Communities, Eastern Province, Colonial Policies

### **Details**

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**Name of the grantee:** Nilanthini Chenthurran

**University/ HEI where the research is conducted:** University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

**University/HEI where the grantee is affiliated/ employed:** Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

**Official email address:** nilanthinic@esn.ac.lk