

Extraction of Natural Resources During the Early British Occupation of the Maritime Provinces of Sri Lanka

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Extraction of natural resources from other foreign territories under their control was a primary objective of imperial policies of the nations who were engaged in conquering countries and regions. These resources were utilized for direct consumption of these imperial nations as raw material or consumable items and for the trade, from which they made considerable economic profits. This factor was common for the British who took over the Maritime Provinces of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in the last decade of the 18th century.

This paper presents an in-depth analysis of the effort of the British authorities to explore the possibilities of increasing the extraction of natural resources during the early British occupation of Sri Lanka, i.e. 1796-1805. The natural resources that the British utilized or attempted to utilize during this period in concern could be categorised into two broad categories-traditional and non-traditional natural resources.

Since the beginning of their occupation of the island, the British engaged in extracting traditional or already established forms of natural resources that include cinnamon, pearls, elephants and timber. Some of these items presented problems such as reducing the demand that caused low profit margins during trade as well as dwindling supplies from possible over exploitation. They made efforts to overcome these problems and make them profitable through a variety of ways, including reorganization of extraction and production methods and exploring new markets.

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Meanwhile, there was an effort to explore non-traditional types of natural resources which included novel and lesser known natural resources. They employed a partially systematic (or scientific) methodology to some extent in the identification of possible natural resources and the economic potential of those.

Keywords: environmental history, British administration, natural resources, maritime provinces of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)