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Dutch and British colonial intervention in Sri Lanka, 1780 - 1815: expansion and reform

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CHAPTER NINE

1805-1815: TOWARDS A NEW ORDER

On 12 January 1805, Thomas Maitland was appointed to succeed Frederick North as governor of Ceylon. Maitland entered office under entirely different circumstances than North had done seven years earlier. Ceylon was now considered a colony of the Crown, obtained for strategic reasons but retained to become profitable for the Crown. Due to the Kandyan wars, the negative trade balance and the disappointing revenue, the colony was in a bad financial state. Indeed, one of the reasons for Dundas to separate the administration of Ceylon from that of the Company was his anticipation that no direct positive balance was to be expected in the colony's first years. However, a war with Kandy had not been anticipated and this caused an enormous increase in expenses which could not really be justified. Moreover, political opinion in England was turning more and more against the great expenditures made in overseas wars.⁵⁰⁴

Thomas Maitland was forty-five when he became governor. He had already pursued quite a career. As a military officer he served in India in the 1780s. After his return to England in 1790, he entered Parliament and found a position on the board of the East India Company. He served again as military officer in 1795, this time on San Domingo, to return to Parliament in 1802.⁵⁰⁵ He had prepared himself for the office of governor of Ceylon by studying North's despatches and discussing with Lord Camden, Hobart's successor, which lines of policy to pursue. Austerity was central to his plans and he was ordered to stick to the recommendations made by Dundas in 1801. The first instructions for Maitland mainly referred to the attitude that was necessary towards Kandy and the reorganization of the army. He brought with him a letter to discharge General Wemyss, who was by and large responsible for the exorbitant expenses of the campaign and had caused a lot of unrest in his conflict with the governor. Maitland prepared plans to curtail expenses in the civil and judicial departments as well.⁵⁰⁶

The period of Maitland's rule is usually considered as stable and conservative, with an authoritarian character. The Sri Lankan journalist and historian H.A.J. Hullugalle called him a "rough old despot" and Colvin R. de Silva stresses that this was a period in which peace and order returned and the colonial government was set on a sound footing again.⁵⁰⁷ At the time, Maitland's authoritarian character was underlined by Rudolf Prediger, the Dutch commissioner sent to Ceylon in 1806 to fetch the

former Dutch employees of the VOC and who described Maitland as vigorous and peremptory.⁵⁰⁸ It is therefore not surprising that Maitland's term of office is contrasted with the chaotic administration of Governor North. The difference in personality between North and Maitland is obvious, but how this was reflected in his policies and the practice of his government is less clear. This chapter discusses in further detail the ups and downs of Maitland's government and places his policies in the perspective of those of his English predecessors and the developments in Dutch times.

9.1 *North's heritage*

Within twenty four hours after his arrival on 19 July 1805, Maitland wrote his first despatch to the Secretary of State in which he portrayed governor North very positively. Indeed, the military force was in a bad state, but North was not to be held responsible for it. He felt that North had done a good job in his administration of the civil department, but criticized the military and judicial establishment and he actually dismissed General Wemyss upon his arrival.

However, by October, Maitland's letters begin to complain of North's management. He particularly disagreed with the legislation regarding all sorts of inland affairs that North had promulgated. Maitland believed that these laws were formulated in a very complicated language, which made it impossible for the natives unfamiliar with British legislation to understand it. In addition, the officials and native servants had not taken enough pains to make sure that the regulations were complied with. In fact, they had operated entirely outside of North's control and had been more occupied in filling their own pockets than in working for the government. The case of Jaffna was brought forward by Maitland as exemplary, but he assured Camden that the problem was endemic. He stated repeatedly that North had exercised no control whatsoever over his civilian corps.⁵⁰⁹

In particular, Maitland disagreed with North's measures regarding the service tenures.⁵¹⁰ Nothing but chaos had come of it. In his later despatches he returned to this subject and reacted vehemently against North's policies. Maitland absolutely rejected the principle of such radical changes, and wrote that all this should have been pursued more gradually.

We find that the Dutch uniformly did claim it [the services], we find that their attention to keep it up was most astonishing, and we find in all their memoirs for the last 40 years, when some, as able men as are to be met with anywhere, administered the Government of this island, particularly Falck and Van de Graaff, that they uniformly considered it as the object, out of

which not suddenly, but by degrees they had the prospect of increasing to an enormous extent, stated by some no less than 2 or 300,000 pounds per year, the revenue of this island. We find that General De Meuron in his very able memoir on this subject entertains a similar view of it, yet in the face of all those grave, and I must state great authorities, Mr North chooses at once to do the whole of a system matured by the wisdom and approved of by the experience of ages, totally away. Most fortunately however, with all his inclination, it is not done away and from the modeliers having still carried it on for their own emolument, I have been enabled in one or two instances already to reap the benefit of the ancient system.⁵¹¹

In practice, apparently not much had come from North's measures, but contrary to his intentions they had created chaos in the interior. Not only had the native headmen managed to gain power even while North intended to curtail their power, but gangs of landless vagrants were roaming the countryside where they continuously harassed people, the inevitable outcome of North's ill-conceived land policies. The case of Jaffna was explained as follows: the most valuable asset consisted in land and in the right of the higher castes to demand servitude from the inferior castes. In exchange for the services of the inferior castes, the higher castes were bound to support and protect them. The recent interventions had thrown the district out of balance:

These circumstances have not only tended to diminish the value of land, but have materially checked the cultivation of the country and gradually destroyed the whole of its police.

The property in land is shaken by its being exposed to constant and vexatious litigation [...]. The servant from these decisions refuses to obey his master; The master consequently refuses to support his servant; The ancient system of subordination is done away; numbers of the lower castes without the means of subsistence are daily turned upon the public and uniformly commit those enormities which for the last two years have disgraced the province of Jaffna, and which demand the immediate and salutary interference of his Majesty's government.⁵¹²

Bands of robbers roamed the province, and gangs from the territories of Kandy abducted women and children. In the case of Jaffna one may wonder whether this explanation of the high crime rate was entirely correct, for it was already a problematic and unsafe region in the Dutch period, and Maitland may have been predisposed to blame North's policies regarding the service tenures.⁵¹³ In any case, it led to a reversal of the service tenures and strict regulations to decrease the crime rate.

In Matara and Galle, the government encountered a similar situation. In the course of 1806, many robberies were reported to have taken place over the course of several years in a row without the government being informed of it. The headmen had not acted either because they were bribed, feared repercussions from gangs of robbers or simply neglected the protection of the inhabitants. In addition it was found that there were

“at present a number of vagrants on this island who having no visible means of obtaining a livelihood, generally support themselves by being guilty of all kinds of petty offences”.⁵¹⁴ It led to new regulations that made the headmen responsible for the peace in their district. It forced them to observe more strictly their duty to protect the inhabitants from gangs and to prevent gangs from operating in their district. If they did not uphold this regulation, the headmen risked removal from office and being brought before the court of justice. In addition the magistrates were allowed to apprehend all vagrants and put them to work repairing public roads or any other public works, until they found another job or could be discharged for good behaviour.

Thus within his first months in office, Maitland had begun not only to reform the military and judicial establishments, but also to work on the inland department. He installed a native police department after the example of the Dutch, with the village *vidānē* (village chief) at the head of the departments. Time and again, he contrasted North's policies with those of the Dutch, who in his view had promoted proper government rather than bad management as North and Andrews had always insisted. The Dutch method of governing now served to legitimate Maitland's new policies. By praising the former Dutch governors, Maitland pointed out that there was no shame in reverting to their policies. Again his arguments fit in well with the models of regime change: the time of restoration and stabilization had begun.

9.2 *The fate of the Dutch who stayed behind*

Despite Maitland's positive assessment of the former Dutch regime, he did his best to make sure that the Dutch “prisoners of war” would finally leave the island. The pensions to which they had a right as prisoners of war and which were established in the capitulation had become too costly. Maitland also seriously mistrusted them and considered it wise to secure their departure from Ceylon as a matter of security: in case of a European attack they were liable to side with the enemy. He also feared the possibility of their colluding with Kandy.⁵¹⁵

In the fall of 1805, he contacted the Batavian government and within six months a commissioner named Rudolf Prediger arrived to pick up these Dutchmen. Due to unexpected problems with the ships and administrative business in Ceylon, it took more than a year before the mission was accomplished. Eventually, only about one third of the Dutch inhabitants, around one thousand people, went to Batavia. The rest stayed on, some because they were too old and infirm to travel, others because of their vested interests on the island and the subcontinent, but in most

cases because their creditors would not let them go until their debts were paid of. These stay-behinds could however no longer claim any pension or subsidy from the British government.⁵¹⁶

Thus, while North had treasured the burghers and their charitable institutions, but scorned the former Dutch government, Maitland acted the other way around. He did not consider the well-being of the Dutch a particular concern for the British government. Those who decided to remain on the island were now responsible for these institutions themselves and these were detached from the government's responsibilities. Therefore certain essential elements of the Dutch establishment now disappeared and the community of Dutch burghers no longer had a privileged position relative to the other inhabitants of the towns and coastal areas.

The position of the Dutch officials and burghers had certainly changed since the British take-over. Prediger wrote to Batavia how impoverished they all were, and the difficulties they had in getting by. Upon his arrival in Ceylon, his house had to be guarded and he had to be protected from the desperate Dutch men and women. The poverty of the Dutch inhabitants also surfaces in the few letters sent to the Netherlands and Batavia that are now found in some of the private collections of the *Nationaal Archief* in The Hague.⁵¹⁷ People complained much about the increase in prices and the decline of the value of their properties. Many earned an income by letting their houses to English officials, but often this was not enough.

Prediger writes how some men could not adapt to their new modest position under the British government and continued to live in a luxurious manner. Only some of them kept a small shop or were engaged in small-scale retail trade along the coast.⁵¹⁸ It seems that within ten years, they lost their position as the major capitalists in the country and were unable to make new investments, but were rather bound by debts.⁵¹⁹ In fact, their decline created opportunities for native entrepreneurs and their whole trade business in the southwest was taken over, most likely by the Karāva headmen who already built up experience in this business and managed to accumulate money while working with the Dutch capitalists in the last decades of the eighteenth century.⁵²⁰ As we shall see below, the rise of the Catholic coastal inhabitants like the Karāvas, was something which Maitland actually encouraged.

Not only had the economic position of the Dutch burghers changed, but so also their status. In a letter to the advocate fiscal and later chief judge Alexander Johnston, the principal Dutch inhabitants complained that the British did not differentiate among the various classes of Dutch, and they instructed him about how they had been divided and employed under the Dutch government. The hierarchy was strongly connected to

the degree of racial mixture, with those descending from European parents in Europe at the top and those descending from the offspring of mixed marriages at the bottom. They complained that whereas in the past the prominent members of the burgher community all had careers on the island with the VOC and enjoyed certain privileges in relation to the taxes and judicature, they were now deprived of such career opportunities. Clearly, the more prominent members were the ones who wrote the statement and were the ones who had lost most of their prestige due as a result of the British take-over. These men wished to be regarded not simply as Dutch burghers but as capable Europeans.⁵²¹

Young men with money and connections like Christiaan van Angelbeek and Hendrik Jan van de Graaff had already left in the course of time after the death of Johan Gerard van Angelbeek in 1799, when they realized there was no future for them on the island.⁵²² Maitland actively diminished the power and influence of the remaining Dutch inhabitants, but in contrast, in the determination of his inland policies he was inspired in many cases by the former practices of the Dutch government.

9.3 *Cutting expenses*

The scheme of removing the Dutch was part of his larger plan of cutting all unnecessary expenses on the island and make the finances healthy again. The military establishment was the next item to which he turned. Although Maitland did not manage to sign a peace treaty with Kandy, he did make sure that no warlike movements were made during his governorship. He cut the expenses in the military department by sending off a large part of the troops to the subcontinent just as he had been instructed. Furthermore, Camden asserted once again that there should be no confusion about Ceylon's military position in Asia, which was no longer to be considered a bulwark. In Camden's words:

It appears to me that the island of Ceylon would be considered chiefly as an outwork to the British Possessions in India, and accordingly the military force should only be estimated in reference to protection from internal attack and from foreign European invasion; but by no means on the principle that he island would be enabled in case of necessity, to furnish material military aid to our continental possessions.⁵²³

In the judicial department, huge expenses were made that needed to be cut down: North had arranged that the officials received a separate salary for their work as judges, even if they already received a proper salary for their permanent job. Maitland also restructured the department; he decreased the provincial courts from six to three, and gave the collectors the function of judge and fiscal, without extra payment. In the major towns, magistrates were appointed to assist the collectors. In so doing, he

managed to cut down the enormous expenses made by the supreme court in the circuits. These changes were only temporary though; later on he was to look into the judicial department more critically and more precisely, and advocated trial by jury instead of by one judge, and strove for a full return of the Dutch *landraden* with native judges. However, the judicial department was first set to work to clear away the arrears, for Maitland found out that many people had had their trial but were kept in prison without proper orders.

In all, Maitland's new police system and his fascination with the court system give the impression that there was a sense of increased insecurity. Plundering gangs and robbers continued to trouble the country side and there was a high rate of capital offences. Of course it is questionable whether this increased insecurity was real or only perceived by the British administrators. It has already been pointed out that in the case of Jaffna there are reasons to believe that the crime rate was already high in the Dutch period. More generally, Dutch proclamations in 1789 and 1790 give the impression that crime was increasing elsewhere on the island: a striking example is the *plakkaat* of 1 December 1789, allowing anyone to shoot robbers and anyone causing trouble on private properties, or on the public roads when not responding to call from the police. Another one is the placard issued for Kattukolom and Tamblegam urging the people who had left their fields due to gangs of *Kafirs* (former African soldiers and slaves) roaming the countryside, to return to their villages.⁵²⁴

Of course these are just some examples and perhaps, a more thorough examination of the Dutch criminal records would better answer our question. This is also what the British did themselves. Alarmed by the high crime rate on the island, the advocate fiscal made a comparison with Dutch times by searching the criminal records and concluded that he "does presume to infer from these premises and from the information he has received from others that the perpetration of crimes and of murder more particularly, is fast increasing".⁵²⁵

The executive council decided to ask the principal Dutch inhabitants whether they were of the same feeling, which they answered positively. Therefore, it seems it was more than perceived unsafety, and the increased crime rate points at social unrest. It seems logical to explain this by the continuous changes of policy and increased colonial intrusion from the time of Van de Graaff on, which must have caused insecurity among the inhabitants. Maitland's obsession with justice is more extensively discussed in Chapter Ten.

In the civil departments, Maitland had a similar approach to cutting expenses. First he discovered that there were a lot of unnecessary expenses made on the spot without any government control. North had certainly failed to increase his personal control over the civil servants. Not long

after his arrival, Maitland had made a tour over the island and came to the conclusion that the civil departments were lacking the necessary zeal and order. He decided to increase the control over this department and issued regulations stating that no extra expenses could be made without approval of the governor and the secretary.⁵²⁶

The agent of Jaffna was punished for his fraud, but this was an exceptional punishment and Maitland decided not to go into further detail in the other cases for fear that this would cause too much unrest. He hoped that the example of Jaffna was enough of a warning against such practices in the future. Essential to Maitland's system was the administrative control over his collectors in the outposts. Monthly reports had to be made, with a statement on the financial accounts on the outposts. This was put in to practice, as the many bundles of correspondence with the outposts from 1805 onwards at the Sri Lanka National archives show. Indeed, the larger part of these letters deal with financial matters and requests to spend money.⁵²⁷

Maitland also abolished the board of revenue, and instead of the six collectors with their agents as assistant, he limited the revenue department to the appointment of eleven collectors who were required to make yearly tours through their district to ensure that they were well informed about what was happening and to report their findings to the government. He raised the pay of these men, but at the same time decided that the collectors would not be remunerated for their tours, but had to pay for it from their own salary. Maitland expected that this would stimulate the efficiency of his collectors and would make them more economical in their spending patterns. Finally, he made the civil servants in England accountable for their behaviour in Ceylon. This meant that if they wished to pursue a further career, civil servants were forced to behave well on the island to avoid public trial in England.⁵²⁸ In contrast to North, who seemed to have only an eye for the southwest, Maitland expanded his attention to the periphery, just as the Dutch had done.

These measures enhanced the power of the governor over the various departments and centralized his power in Colombo, where the governor still functioned with an executive council, which had first been appointed by Dundas to advise the governor on all sorts of matters after ties with Madras and Calcutta were severed. North never really made use of this council. Maitland relied a lot on the advice of the advocate fiscal Alexander Johnstone. Part of their private correspondence can still be consulted in Johnstone's papers. The close cooperation between the two was no secret, and often the executive council consisted only of the governor, Alexander Johnstone and the chief secretary. Therefore, the minutes of this council are very irregular. It certainly was not as important as the political council had been in the days of Dutch rule.⁵²⁹

9.4 *Understanding the island and the Dutch system*

The tight control over the civil and military departments and the increased efficiency was not enough to achieve the profit and order which the British longed for. In line with the scheme that Dundas and Glenbervie had worked out in 1801, Maitland aimed at turning the island into a prosperous rice-producing region. Maitland realized that successful government of the maritime district could only be realized if it was based on a thorough knowledge and understanding of the island's natural and social constitution. Here Maitland again revealed his inclination towards the policies advocated three years earlier by Dundas, Hobart, and Glenbervie. The last had promoted the creation of a society that would concern itself with all sorts of knowledge on the island's nature, culture and history. Maitland did not found such a society, but he did stimulate all efforts in that direction and sent his Johnstone on various tours around the island to look into subjects relating to traditional law, administration of justice, education and agriculture. Maitland based his policies by and large on the results of Johnstone's researches.

Alexander Johnstone was a typical early nineteenth-century Orientalist. He was interested in everything related to the history of the island's society, from indigenous religious texts and common law to Dutch practices and regulations. Copies of many of his manuscripts are found in the collections of the colonial office in Kew and in the Sri Lanka National Archives.⁵³⁰ After his return to London in the 1820s, he was involved in the establishment of the Royal Asiatic Society in Britain, to which he donated his papers, manuscripts and translations.⁵³¹ Johnstone's intensive labour in the gathering information about Ceylon can be compared with that of his contemporary Colin Mackenzie, who undertook a similar task in South India for the government of Madras. The two had met first in the 1770s in India, where Johnstone grew up as a boy, and Mackenzie frequently visited his father's house. According to the historian Nicolas Dirks that is when they became "dearest friends", and they kept in contact from that time forward. In 1807, Johnstone went to India for a short period to compare the situation there with that of Ceylon, and it is likely that the two met again there.⁵³²

Johnstone did not work on his own; he was assisted by Jacob Burnand and Captain Schneider. As we saw earlier, Burnand had been responsible for information regarding the Dutch mode of governing in the maritime provinces and strategies to increase the revenue. When he was still a young recruit under Dutch rule, Captain Schneider had been educated to become a civil engineer. Johnstone and Maitland were impressed with his skills, and appointed him as surveyor.⁵³³ Between 1807 and 1808, he went through all the districts, describing the state of agriculture and the possi-

bilities of improvement.⁵³⁴ He listed per village how many inhabitants it counted, how much land was cultivated, and with what produce.

The image his survey gives of the state of the agriculture in many regions is deplorable. In the Vanni, many of the village water tanks were damaged and the inhabitants, unable to repair them, had moved away from the villages and left the land waste.⁵³⁵ In some parts people were so poor that they lived off what they found in the forest and could not even afford a straw roof. Schneider suggested that the tanks needed to be repaired and seed paddy needed to be given to help put these people back on their feet. A lot of land was also laying waste in the southwest including most of the *ande*-fields, half the produce of which had to be given to government. In a few cases he pointed out that in Dutch times groups of *goyigama-naindes* from specific villages were forced to repair annually to these fields to sow it and that they received half of the crop, while people from other villages had to deliver the oxen to plough the fields and were likewise given a share of the crop. "Was this mode to be introduced again", he wrote, "it would tend to the benefit of government and the *mudaliyārs* as well as the inferior heads of the villages ought to be ordered to take care that all those *ande* fields be sowed."⁵³⁶

More generally, Schneider complained that instead of cultivating the abundant fertile soil, people cut out *chēnas* in which they grew paddy and small grains and root vegetables. In addition, they lived off the coconuts and jack fruit that they grew in their garden. This was unfavourable to government, for the *chēnas* were difficult to tax and the garden trees were not taxed at all. Schneider was of the opinion that a lot more people could be involved in agriculture than were at that moment. The impression one gets from these reports is that the supervision of agriculture was much neglected in the first decade of British rule. The various shifts in land policies will have contributed to the neglect of the fields by the peasants, and the lack of interest of the part of the headmen.⁵³⁷

9.5 *Changes in the department of justice and the native department*

On the basis of the information gathered from these two men and his own work, Johnstone drew up his advice for Maitland. This led to adjustments of policy in the various districts in agricultural policy and the native departments and a new plan for the department of justice. Johnstone had concluded that the provincial courts could best be replaced by the former *landraden*, giving the native elite once again the power to decide in native cases. The Sinhalese common law was too complicated and because it was not written down, except in parts in a lengthy report by Johnstone himself, could best be decided upon by the natives. That is

why the courts took too long to decide, which in turn hampered agriculture. Maitland agreed and sent Johnstone home in 1809 to discuss the matter with the Secretary of State and have a new charter of justice drawn up. This plan was accepted by the Secretary, but withdrawn four months later when a new Secretary of State was appointed and the provincial courts were re-established.⁵³⁸

Through the work of Johnstone, Burnand, and Schneider, Maitland was presented with a picture of the Dutch period of which the most important element was the Dutch attitude towards the native system of agricultural organization in general and service tenures in particular. The Dutch were represented as conservative and thoughtful in their policies. They based their decisions upon a thorough knowledge of society and while they strove for change in the service obligations, they did so only through a very gradual replacement of services for capitation taxes. Whether or not this image of the Dutch policy on the island was correct, it helped to justify Maitland's own careful course.

This knowledge over the inland affairs in all districts helped Maitland understand the power relations among the inhabitants and Johnstone encouraged him to interfere in this. He commenced with a policy of divide and rule in the southwest and Jaffna, where in his view the old elite had gained too much power. The instructions he made for the collectors of Matara and Jaffna bear witness to this policy. Maitland identified those headmen they should engage and those whom they should try to ignore. Both in Jaffna as in Matara, the power of the headmen was strongly related to the religious establishments and Maitland advised his collectors to use their authority regarding the temples and monasteries to single out the less powerful ones.⁵³⁹

But I imagine independent of the benefit you will derive from a strict and vigilant superintendence over the headmen of the cutcherry and the various churches, that there are means in that district of Jaffna, if providently made use of, of very materially strengthening the hands of government which is principally the effect by forming an intimate connexion between the government and one of the two temples at that place.

One of those temples is of late erection having been supported by Vittilingane Chetty the great merchant at Jaffna. Vittalingane chitty whose intrigues and influence with government enabled him render the new temple more powerful and to give it more sway in the country than the old one. From this you will find that an inveterate jealousy exists between the bramies [Brahmins] of the old and the new temple, which it will be your business to keep as much alive as possible, giving however in everything you do a clear and decided preference in point of support to the bramies of the old instead of the new temple; and you will cultivate as much as possible the head bramie whom you will find extremely useful if properly managed.⁵⁴⁰

Johnstone also urged Maitland to bond with the Catholic fishermen on the coast and Catholics in the interior, by treating them as equal to the

Protestants. Much was expected from this group, if they attached themselves well to the British government they could in time counter the Kandyan-Buddhist influence in the interior. At the same time, Maitland meddled in Buddhist affairs and tried to establish a Buddhist council separate from the organization in Kandy, upon which he felt they were too dependent.⁵⁴¹ Thus instead of replacing the *mudaliyārs* as Andrews had done in 1796, Maitland tried to undermine their power by making alliances with other power groups on the island, which would render government less dependent on the *mudaliyārs*. At the same time, he reduced the number of offices for native headmen and replaced those headmen who were not performing well to assert his authority over them. In any case, it did not help Maitland much in achieving his other major goal, namely the improvement of agriculture.

9.6 *Agricultural development*

Frederick North had assumed that restricting the cinnamon production to the four plantations in the environs of Colombo and Negombo would suffice to supply the EIC with the annual demand of 450,000 pounds of cinnamon. The other gardens and plantations were neglected and in the final years of North's administration the full demand was not met. When Maitland came to the island, he concluded that the four plantations could never cover the total demand and he reintroduced the former Dutch laws that protected all cinnamon trees in the interior and allowed the peelers to harvest trees on private lands. In addition, he ordered the headmen of the cinnamon department to plant certain numbers of trees, although this never reached the scale it had in the days of Van de Graaff. It really meant a reversal from the multiform system developed by Van de Graaff to the more rigid system of protective rules and regulations regarding cinnamon tree that had existed prior to his term of office. In the end, about half of the required produce came from the cinnamon plantations, and the rest was taken from the gardens and woods in the interior. After the submission of Kandy, supplies from there once again added to the staple and in the time of Governor Edward Barnes (1820-1822 and 1824-1831), the Kandyans were allowed to pay their land-taxes in cinnamon, and some Kandyan headmen started cinnamon plantations.⁵⁴²

At first, Maitland had set his mind on the agricultural improvement of the island along the lines proposed by Glenbervie. He endeavoured to repair water tanks and irrigation works, though not on the scale Glenbervie had planned, as these were after all expensive undertakings. Maitland expected that a lot could be achieved from active involvement and supervision by the collectors, and supervision of agriculture was one of the rea-

sons why Maitland instructed all collectors to make a yearly tour through their district. Though some complied, judging from their reports, in practice not much came from these tours. According to the historian Kannangara, this was largely related to the fact that the collectors had to pay for their tours themselves.⁵⁴³ Maitland was the first British ruler who paid structural attention to the peripheral districts of the Vanni and the East coast.

9.7 *The periphery*

In 1807, George Turnour was appointed collector of the Vanni with orders to investigate the state of the Vanni and draft a plan for improvement. Maitland had gained knowledge of Thomas Nagel's work in the Vanni under Van de Graaff, and ordered Turnour to use Nagel's reports as a guideline for his own work. Turnour unfortunately could not get hold of a copy of the paper before he left for a tour around the district, which he found in a "most deplorable state of poverty and wretchedness". The situation of the region had declined after the British take-over:

When we consider the care and prudence with which Mr Nagel formed his system of administration and the vigilance and activity with which he attended to its execution we can feel little surprise at any effect that followed its sudden overthrow and the substitution of a fluctuating management, with [...] a rapid succession of collectors, residing at a distance and acting through the delegated agency of people, whose education and habits of life excepting in the instance of my predecessor / equally incapacitated them for the task.⁵⁴⁴

In addition, since 1800 nine-tenths of the cattle had died from a disease that was still virulent in the countryside. The dams of the principal water tanks had been ruined by great storms in 1802, and in 1805 one of the *vanniyaṛs* had rebelled and overran the Vanni resulting in substantial damage to the fields and dams. Finally he mentions the lack of rains in the previous two years.

These repeated and heavy losses involved the inhabitants of the district in one general ruin, and the advances made for their support being feeble, ill-timed and too much under the control of the moodeliars, have tended to incur them with debts without affording them any substantial relief. The want of the superintending and controlling principle of Mr Nagel's system is sufficiently apparent from the preceding statement.⁵⁴⁵

Although Turnour considered Nagel's system of government an expensive one, he did not think Nagel would have made the investments if it was not worth it. Turnour therefore decided to more or less copy Nagel's system by appointing *adigaṛs* to counter the power of the native headmen.

These were to superintend the advances of rice seed made by government to the inhabitants and at the same time they were to prevent embezzlement in assessments of the tithe of the crop. Turnour roughly followed Nagel's administrative organization of the district. The same happened in Batticaloa, where translations of Burnand's extensive memoir were used as a guide.⁵⁴⁶

In 1815, Simon Sawers wrote a short memorandum upon leaving the district after six years of collectorship. In this he paid homage to the heritage of Burnand and wrote that the most useful information on the district was found in Burnand's memorandum and that "the plans therein fully detailed from the cases upon which the system at present followed is founded; and it is my opinion vesting upon six years of experience, that the more strictly Mr Burnand's plans are adhered to the better, so far as they are consistent with the more liberal and equitable spirit of the English government."⁵⁴⁷

Between 1806 and 1811, Maitland managed to double the revenue of the paddy-fields from 128,750 to 255,500 *parrahs* of paddy. This increase was gained by and large in the peripheral districts and considering the fact that the revenue on the fields was fixed at one-tenth, the total production was ten times as much.⁵⁴⁸ Anthony Bertolacci was a civil servant who had come to the island in the days of North and he remained there until 1810. In 1817, he published a book on the financial and commercial state of the island and included his own advice about how to improve the situation. Bertolacci praised Maitland for turning to the peripheral regions and explained the particular efforts that were made there to improve agriculture. For example, he stressed the propriety of the government lending seed corn to the peasants without interest. He also commented on the failure to improve the rice production in the southwestern districts and he used the common argument that the mode of landownership among the Sinhalese hampered all improvement.⁵⁴⁹

In January 1809, Maitland commented on the worrisome situation in the southwest as follows:

This enormous encrease [sic] has taken place in those districts where the government reached the cultivator himself and could see its own measures carried into full effect. In the Manar district a similar progression of improvement is rapidly taking place; but in all the Cingalese [Sinhalese] part of the island, where government is alone able to get at the nature through the medium of a head man, the base is widely different; no such improvement has or is likely to take place, and it is only yesterday that from the activity of one of the sitting magistrates, I discovered, that for years past, the returns made by the modeliaris of the cultivated lands, in the district were just 15 per cent under the real cultivation that existed. Should there be therefore any doubt existing in the minds of government with regard to the policy I have ever stated of diminishing the power of the Modeliaris, I am confident this

statement will completely do it away and I beg leave further to refer on this very important subject to Mr Johnstone.⁵⁵⁰

Maitland however did not intend to make any changes in the mode of land ownership; the experiments of North and Andrews had shown the impropriety of this. It was by his policy of undermining the power of the headmen that he tried to get the people to produce more rice. This change of view is discussed in the next chapter: first the mode of land possession hampered development, later the headmen hampered development. In fact, although he had resumed the service tenures, Maitland had continued North's practice of paying the headmen and *lascorins* in money instead of *accomodessans*. On the possibility of improvement of the agriculture in the southwest, Schneider had advised him the following:

For improving the whole district it would be better to order the mudliars of the corles and pattoes and the other headmen, they having very little to do to take care that all the fields be properly and annually sown, and that all the dams and tanks be kept in good order, and further to cause that all the canals, thro' which the water is led to the fields be digged and deepened. Should any fields be found after issuing of the said order the above mentioned headmen shall not only be therefore responsible but also for the loss sustained by that negligence [...].⁵⁵¹

Maitland did not take up all of Schneider's recommendations. Instead, he decided to increase the power of the paddy tax farmers by having them supervise the sowing and harvesting of the crop. At the same time, he forbade the *chēna* cultivation, to protect the cinnamon, but also because the *chēnas* did not deliver much taxes. In addition, Maitland fell back on some of the Dutch methods to improve the agriculture in these districts, Burnand being his main advisor in this. The collector of Matara was for example instructed to implement as far as possible the regulations that were issued by Burnand in the district of Batticaloa when he was collector of that region in Dutch times. As we saw in Chapter Five, Burnand's main strategy in Batticaloa had been the replacement of the native chiefs by government agents.⁵⁵²

It was also in this period that Maitland developed the view that the island needed to have European entrepreneurs investing their capital in the land. This had been strictly forbidden by Dundas in his instructions of 1801, but Johnstone convinced Maitland of the judiciousness of attracting European planters after his journey to Madras where he had travelled to compare the state of agriculture there with that in Ceylon. He had come to the conclusion that the situation in Ceylon was much different from that in India. On Ceylon there was a great deal of land laying waste which could easily be brought into cultivation by European capitalists, which would stimulate the island's economy. The natives could work for them and in addition labourers could be brought over from India and

China. When Johnstone returned to London with his mission to change the charter of justice, he also proposed this change, which was eventually approved of by the Crown. It was only in the late 1820s though that such capitalists were attracted.⁵⁵³

Thus, whereas in the Vanni, Jaffna, and Batticaloa the Dutch example was followed from Maitland's time onwards, the situation in the southwest was different. Maitland would have preferred to organize the government there on the model of Batticaloa, but he failed to do so because the power of the native headmen was too strong. In general, Maitland's agrarian policies for the southwest differed much from the Dutch example: he did not wish to engage the headmen in the further cultivation of the district, but rather wished to attract Europeans to invest their capital. The former agricultural enterprises like in Diviture were not continued, to the regret of the inhabitants. In 1809, the collector noted that the estate of Diviture was flooded. The inhabitants explained to him that they had cultivated the vast area at the time of Governor Van de Graaff, when various rivulets had been dug to drain the superfluous water from Diviture. They went on to state that "after this place surrendered to the British Crown, the work of this country was neglected and not continued and that therefore by falling of trees in those rivulets caused the course of the water to be stopped and was filled up again".⁵⁵⁴

It seems that the restless beginning of British rule and the attempts of Maitland to undermine the power of the headmen actually had the opposite effect on the agriculture. The reason why Maitland held on so strictly to these measures is related to his ideas about progress and development, which are discussed in the next chapter.

9.8 *The aftermath: accommodation to local conditions*

Maitland's successors, Robert Brownrigg (1811-1820) and Edward Barnes (1820-1822 and 1824-1831), by and large followed his administrative and institutional set-up. In this sense Maitland's historic reputation is appropriate: he placed the government on a regular footing. Of course, considering that he was responsible for the occupation of the Kanyan Kingdom in 1815, Brownrigg was concerned more with the administrative organization of Kandy. Although at first it was agreed that the Kandyan nobles were to rule their provinces independently, Brownrigg changed his mind after a rebellion broke out in 1818. The reorganization of the Kandyan administration was done following the example of the institutional organization of the maritime provinces. Only the judiciary remained set on a separate footing.⁵⁵⁵

The aftermath of Maitland's agricultural development plans for the

southwest was tragic. At first, three years of drought and cattle plague caused a famine and impoverishment in Matara in the years 1812-1813. In addition, there was an outbreak of disease and people were moving away from the district because they were not allowed to cultivate in *chēnas*. Once again, gangs of robbers were making the region unsafe.⁵⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, we find from 1813 and 1817 series of collectors' letters discussing whether a change in the system of taxation could make the people more keen on producing more. The answer was generally that this would not serve as a remedy, that the key was in the supervision of the agriculture and that this required the involvement of native headmen. The British policymakers continued to search for solutions for the bad state of agriculture in structural changes in the mode of land possessions, systems of inheritance of land or taxation, topics that were not discussed in Dutch times.⁵⁵⁷

It is also typical that the local answers to such problems were almost always that the bad state of agriculture in the interior related to the demise in power of the native headmen: they were not overseeing agriculture as they had in the past, supervising the sowing of crops, and the repair of dams and canals, in return for which they had received a small part of the crop of all fields. This traditional system had fallen apart in Maitland's time and according to the collectors this was the cause for the bad state of agriculture. In addition they mention the irrigation works with which the Dutch had started, and which had been taken up by some collectors, but were never finished.⁵⁵⁸ Edward Barnes was the first governor to undertake such activities on a scale comparable to that of the Dutch times, to the cost of the peasants who were forced to work hard on the public works for their service tenures.⁵⁵⁹

Whereas the institutional organization remained largely untouched under Maitland's successors, government policies and practice did change. Under Brownrigg the granary ideal was abandoned and he focused more on the facilitation of the production of cash crops like coffee. Johnstone's mission to Europe in 1809-1810 had resulted in the approval of European private investments and landownership in Ceylon.⁵⁶⁰ However, Ceylon's position within the empire was still not an attractive one. While coffee from the West Indies was imported cheaply to sell on Britain's markets, coffee from Ceylon still paid high import duties. Brownrigg encountered a similar problem with the export of arrack to India, where officials favoured and protected the Indian-made arrack. The situation reminds of the Dutch period, when Ceylonese products were unable to compete with the same products from Java which were protected by the policies of the High Government. Nonetheless Brownrigg's lobbying of members of Parliament proved fruitful in the end, and the high tariffs were rescinded.⁵⁶¹

Barnes continued to improve the circumstances for foreign investment and colonial control by undertaking large infrastructural projects. As with the irrigation project, he made intensive use of the gratuitous services and relied heavily on native headmen to organize this. He justified this practice by arguing that the service was used in the interest of the community only. The increased use of the gratuitous services is something that had already begun in the days of Brownrigg, particularly in relation to his conquest of Kandy. Thus, we find Brownrigg ordering lists to be made of services due to government per community or caste, something that reminds of the policies of Van de Graaff.⁵⁶² In Kandy, Barnes allowed people to pay their taxes and remunerate their services by producing cinnamon for the government in their gardens. It was a situation not unlike the system of forced cultivation of cinnamon under Van de Graaff. A major difference was that the services were not openly used for private matters, nor were the European investors supposed to rely on the services for labour on the plantations as had been the case in Dutch times. Finances improved in the course of the 1820s, thanks to the revenue from Kandy and the increasing income from coffee production, which eventually became the most important of the island's products.⁵⁶³ Although cinnamon still accounted for a regular profit, the market was taken over by cassia, a type of cinnamon of lesser quality found elsewhere.⁵⁶⁴ Another noteworthy development in this period was the rapid growth in population, which could probably be related to the inoculation campaigns against smallpox.

Although Barnes did not refer as much to the Dutch period as Maitland had done, the period of his government probably compares best with that of Van de Graaff. Maitland's strict attitude regarding the native headmen was abandoned, and Barnes made it an important point to treat the headmen with respect and to make the most of them.⁵⁶⁵ The hostile attitude towards the headmen and the rigid policies of Maitland's tenure were over and the policies of the British government accommodated to the local circumstances.

But changes were once again in the wind, when in 1823 it was announced that an investigation into the government and revenue of the island was to be initiated from London. The committee came in 1828, and it was once again decided to change the institutional basis of the government and the basic policies.⁵⁶⁶ As shall be seen in the next chapter, metropolitan involvement in affairs on Ceylon was far more intense in British times than it had ever been under Dutch rule either on Ceylon or on Java, which remained a Dutch possession.

9.9 Conclusion

North had left behind a chaotic and expensive administration and a countryside in very bad condition. The interior had become insecure due to his new land policies. It is therefore not surprising that Maitland put most of his energy into the reorganization of the administration, which he totally revamped, revoking many of his predecessor's inland policies in the process. This was all done to establish peace and order and to cut expenses. It is also in that context that Maitland decided to have the remaining Dutch inhabitants expelled from the island. Those who decided to remain could not apply for any government assistance. Maitland was also the first to put real effort in getting to know the island. He sent his closest employee, Alexander Johnstone, on a tour around the island, to provide him with all sorts of advice about the management of the colony. It was on the basis of this information that Maitland developed his strategy of divide and rule in order to contain the power of the native headmen.

During Maitland's regime the granary ideal formulated by Dundas in 1801 continued to be the basis of his inland policies. Whereas Maitland was seemingly successful in the peripheral districts, he could not get grip on the agricultural production in the southwest, which frustrated him much. He tried to change this by undermining the power of the native headmen, but this only had the opposite effects. In contrast to the Dutch development schemes, Maitland did not actively pursue the involvement of the native headmen. This did not harm them significantly because they had already grown into a strong, independent landowning class, thanks in part, perhaps, to North's chaotic administration and his new land policies. The real growth of their power strongly related to the Dutch policies in the second half of the eighteenth century, for it was at this time that their power was substantially enhanced and their possessions and capital increased. In comparison to the Dutch times, the relationship between the *mudaliyārs* and the colonial government was of a different nature in Maitland's period. They were set further apart from the colonial officials, because they did not jointly venture in businesses on the island. The absence of any interest in indigenous religion and education on the part of the British may have contributed to the cultural divide between the headmen and the Europeans.

The Dutch burgher community probably lost the most from the British take-over. They never became administrative middlemen, as North had wanted them to be. Instead, they lost their privileged position vis-à-vis the government and thereby lost the attraction as trading partners. In time, their local trading ventures were taken over by Karāva entrepreneurs. Clearly, as migrants the Dutch inhabitants had never fully fused with the native society, despite the intermarriages. Therefore, they had

never become an indispensable factor in the government of the interior and they possessed no autonomous power over the inhabitants comparable to that of the mudaliyars. In practice, they formed a temporary link between the British government and the native society because of their local knowledge, but not because of their power over the inhabitants.

Maitland paid little attention to the growth of cash crops, but focused on the rice production. In this he was however not very successful, which can be attributed partly to his hostile attitude to the headmen. In the end he did open the way for European investors to start plantations on the island. This only really took off in the 1820, when London lifted the high tariffs on coffee from outside the West Indies. Maitland did not involve the native headmen in this type of agricultural enterprise, even in the case of the cultivation of cinnamon. The energy and capital put into the development of coffee, indigo, cinnamon, and *kiate* (teak) plantations in the last decades of the eighteenth century was lost because these products had been purchased only by the Dutch government. As before only the traditional indigenous crops like coconut and areca did well on the open market.

In hindsight, the transitional period followed the trajectory suggested by the regime change model: after a turbulent period and various changes of authority, the colonial government searched for stabilization. Although Maitland proclaimed a return to former practice, he actually created a new regime. In contrast to what is usually assumed, Maitland did not “just” revert to the Dutch system, but picked out those elements which he thought suitable. His choices were based on personal experience on the island and the advice of Burnand and Johnstone, but also on British ideas of proper rule developed in London and India. These ideas are explained in the next chapter. Although the administrative organization remained by and large as Maitland left it, the real accommodation of the colonial policy to local circumstances only started after his departure, but again this was only short-lived.