

## Colonialism and Education: English Language Education in Sri Lanka

Marie Clare Fernando

Wayamba University of Sri Lanka, Makandura, Gonawila, Sri Lanka

Doi:10.5901/mjss.2012.v3n14p73

### Abstract

*The English Language was introduced to Sri Lanka by the British colonial rulers at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then the existence of the people of Sri Lanka changed significantly together with the values and attitudes towards life. Independence gained in the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not have a speedy recovery on the damages done to the thinking patterns of the people; making the languages people used as a wedge. The much debated 'Sinhala Only' policy in 1952 paved the way for the Sinhala educated mass to come to the administrative strata of the country in the post colonial times. Yet, English was not dethroned; it enjoyed the prestige it used to have. The intension of this paper is to discuss the efforts taken to remove the colonial mind set from the people of Sri Lanka while opening doors for globalization through English Language education. The variety of English called Sri Lankan English emerged clandestinely; even the users of this variety of English were unaware of its existence. The new found identity can be the stepping stone in placing English language at its right place, and acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to compete with the global standards.*

**Keywords:** Colonialism, post colonialism, policy, globalization, Sri Lankan English

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### Introduction

Sri Lanka shares the same mind-set with other nations that were once colonized by the European monarchs. Colonization left an indelible mark in the history of a nation that was once self-sufficient and rich with arts and crafts to induce higher order thinking. Colonialism, according to the Oxford Dictionary of Politics is the policy and practice of a strong power extending its control territorially over a weaker nation of people. It is connected with exploiting the resources of the country in captivity for the betterment of the sovereignty; in the case of Sri Lanka it was for the British sovereignty. Inevitably, it is associated with 'Imperialism' the practice of which one state extends its power and dominion by territorial acquisition and gaining political and economic control (Phillipson, 1992). Sri Lanka was a British Colony from 1802 to 1948. Prior to this, the coastal area of the then 'Ceylon' was under the Portuguese and Dutch for approximately 300 years. This duration was long enough to make an impact on the minds of the people to be obliging and dependant on a nation which exhibited supremacy over every aspect of life; social, cultural, economic, and political-wise. Undoubtedly it created linguistic diversity adding English Language to already existing Tamil and Sinhala languages. These two languages were well established in Sri Lanka. Knowledge was disseminated to the affluent Sinhala youth by the monks in temple schools. During this colonial period, in 1832 Colebrooke Commission appointed to look into socio political matters in this country, recommended wide spreading English Language as the commission has observed the education given by the monks was substandard. That was mainly because Colebrooke