

Influence of Selected Westerners, on Sri Lankan Scholars on the Revival of National Identity

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Much pioneering academic, scholarly and specialized studies were done during the hundred years preceding the Independence of Sri Lanka, when the country's interior remained isolated and shrouded in thick jungles, sparsely populated with impoverished villagers surviving with difficulty. Inscriptions, monuments, dagobas, irrigation tanks and canals seen today, lay hidden and buried in wilderness. Exploration, excavation, and restoration activity was initiated and commenced during this period, by the Officers of the British Government. Many Officers of the Technical and Administrative branches of the Government had taken a keen interest in carrying out explorations and excavations, by utilizing their spare time for study and also recording their observations and findings in the diaries kept by them.

In the 'Foreword' to the valuable work "Ancient Irrigation Works of Ceylon" Brohier, in 1933, the then Minister of Agriculture and Lands, D.S. Senanayake, who had ordered this work, says that "we owe indeed a deep depth of gratitude to these officers in the Public Service". He further states, "apart from the published works of these officers, much was learned from the records kept in the Government Departments. Nearly fifty years ago, Bishop R.S. Copleston thanked the then Governor from the presidential chair of the Royal Asiatic Society for making available to the members the diaries of public officers, which he said had proved to be of interest and advantage in their learned deliberations". Scrutiny of the early records of RASSL(Vol. I, II, III) and works by Captain J.W. Bennett (*Ceylon and its Capabilities*-1843), Captain Robert Percival

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(An account of the Island of Ceylon-1803) etc. indicate the valuable contribution by pioneering members of the RASSL and others. It is evident that subsequent scholars, Senarath Paranavithana, Wilhelm Geiger, and Nayanatiloka Mahathera et al used these works for their study.

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