

# The Ceylon Civil Service : A Study of Recruitment Policies, 1880-1920.

by P. T. M. FERNANDO

The term "Civil Service", as used in Ceylon, refers to the higher administration and excludes clerical, technical and other subordinate functionaries of government. Throughout the British period, government service was considered by Ceylonese as employment *par excellence*, and the Civil Servant was the most prestigious official of them all. In the early years of the 19th century,<sup>1</sup> entry to the Civil Service was by passing an examination similar to that required to enter Haileybury, the training college for Writers to the Indian Civil Service. In 1856 this system of selection was superseded by a competitive examination held by the Civil Service Commissioners, for candidates nominated by the Secretary of State. The Ceylon Governor's nominees were either not required to pass an examination at all, or at most, had to face a non-competitive examination on "general attainments". The standard of this examination was lower than the one held in England and candidates selected abroad came to be considered superior to the local recruits. Partly as a corrective to this, it was decided, in 1870, to hold the Civil Service examination simultaneously in England and in Ceylon, with the same papers for all candidates.<sup>2</sup> In 1880 however, there was a radical change in procedure. The examination held in Ceylon was abolished, and all candidates were thereafter required to compete in England. This practically closed the doors to Ceylonese aspirations for over a decade.<sup>3</sup>

The open competitive examination held by the English Civil Service Commissioners operated to the disadvantage of Ceylon candidates. As early as 1883, a select committee of the Legislative Council made the following observation:

The exclusion of natives from the Ceylon Civil Service proper had been unintentionally but most thoroughly effected by throwing open the Cadetships to competition by public examination in England. How is it possible for a native of one of the ancient races in Ceylon, speaking English with the same difficulty

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1 For details on the Civil Service of the 19th century see J. R. Toussaint, *Annals of the Ceylon Civil Service*, Colombo, 1935; Lennox A. Mills, *Ceylon under British Rule*, London, 1933, chapter VI; P. D. Kannangara, *The History of the Ceylon Civil Service, 1802-1833*, Dehiwela, 1966.

2 This provision for examining candidates in Ceylon was, in fact, acted upon only once during the decade 1870 - 80. See W. M. D. D. Andradi, *English educated Ceylonese in the official life of Ceylon from 1865 - 1883*, London Ph. D. Thesis, 1967, p. 81.

3 In 1882 a combined competitive examination was instituted for recruitment to the services of Ceylon, Hong Kong, Straits Settlements and later the Federated Malay States. In 1896 this examination was combined with that for the Home and Indian Civil Service, an arrangement which continued until 1932. See Charles Jeffries, *The Colonial Empire and its Civil Service*, Cambridge, 1938, p. 8.

that an ordinary Englishman experiences in speaking an Oriental language, to compete successfully with Englishmen bred, up from their childhood, in the familiar use of English, and thoroughly grounded from their youth in the studies which are the subjects of examination? We might as well expect the average young Englishman to take the first place in a competitive examination with the Chinese for a place in the Chinese Civil Service.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to note that the only Ceylonese to enter the Civil Service in the 19th century, in open competition, was Ponnambalam Arunachalam, and he was a graduate of Cambridge. Recruitment by open competition meant in effect that Ceylonese who aspired to a Civil Service career had to be those educated in British universities, and such persons were few in number at the turn of this century. This was a fundamental obstacle to increasing the native in-take of Civil Servants, for as Governor Longden told the Secretary of State, "it is impossible to maintain the principle of admission by competitive examination and at the same time admit into the Service those who do not succeed at the examination".<sup>5</sup>

The pressure from Western educated Ceylonese for better employment was clearly felt as early as the 1880s. And appointments in the Civil Service were among those that were coveted by the new elite. Ramanathan pointed out in 1883:

Up to the dawn of this period the ambition of young men was to join the clerical service: their qualifications did not fit them for any other employment. They were content to enter it on a monthly salary of Rs. 20 or Rs. 30, and to work their way up slowly, but by no means surely, to the few prizes of that service, which were not more than half a dozen, carrying salaries each of about Rs. 200 a month. This phlegmatic contentment, however, is no longer characteristic of our English-speaking youths, for during the last five and twenty years Ceylon has been undergoing vast changes.<sup>6</sup>

Ramanathan went on to emphasize that there were "scattered all over the island a large number of well educated youths, despising the dry drudgery of the desk and yearning for careers of greater usefulness and dignity". The creation of a Lower Division of the Civil Service was a consequence of this pressure from the gradually increasing westernised element, for more responsible and more remunerative employment.

### THE SUBORDINATE DIVISION OF THE CIVIL SERVICE

In his dissent to the 1883 Retrenchment Committee Report,<sup>7</sup> Ramanathan argued that as a consequence of the spread of western education, the Government needed to alter its attitude towards employment of Ceylonese. "The present system assumes that every Ceylonese shall enter Government service only by

4 C. O. 54/546, Longden to Derby, No. 155, 14 April 1883, enclosure.

5 *Idem*.

6 Dissent of P. Ramanathan, 3 March 1883, enclosure in C. O. 54/546, Longden to Derby No. 158, 14 April 1883. C. P. Lucas of the Colonial Office was impressed and called it "an able paper". See minute of 25 May 1883.

7 *Idem*

beginning at the lowest rung of the official ladder'. The 'most fortunate of intellectual men' entered the Civil Service, but the prospects of the large bulk of western educated Ceylonese were limited to clerical and other subordinate employment. Ramanathan emphasised the existence of an 'intermediate class' of Ceylonese who, though not qualified to be Civil Servants, had a legitimate claim to more responsible employment than the clerical service. He suggested the creation of a Service to occupy an intermediate position between the Civil and the Clerical Services, and called it 'for want of a better name' the Subordinate Service of Ceylon. It is ironic that the term 'subordinate', so greatly resented later, was first suggested by a leading Ceylonese. This idea of giving local inhabitants responsible employment found favour with the Retrenchment Committee of 1883 mainly on grounds of economy.<sup>8</sup> The Committee reported that 'if Ceylon is to be administered on a more economical basis it can only be by the more extended employment of natives'. It was only in 1891, however, that this new Service for the Ceylonese came into operation. Entrance to the Subordinate or Lower Division of the Civil Service was by examination and was limited to candidates nominated by the Governor. The Governor also had the power of occasionally appointing to the Lower Division, without examination, older men possessing special aptitude for administration.<sup>9</sup>

The Subordinate Division was established by Sir Arthur Gordon's administration. Sir Arthur Havelock (who succeeded Gordon as Governor) was sceptical about the success of the scheme. He wrote 'I have little faith that the scheme will for any length of time continue to fulfil one of its objects, namely, to satisfy the aspirations of the Ceylonese'.<sup>10</sup> It was an accurate prophecy, for West Ridgeway noted six years later that 'It has failed to attract the men whom we would wish to have; and the question of the employment of Ceylonese is in much the same position as it was when Sir Arthur Gordon wrote his despatch of 7th May 1890'.<sup>11</sup> Whereas in 1868 there were ten Ceylonese in the Civil Service, in 1890 there were only three who entered the Service as Cadets, and three others appointed by the Governor. In 1896, despite these reforms, there were only 13 Ceylonese, including only 4 Sinhalese and 3 Tamils. West Ridgeway observed that 'the Subordinate Civil Service cannot therefore, after five years of its existence, be considered a success; and I think that one of the reasons must be the very limited scope and narrow career which it offers'. The Subordinate Service could not have satisfied elite ambitions if they were to be given only the inferior administrative posts. What was necessary was a device to make the whole spectrum of Civil Service appointments accessible to local candidates. West Ridgeway suggested adopting the Indian pattern of dividing the Civil Service into two branches, those recruited in England and those recruited in Ceylon, the rate of pay to depend on the place of recruitment and not on the nationality.

8 C. O. 51/546, Longden to Derby, No. 155, 14 April 1883, enclosure.

9 J. R. Toussaint, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

10 S. P. XXVII (1897), *Papers relating to the Re-classification of the Ceylon Civil Service* minute by Sir J. West Ridgeway, p. 3.

11 *Idem*.

of the recruit. Those recruited in Ceylon were to be given salaries one-third less than the salaries given to those selected in England. West Ridgeway did not think that this distinction would be resented, since it was to be accompanied by the greater employment of Ceylonese. Of a Civil Service of 70 members, he envisaged having 29 local recruits, and they were to be permitted to rise to every class except class I which consisted of the highest executive appointments. This scheme was endorsed by Ramanathan,<sup>12</sup> who was then a member of the Executive Council, as acting Attorney General. The Secretary of State, however, turned down the recommended scheme, with the comment: "I cannot but believe that your proposal to pay local men, smaller salaries simply on the ground that they are local men, and not because they have not passed a higher examination test, will tend to cause friction and distrust",<sup>13</sup> It would be wrong to conclude that the Colonial Office was more sensitive to the ambitions of westernized Ceylonese than was the Governor. On the contrary, the Secretary of State felt that the Subordinate Service was quite satisfactory, that it had not been given a fair trial, and besides, that 29 Ceylonese to 41 recruits from England was far too high a proportion in favour of the former. "My view" he said, "is that the line between the Lower and the Higher Division should be much more strictly drawn, that there should be less interchange of appointments. . . ." <sup>14</sup> It was clear that the Colonial Office did not accept the assumption that the Subordinate Division was not satisfying the Ceylonese demand for better employment.

West Ridgeway, however, was aware that the connotations of inferiority associated with the Subordinate Division were inimical to satisfying the aspirations of educated Ceylonese. He argued with the Colonial Office, that 'there should cease to be two Civil Services, - the one high, the other low'. 'The badge of inferiority thus affixed to the Ceylonese' he maintained 'is far more distasteful than any difference of pay, which can be defended reasonably and without any imputation of social or official inferiority'.<sup>15</sup> But the Colonial Office was unmoved. In 1907 a superficial concession to local sentiment was granted by changing the title of the Subordinate Division to 'Local Division of the Civil Service'. It was hoped that this change would 'effect an improvement in the position of locally recruited officers, by removing all suggestions of inferiority in their relation to those members of the Civil Service who are recruited in England'.<sup>16</sup> The more important reform introduced by the McCallum administration was the increase in the number of posts open to locally recruited men. Officers of the Local Division had, hitherto, little hope of promotion beyond class III of the Civil Service. McCallum gave them access to one post in Class I and two in Class II, and also increased the cadre of the Local Division from 13 to 24. Nomination to the Local Division was limited to candidates who had

12 S. P. XXVII (1897), p. 7.

13 *Ibid.*, Chamberlain to West Ridgeway, 19 February 1897.

14 *Idem.*

15 S. P. XXVII (1897), West Ridgeway to Chamberlain, No. 157, 12 May 1897.

16 S. P. I (1909), *Despatches relating to the consolidation of the minutes on the Civil Service*, McCallum to Earl of Elgin & Kincardine, 23 Nov. 1907

passed the Cambridge Senior, London Matriculation or other public examination of equal standing. Those nominated had to sit for a competitive examination conducted by the Civil Service Commissioners of Britain.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that although the government was keen on increasing native recruitment, they were equally keen on maintaining the standards and reputation of the Civil Service in Ceylon.<sup>18</sup> Yet, the entrance requirements for the Local Division remained inferior to those required for the examination held in England, where competition was usually confined to graduates of British Universities. The selection of the Cambridge Senior and London Matriculation as the norm for the Local Division candidates show that higher education in Ceylon had yet to surpass these limited academic boundaries.

These reforms did have some success in increasing the recruitment of Ceylonese. In 1910 the Local Division had 10 Ceylonese out of 15, and six other Ceylonese held Civil Service posts temporarily. By 1920, the proportion of Ceylonese had increased to 23 out of 26 appointments.<sup>19</sup> Despite its limited success the Local Division had defects inherent in its structure which made change inevitable. West Ridgeway's warnings were proving prophetic; the western educated Ceylonese were clearly dissatisfied with the *status quo*.

One conspicuous disadvantage of the Local Division was its poor prospects for promotion, which meant that although more Ceylonese were recruited, they were mainly confined to the lower rungs of the service. Even after the Civil Service reforms of 1912, the Local Division was entitled to only three posts in class I and II together.<sup>20</sup> The following Table shows the number of posts held by recruits to the Local Division in relation to the total number of appointments in each class of the Civil Service.

17 S. P. VI (1911), *Despatches relating to the examination of candidates for admission to the Local Division of the Civil Service*, McCallum to Harcourt, 11 Feb. 1911. The following were the subjects on which candidates were examined:

<i>Obligatory Subjects</i>	<i>Voluntary Subjects</i> (two to be selected)
English	Mathematics II or Geography & History
Mathematics I	Chemistry or Physics
Latin	Sinhalese or Tamil
Book Keeping and Accountancy	

18 McCallum had recommended excluding Law as a subject on the grounds that "it affords too much scope to the native ability to memorise . . ." He also opposed a proposal by the Civil Service Commissioners to assimilate the Local Division examination with an examination for certain junior appointments in the Home Service. "Our examination should be of such a character that we may secure our most intelligent aspirants for Government employment and not crammed memorising pedants". C. O. 54/735, McCallum to Crewe, No. 477, 9 Aug. 1910.

19 See *Ceylon Civil Lists*, 1910 and 1920.

20 C. O. 54/761, Stubbs to Harcourt, No. 145, 2 March 1913.

## THE PROPORTION OF LOCAL DIVISION APPOINTMENTS IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

	1910		1920	
	Number of Appointments	Number held by Local Division	Number of Appointments	Number held by Local Division
Staff Appointments	3	0	3	0
Class I	17	0	21	2
Class II	20	2	21	1
Class III	22	2	25	4
Class IV	31	10	37	15
Cadets	11	1	9	4

*Source: Ceylon Civil Lists, 1910 and 1920*

Furthermore, a Local Division intended mainly for Ceylonese had the effect of making the Civil Service proper a virtual monopoly of the Europeans. Thus, even as late as 1920, there were only 3 Ceylonese to 87 Europeans in the Civil Service by open competition.<sup>21</sup> And it appears that the government was not keen to have Ceylonese enter by open competition in England, for as in the case of Arunachalam,<sup>22</sup> such recruits could prove embarrassing to the government. Thus, in reply to a query from the Colonial Office as to the number of cadets needed by Ceylon in 1914, Stubbs, the Colonial Secretary, replied: "If the first six are Europeans and the next men are natives, only six cadets should be appointed. Numbers seven, eight and nine may be appointed if they are Europeans".<sup>23</sup> The message was clear, and J. Robinson of the Colonial Office minuted: "This means that Ceylon doesn't want more than six cadets if by that means they can avoid natives, but that if there are three natives in the first six they will take 3 more white men".<sup>24</sup>

### THE CEYLONESE REACTION

The poor representation of Ceylonese in the Civil Service and in other branches of the higher administration became increasingly irritating to the growing body of western educated persons. By the turn of this century discontent had developed into protest. In 1910, a Sinhalese barrister complained to the Colonial Office of the absence of adequate avenues for satisfying "honourable ambition."<sup>25</sup> The need for better employment for educated Ceylonese was also the theme of a memorial sent to the Secretary of State by the Ceylon Reform League in 1917.<sup>26</sup> The local press, likewise, criticized the tendency to exclude natives of the colony from "the higher posts in the public service" and accused the government of racial discrimination.<sup>27</sup> The practice of overlooking the

21 *Ceylon Civil Lists*, 1920.

22 See reference to Arunachalam later in the paper.

23 C. O. 54/774, Stubbs to Robinson, Telegram, 1 October 1914.

24 C. O. 54/755, J. Robinson's minute, 1 October 1914.

25 C. O. 54/740, J. W. de Silva to Crewe, 14 June 1910.

26 C. O. 54/805, W. A. de Silva to H. W. Long, 20 June 1917.  
enclosure in Anderson to Long, No. 399, 4 July 1917.

27 *Ceylon Independent*, 30th August 1911, editorial; 19 April 1913, editorial.  
*Ceylonese*, 29 January 1914, editorial.

claims to promotion of able Ceylonese officers only reinforced suspicion of discrimination. The career of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, for example, did much to undermine confidence in the government's impartiality. A graduate of Christ's College, Cambridge, and a Barrister-at-Law of Lincoln's Inn, Arunachalam was selected in 1875 for the Ceylon Civil Service, in open competition. But throughout his career he was never appointed to even an Assistant Agency,<sup>28</sup> although his capacity and loyalty were beyond question.<sup>29</sup> At the end of his career when Arunachalam was heir-apparent to a Government Agency, he was given the rather innocuous post of Registrar General. The government preferred to up-grade the post of Registrar General to Class I of the Service and retain Arunachalam in this relatively powerless position, rather than offer him an Agency to which he had strong claims by virtue of seniority. In 1910, when Arunachalam was Registrar General, all the Government Agents were his juniors.<sup>30</sup> J. G. Fraser, who was appointed, in 1912, to the most important of these, that of the Western Province, was twelve years junior to Arunachalam.<sup>31</sup> A local journal observed, "It is widely believed and we are inclined to believe ourselves that no Government Agency would be given to a Ceylonese Civil Servant. A policy much narrower than that of India appears to be at work here".<sup>32</sup> Discrimination against Arunachalam was so conspicuous that an official of the Colonial Office minuted: "There can be no reasonable doubt that a man of Mr. Arunachalam's ability would, if he had been a European, have got a Government Agency as a matter of course".<sup>33</sup> Instances such as this stimulated the discontent of the new elite. The *Daily News* complained that "Ceylonese of undoubted merit stagnate in subordinate ranks while their inferiors in point of service or degree of ability are hoisted above their head simply because they are men clothed in fairer skin".<sup>34</sup> A correspondent called upon the public "to fight for and remove the unjust and immoral colour-bar . . . ."<sup>35</sup>

This growing dissatisfaction led to a motion in the Legislative Council by Dr. Marcus Fernando calling for an inquiry in to the means of increasing the proportion of Ceylonese in the higher administration. This resolution had the support of Ramanathan, who strongly condemned the exclusion of Ceylonese from positions of power and responsibility.<sup>36</sup> The motion, although withdrawn at the request of the government compelled the authorities to recognise existing

28 The "revenue" posts of Government Agent and Assistant Government Agent were highly coveted in the Service.

29 Arunachalam was considered a very able officer and impressed both the Ceylon Government and the Colonial Office with his Census Report of 1901. McCallum acknowledged that Arunachalam "has performed uniformly good service". C. O. 54/750, McCallum to Harcourt, Confidential, 28 Jan. 1912.

30 *Ceylon Civil List*, 1910.

31 C. O. 54/750, McCallum to Harcourt, Confidential, 28 Jan. 1912.

32 *Ceylon National Review*, No. 3, Jan. 1907, p. 362.

33 C. O. 54/740, R. E. Stubbs' minute, 21 April 1910.

34 *Daily News*, 22 Oct. 1919, letter by "Justice".

35 *Ibid.*, 20 Jan 1919, letter by "Justice".

36 *Ceylon Hansard*, 1917, 8 Aug. 1917.

discontent and led to the appointment of two commissions of inquiry.<sup>37</sup> The founding of the Ceylon National Congress in 1919 also helped the Ceylonese agitation for better employment, because the demand for the progressive Ceylonization of the higher administration became an integral facet of the broader political agitation.<sup>38</sup>

### THE UNIFIED CIVIL SERVICE

As a response to growing discontent Governor Anderson appointed, in January 1918, a commission to advise on possible steps "to facilitate the employment of natives of Ceylon in the higher ranks of the Public Service".<sup>39</sup> The Commissioners made many important recommendations. They proposed "abolishing the Local Division, with its claims and limitations, and having only one undifferentiated Civil Service, in which every man will reach the level to which his character and abilities will raise him, without regard to the nature of the examination by which he entered the Service". The Commissioners went even further. They argued that "the time has come when it is desirable to lay down that a certain proportion of the members of the Civil Service should be natives of Ceylon". But their proposals were not as radical as may appear, for they only recommended that one-third of the posts be held by Ceylonese, with the proviso that the proportion be "gradually raised to one-half". The Commissioners were aware of the problem of examination standards that this proposal involved. They maintained that "if there is to be one undifferentiated Civil Service, we regard it as essential that the men selected locally should be of a mental calibre approximating to that of the recruits selected in England... it is safe to say that, with rare exceptions, this is not the case at present".<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, they recommended that the local examination for the selection of Ceylonese, must be of a higher standard than the present Local Division examination. The Ceylonese recruits were to be chosen primarily by the examination held in England. However, if the required number was not obtained, a local examination was to be held to fill the remaining vacancies.

The recommendations of the committee were received favourably by the Ceylon Government; but there were practical difficulties that had to be seen to at the outset. One of them was that if a scheme for proportional representation between Europeans and Ceylonese was to be operative, it was necessary to exclude Indians from entering the Ceylon Civil Service.<sup>41</sup> Before 1909, the Ceylon Civil Service was open to all natural born British subjects. In that year consequent to representations made by McCallum, the Service was restricted to British subjects (a) of pure European or Asiatic descent on both sides,

37 S. P. I (1919), *Further Employment of Ceylonese in the Public Service*.  
S. P. X (1922), *Further Employment of Ceylonese in the Public Service*.

38 For example, P. Arunachalam, *Ceylon National Congress: Presidential Address, 1919*, Colombo, 1919.

39 S. P. I (1919), *Further Employment of Ceylonese in the Public Service*.

40 *Ibid.* p. 4

41 C. O. 54/819, Manning to Milner, Secret, 5 Apr. 1919.

or (b) of mixed European or Asiatic descent.<sup>42</sup> Manning now strongly recommended to the Colonial Office that Indians be altogether excluded from the Ceylon Civil Service.<sup>43</sup> He argued that the five Indians in the Service at the time did not command the respect of the local population. Gollan, the Attorney General, told Cowell of the Colonial Office that "the Indians now in the Service are, without exception, inefficient and the Ceylonese themselves recognise this".<sup>44</sup> The Secretary of State granted this request for the exclusion of Indians, despite protests from the India Office,<sup>45</sup> and the Ceylon Civil Service came to be limited to "natural born British subjects of European or Ceylonese descent".

The problem of examination proved equally vexing. The Colonial Office was divided on the proposal to hold local examinations if a sufficient number of Ceylonese recruits were not obtained from England. Grindle was against the idea and considered local examinations "a pet scheme of all those who want to substitute baboos for Europeans".<sup>46</sup> Fiddes disagreed with Grindle,<sup>47</sup> and was prone to view a local examination with sympathy. But Amery, the Under Secretary of State, was not a believer in the efficacy of examinations. He minuted: "I would have the selection in Ceylon not by competitive exam but by qualifying exam or educational standard + *personal selection*. Pure competitive exams are bad enough as a test for Europeans, but ridiculous for Asiatics as a test of administrative honesty and capacity".<sup>48</sup> He did not explain how Asiatics differed from Europeans in this respect but his ideas prevailed as future events were to show.

In November 1919, Manning wrote to the Secretary of State emphasizing the need to bring the Service up to full strength and recommended the appointment of 21 Cadets to be selected during the next two years by examination in England. In accordance with the agreed formula, he recommended that 7 of the 21 Cadets be Ceylonese.<sup>49</sup> Manning pointed out that the Temporary (Reconstruction Regulations for the selection of Eastern Cadets in the Colonial Service required candidates to have served in His Majesty's Forces. This would have excluded some of the eligible Ceylonese candidates studying in British Universities and Manning pleaded that, if otherwise suitable, they be given special consideration. The Governor, no doubt, wished to recruit at least some Ceylonese with University training in England. Milner, the Secretary of State, took a different view. He

42 C. O. 54/800, Regulations for Eastern Cadetships.

43 C. O. 54/822, Manning to Milner, Secret, 18 Nov. 1919.

44 C. O. 54/837, H. R. Cowell's minute, 28 June 1920.

45 *Ibid.*, Under Secretary of State for India to Under Secretary, Colonial Office, 13 May 1920.

46 C. O. 54/819, G. Grindle's minute, 18 June 1919.

47 *Ibid.*, G. Fiddes' minute, 20 June 1919.

48 *Ibid.*, Amery's minute, 21 June 1919.

49 S. P. XVII (1920), *Despatches relating to the recruitment of Cadets for the Ceylon Civil Service*, Manning to Milner, No. 798, 18 Nov. 1919.

wanted the Ceylonese chosen "by a local selection committee, after a qualifying exam".<sup>50</sup> If any Ceylonese were nominated by the Civil Service Commissioners in England, the number of candidates to be selected locally was to be proportionately reduced. Milner also felt that it was not necessary to enlist the assistance of the Civil Service Commissioners in the selection of local candidates, as it was a purely local affair.

The strong reaction in Ceylon against purely local selection reflects the prestige of the Civil Service in the eyes of the local elite, as well as their determination to preserve the high standards associated with it. The committee which had recommended a unified Civil Service had emphasized that the Ceylonese recruits must be intellectually superior to the Local Division Cadets. But the proposed examination for recruiting Ceylonese was not intended to be a test of intellectual ability. For instance, apart from limiting nomination to those with war service, "athletic distinctions" were to be given consideration in selection.<sup>51</sup> But more disturbing was that the examination itself was not a test of intellectual capacity; "the object of the examination is mainly to test as far as possible the powers of the candidates to express themselves clearly and intelligibly in English and their general knowledge".<sup>52</sup> The *Daily News* argued that the proposed method of selection was tantamount to handing over the future administration of the country "to a set of men who need not have the mental calibre of the average sixth form boy".<sup>53</sup> There were other objections also to a system of local selection. It was feared that an examination conducted by the Ceylon Education department would open a "back door" to those incapable of entering the Service through open competition in Britain. The need to reward exceptional war service was recognised but it was felt that this should not be done at the expense of the Civil Service.<sup>54</sup> Limiting nominations to those with war service and recruiting Ceylonese by a relatively simple examination would undermine the quality of the Civil Service which was "supposed to contain the cream of a country's intellect".<sup>55</sup> For these reasons the Ceylonese leaders wanted recruitment to be based on examinations conducted by the Civil Service Commissioners in Britain. "The Civil Service being the highest form of Government Service, it is felt that the best result based on an unbiased verdict can be obtained only by a body of examiners severely remote".<sup>56</sup> But despite opposition in Ceylon the decision to hold local examinations prevailed.

50 *Ibid.*, Milner to Manning, No. 127, 20 Dec. 1919.

51 The age limit for candidates was 21 to 30 years.

52 *Daily News*, 17 July 1920.

53 *Idem.*

54 *Daily News* 19 July 1920, editorial. Appointments in the Police or Excise Departments were suggested, as work in these departments would prove congenial to trained soldiers.

55 *Ibid.*, 21 July 1920, letter by M de S. Jayaratne.

56 *Ibid.*, 19 July 1920. Also 20 and 23 Feb. 1920, editorials. The new system of recruitment was criticized by Ramanathan, in the Legislative Council. *Ceylon Hansard*, 1920-1, 16 Sept. 1920.

Accordingly, an examination was held by the Department of Education in September 1920 in which 16 candidates, who had served in the Forces, participated.<sup>57</sup> Five failed to reach the required examination standard and the remaining candidates were interviewed by a selection board of local officials, presided over by the Colonial Secretary. The four finally selected were C. E. Arndt, R. Y. Daniel, R. Aluvihare and D. B. Seneviratne. They were appointed as Cadets from 18th October 1920, the first Ceylonese recruits to the re-organised and unified Civil Service. The disparity in the standard of education of the candidates chosen reveals that the fears of Ceylonese leaders were not without foundation. The selection board was not concerned with selecting Cadets with a sound educational background. What they seemed to want was what Amery had called "administrative honesty and capacity". To be admitted to an inter-grated Civil Service recruits had to be the type who could "fit in" socially; their orientations had to be clearly western and their loyalties unambiguous.<sup>58</sup> The common bond shared by the successful candidates was not a similar level of education but their western orientations.<sup>59</sup> Aluvihare was educated at Trinity College, Arndt at Trinity and St. Thomas' College, Seneviratne at Richmond and Wesley College and Daniel at Royal College—all of them leading English schools of the island. The recruiting examination seemed intended to test their degree of westernisation. Thus, English (300 marks), General Knowledge (300 marks) and Arithmetic (200 marks) were compulsory subjects, whereas Sinhalese or Tamil (200 marks) were optionals only. Besides, in English, special attention was to be paid "to pronunciation, powers of expression and command of the language".<sup>60</sup> The *viva voce* conducted by a Board of European officials was a guarantee that this requirement would be strictly enforced.

Manning, however, was reluctant to confine the Ceylonese in-take to local candidates, most of whom were not university graduates. He also wanted an examination in England, with the same papers as the local examination, for the

57 C. O. 54/834, Manning to Milner, No. 786, 20 Oct. 1920.

58 The following question was included in one of the examination papers. "If Ceylon was washed out to sea, what country would you wish it to be joined". *Daily News*, 16 Sept. 1920.

59 Aluvihare was in the Cambridge Senior form when he proceeded to England and enlisted in the Public School Battalion (18th Royal Fusiliers). He saw active service in France and was wounded at Beaumont Hanelle in July 1916. After discharge from hospital Aluvihare served in the Indian Army Y. M. C. A. with much credit for two years; he was highly recommended by Lt. General Sir E. Locke Elliot, and was mentioned in Sir Douglas Haig's despatches. D. B. Seneviratne was also educated only up to the Cambridge Senior, before joining the Forces. Arndt was a Ceylon Proctor (Solicitor), while Daniel was an Oxford graduate (Lincoln College, 1919). C. O. 54/834, enclosure II in Manning to Milner, No. 786, 20 Oct. 1920.

60 *Ceylon Government Gazette*, No. 7, 116, 16 July 1920, Examination for Admission to the Civil Service of Ceylon.

benefit of Ceylonese studying in Britain. By such an examination he felt that the quality of Ceylonese recruits could be significantly improved.<sup>61</sup> The Colonial Office was not enthusiastic about the proposal. Grindle minuted: "If Ceylon wanted to start simultaneous exams here and in the colony as a standing arrangement, we ought I think to consider the bearing of such a scheme on the agitation for simultaneous exams here and in India for the I. C. S. . . ." The Colonial Office, in other words, thought that Manning's scheme would create a very dangerous precedent, both for itself and for other Departments.<sup>62</sup> The Civil Service Commissioners too objected to the scheme, which they felt involved a disproportionate amount of labour and expense.<sup>63</sup> The Secretary of State, therefore, instructed that there should be no change in the arrangement of holding the examination in Ceylon only. He further pointed out that if there were but one or two vacancies in any one year, they could be filled by Ceylonese not successful at the open competition held in England, provided they had reached a standard considered adequate by the Civil Service Commissioners. The advantage of this procedure was that it would ensure that all Ceylonese Cadets would be of comparable intellectual standard.<sup>64</sup>

This suggestion was considered and accepted by the Ceylon Government. Endorsing the Colonial Office point of view Manning wrote: "I regard it as most important that Ceylonese students in training in England should be given the first chance of filling such vacancies by presenting themselves for the open competitive examination held in London . . . ." <sup>65</sup> If the vacancies were not all filled by successful candidates and by unsuccessful candidates of sufficient merit, then only was the Government to resort to an examination conducted by the Department of Education. Manning pointed out that once the University College (founded in 1921) was placed on a firm footing, it might become possible to restrict candidates for the local examination to those with a 1st or 2nd class degree, but this, he said, would not be practicable for sometime. It was, in fact, only in 1932 that the local examination was finally restricted to London graduates and to those with University degrees of equal standard. <sup>66</sup>

In the two decades after 1910 there was an appreciable increase in the recruitment of Ceylonese into the Civil Service. The following Table shows

61 C. O. 54/834, Manning to Milner, No. 786, 20 Oct. 1920. This examination suggested by Manning was to be in addition to the Eastern Cadetship examination held regularly in London.

62 *Ibid.*, G. Grindle's minute, 26 Oct. 1920.

63 C. O. 54/849, Secretary, Civil Service Commission to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 17 Oct. 1921.

64 *Idem.*

65 C. O. 54/854, Manning to Churchill, Secret, 4 Sept. 1922.

66 Sir Charles Collins, *Public Administration in Ceylon*, London 1951, p. 101.

the number of Ceylonese compared with the total number of Civil Servants, in the years 1910, 1920 and 1930.<sup>67</sup>

	CEYLONESE IN THE CIVIL SERVICE					
	1910		1920		1930	
	Total	Ceylonese	Total	Ceylonese	Total	Ceylonese
Staff appointments	3	0	3	0	3	0
Class I	17	1	19	1	24	2
Class II	18	1	20	0	23	3
Class III	20	0	21	1	49	15
Class IV	21	0	22	0	31	19
Cadets	10	0	5	0	8	4
Local Division	15	10	26	22	—	—
	104	12	116	24	138	43
		(11.5%)		(20.6%)		(31.1%)

Source: *Ceylon Civil Lists, 1910, 1920 and 1930*

The proportion of Ceylonese increased by nearly threefold in the twenty years, from 1910-30. The significance of the increase becomes clearer if one excludes the minor appointments and considers only those appointments in Class III and above. In 1910 there were 58 appointments in and above Class III, of which only 3 were held by Ceylonese (including one from the Local Division) (5%). In 1920, there were 63 such appointments of which 6 were held by Ceylonese (including four from the Local Division) (9%). By 1930, there were 20 out of 99 posts held by Ceylonese (21%).

It should be noted, however, that the recruitment of Ceylonese fell short of the formula proposed by the commission inquiring into the employment of Ceylonese in the Public Service.<sup>68</sup> They recommended in 1919 that one third of the Civil Service posts should be given to Ceylonese and that this proportion should be "gradually raised to one-half". But even by 1930, scarcely one-third of the posts was held by Ceylonese, and if only the higher appointments are considered, the proportion becomes even less. Even so, the Ceylonese gained steadily in the period under review, although still employed mainly in subordinate positions.

### THE JUDICIAL BRANCH AND THE CEYLONESE CIVIL SERVANT

The Ceylon Civil Service had two distinct branches – which, though never officially recognised, were very real to members of the Service. These were the administrative (revenue) and the judicial divisions. The former consisted of a hierarchy rising from Office Assistant in a Kachcheri to Agent of a Province. The judicial line usually began in a Police Magistracy and

67 The few minor posts classified in Class V and reserved for promotion from the Clerical Service have been excluded. In 1930, 12 Ceylonese were holding Class V appointments. Also note that in 1921 the Local Division ceased to exist.

68 S. P. I (1919), *Further Employment of Ceylonese in the Public Service*.

culminated in a District Judgeship. These two branches were of course not mutually exclusive. Most Civil Servants held both revenue and judicial appointments at some stage of their career. But an interesting aspect of the dynamics of the Service was that after a certain number of years of "training", an officer was more or less earmarked for one branch or the other, and his subsequent promotions were mainly, if not exclusively, within that branch. This would of course be an internal differentiation of no consequence if both branches were considered equal in all respects. But the fact was that the revenue branch was considered superior in both prestige and power to the judicial branch. In this section an attempt will be made to demonstrate this fact and to point out its implications for the employment of Ceylonese in the Civil Service.

The inferior status of the judicial branch was widely recognised at least as early as the last decades of the 19th century. It was felt that the government was not putting the best men into judicial work and that it showed a condescending attitude towards that branch of the Service. Justice Clarence in a letter to the Lieutenant-Governor in 1881 wrote :

"Judicial appointments at large throughout the Island are not filled by the best talent in the Civil Service..... Gentlemen whom the government deemed unfit to be entrusted with work in Kachcheri have been appointed Judges of first instance, as Justices of the Peace and Police Magistrates and Commissioners of Requests, and even District Judges. A general belief exists, which cannot be said to be without foundation, that the Government of Ceylon regard judicial work as work which may fitly be entrusted to those whom the government will not venture to entrust with other work - that, in the estimation of the government, almost anybody is good enough to be a Police Magistrate or Commissioner of Requests. Such a belief naturally serves to degrade judicial work in the estimation of the Civil Service".<sup>69</sup>

The Government provided adequate fuel to reinforce such beliefs.<sup>70</sup> One such instance concerns R. C. Pole, a European Assistant Agent of Vavuniya. "During his brief stay at Vavuniya he had shown himself unequal to the duties of an Assistant Government Agent". Pole was therefore, appointed to act as District Judge, Batticaloa, on the grounds that the duties of a District Judge were "much lighter" than those of an Assistant Agent<sup>71</sup> — a contention which clearly reveals the government's partiality for revenue work. This case shows how the judicial service was sometimes considered a dumping ground for those found incompetent in the field of administration.

69 Letter dated 25 May 1881, quoted in dissent of P. Ramanathan, enclosure in C. O. 54/546, Longden to Derby, No. 158, 14 April 1883.

70 Governor Longden acknowledged, in 1897, that "most of the really able men in the Service were to be found in the Revenue and not in the Judicial Branch". See *S. P. XX* (1882), *Despatches relative to the District Judgeships of Colombo and Kandy*, Longden to the Secretary of State, No. 403, 17 Oct. 1879.

71 C. O. 54/545, Longden to Derby, No. 69, 17 Feb. 1883.

It was natural, therefore, that judicial officers of the Civil Service were dissatisfied with their position. In 1883, 53 members of the Civil Service memorialized the Secretary of State, protesting against the very unfavourable position of judicial officers compared with those holding revenue appointments.<sup>72</sup> They protested not only about their poor prospects of promotion and advancement, but also about their overall inferior status. "Your memorialists submit that it must be detrimental to the interests of any country when the office of administering justice is looked on with disfavour, and is regarded as a duty inferior to that of managing its revenue, and one that should be shunned rather than aspired to. But the Colonial Office was not sympathetic to their grievances and was not prepared to introduce any changes."<sup>73</sup>

The dissatisfaction of these judicial officers was so conspicuous that in 1896, the Governor recommended to the Colonial Office (in a scheme for the re-classification of the Civil Service) that two judicial officers be added to the First Grade of the Service, "with a view of encouraging officers holding judicial appointments to remain in that branch of the Service".<sup>74</sup> It is interesting to note that this modest recommendation was opposed by the Acting Colonial Secretary of Ceylon, W. T. Taylor, who argued that the remuneration in the second class of the Service was adequate for a District Judge, except those of Colombo and Kandy, which were, in any case, non-Civil Service appointments. Despite such objections, the Governor persisted with his proposal which was accepted by the Colonial Office. But this was in fact not a major concession, for whereas the approved scheme provided for 12 posts in Grade I of the First Class, only two of these were allocated to the judicial branch. What this meant was that Officers in the judicial line had very few posts of importance to aspire to. The Supreme Court was outside the Civil Service, and so were the highest District Judgeships—Colombo and Kandy. The former was reserved in 1856 for senior members of the Colombo Bar and the latter generally given, after 1872, to members of the Kandy Bar. Not only was the judicial branch relatively powerless and unimportant, it was also considered socially inferior to the administrative branch of the Service. It was even viewed as a resort for the "social misfits". Leonard Woolf, who was in the Ceylon Civil Service from 1904-11, brings out this aspect well in the following comment from his own experience. "A social analysis of the service in my time would, I think, have revealed the curious fact that, if you were thought to be not much of a 'Good fellow' or not much of a 'gentleman', this was considered by the Colonial Secretary and his Assistants to qualify you for being a Magistrate or Judge rather than an A. G. A".<sup>75</sup> The status of the judicial branch remained the same for the next twenty years and no real attempt was made to equalize the prospects

72 C. O. 54/549, Douglas to Derby, No. 196, 21 Nov. 1883. These included 4 Ceylonese all holding judicial posts—J. H. de Saram, F. J. W. Livera, P. Arunachalam and D. E. de Saram.

73 *Ibid.*, Derby to Gordon, No. 81, 14 March 1884.

74 S. P. XXVII (1897), *Papers relating to the Re-classification of the Ceylon Civil Service*, West Ridgeway to Chamberlain, No. 316, 31 Oct. 1896.

75 Leonard Woolf, *Growing: An autobiography of the years 1904-11*, London 1961, p. 36.

of the two branches of the service. The Salaries Commission of 1921, however, did recognise the need to make the judicial side more attractive, although it did not suggest any radical change. It recommended that one of the District Judgeships of Galle, Jaffna and Kurunegala (which were in Class I Grade II) be elevated to a Grade I appointment.<sup>76</sup> To implement this recommendation, Governor Manning increased the number of posts in Class I Grade I from 4 to 10, because of the practical difficulty of promoting judicial officers to Grade I with the present limited cadre. In support of this change Manning argued that the lack of prospects for a Grade I appointment in the judicial line "creates a feeling of discontent in that branch of the Service and causes almost all officers to seek advancement on the revenue side".<sup>77</sup> But his recommendation did not in any way equalize prospects of the two branches, for the advantageous position of the administrative branch was scarcely touched.

The position of the Civil Service Judge remained in this unenviable state right up to 1923, when the foundation for his extinction was laid. In that year the Retrenchment Committee recommended that judicial posts be gradually transferred from the Civil Service and filled by members of the Bar.<sup>78</sup> In 1924, the judiciary was still predominantly manned by Civil Servants. There were then (besides the Supreme Court) only 5 judicial posts ordinarily filled by members of the legal profession.<sup>79</sup> All other posts ranging from Police Magistracies to District Judgeships were the monopoly of the Civil Service. In 1924, Governor Manning began the process of eliminating judicial posts from the Civil Service, which was to culminate in an independent Judicial Service. In 1924 Manning recommended that the posts of District Judge, Chilaw, District Judge, Batticaloa, and Commissioner of Requests, Colombo, be open to members of the legal profession.<sup>80</sup> By 1930 this process was well under way; of a total of 42 Judicial appointments, 18 were now held by professional lawyers.<sup>81</sup> The gradual reduction of judicial posts meant that the judicial branch of the Civil Service became even less attractive than before. For many of the District Judgeships - the "plums" of the judicial line were among those transferred to practising lawyers.

Thus the judicial branch of the Civil Service was widely recognised as being inferior in prestige and prospects to the administrative branch. It is a contention of this paper that the mere increase in the recruitment of Ceylonese into the Civil Service, cannot by itself be interpreted to mean that Ceylonese

76 S. P. XIX (1921), *Report of the Salaries Commission, 1921*, p. 15.

77 S. P. XIII (1922), *Despatches relating to the Report of the Salaries Commission, 1921*, Manning to Churchill, No. 203, 12 April 1922.

78 S. P. III (1923), *Report of the Retrenchment Commission*, p. 10.

79 These were - District Judge, Colombo; District Judge, Kandy; Additional District Judge, Colombo; Second Additional District Judge, Colombo; Municipal Magistrate, Colombo. The post of District Judge, Kandy was at this time held by a Civil Servant seconded from service.

80 S. P. XI (1924), *Transfer of certain Judicial posts from the Civil Service*, Manning to J. H. Thomas, 8 March 1924.

81 S. P. VII (1930), *Judicial Appointments*.

were increasingly accepted as co-partners in administration. Nor does it necessarily mean that, with the spread of western education Ceylonese were automatically given access to positions of power. The Civil Service provided the most prestigious employment within the Higher Administration, and therefore, what happened to Ceylonese already in the Service is a significant indication of the limits to which educated Ceylonese could realistically aspire. Did a Ceylonese who had similar qualifications and seniority have as good a chance of rising to the highest appointments in the Civil Service as his British colleague? The evidence is very striking that although more and more Ceylonese were admitted to the Civil Service, it was tacitly understood that there were areas in the Service which were barred to them.<sup>82</sup> As a general tendency, Ceylonese seem to have been excluded from positions of responsibility and administrative authority, even when they had good claims for such positions. The Government Agent and his Assistant were the most important revenue officers of the provincial administration. They enjoyed considerable power and prestige, for they were, in the words of Governor McCallum, "the direct embodiment of the central government".<sup>83</sup> It is interesting therefore to consider whether a Ceylonese Civil Servant could reasonably aspire to a Government Agency, which was the natural culmination of the career of an able European officer. The evidence is clearly in the negative for the period under review. The implementation of a policy of "thus far and no further" was fraught with difficulties, for the Government could not afford to create the impression that Ceylonese were victims of discrimination. One way of finding out how the government solved this dilemma is to examine what exactly happened to the Ceylonese in the Service. The most conspicuous feature of the recruitment of Ceylonese in this period was that they were channelled predominantly in to the judicial branch of the Service. The impression of deliberate discrimination was thereby avoided, for a Ceylonese could rise to Class I of the Civil Service without having held a high administrative appointment.

It must be conceded, however, that the government justified the disproportionate distribution of Ceylonese in one branch of the Service, as being a function of their aptitude for judicial work.<sup>84</sup> This assertion is certainly true if it means that Ceylonese made more equitable judges because they had a better grasp

82 The Government Agency of Central Province was unequivocally reserved for European civil servants, because of the presence of the tea planting community in this province. Even marriage to a non-European was considered enough to deprive an English civil servant of his legitimate claim to this post. Thus, when a vacancy in this Agency occurred in 1915, B. Hill who was at the head of Grade II in order of seniority was passed over in favour of C. S. Vaughan, because 'Mr. Hill's wife is not of pure European descent - a fact which would have been a cause of much inconvenience in a province where the planting community is of the first importance'. C. O. 54/783, Chalmers to Bonar Law, Confidential, 3 Aug. 1915.

83 *S. P.* VII (1913), McCallum to Harcourt, No. 625, 17 Oct. 1912.

84 For example *S. P.* I (1909), McCallum to Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, 23 Nov. 1907. McCallum while suggesting the assignment of two District Judgeships to the Local Division of the Service, commented that "Ceylonese appear to be well adapted for appointments such as these..".

than European cadets, of native customs and traditions. But it is only logical to conclude that if empathy was a qualification for judicial work, it was equally so for the task of administration - especially provincial administration. Ceylonese were so conspicuously excluded from administrative posts that they can hardly be said to have failed in the role of the administrator. The Ceylonese Civil Servants of the 19th century were practically all employed in judicial work, and this was equally true of the early decades of this century. The channelling to the judicial service was effected irrespective of the abilities of individual Ceylonese. The case of Paul Pieris is particularly illuminating, since he was clearly the intellectual equal of his European colleagues.<sup>85</sup> Yet, even when he became the most senior officer in Class I of the service, Pieris - like Arunachalam before him - was not offered a Government Agency.<sup>86</sup> By having been placed on the judicial side at the outset his chances of promotion were effectively stifled. Pieris' career illustrates well that the prospects of Ceylonese Civil Servants - even the best of them - were less attractive than those of their European colleagues. The following comparison of the appointments held by Pieris with those given to a European colleague of equal seniority shows how the process of "channelling" operated.<sup>87</sup>

## PAUL PIERIS

10 July	1896	Appointed Cadet
1 Jan.	1899	Acting A. G. A. Puttalam
10 Dec.	1901	O. A. to G. A. Galle
1 Feb.	1904	Asst. Commissioner, St. Louis Exhibition
20 Mar.	1906	D. J. Kalutara
23 Dec.	1909	Acting Registrar- General
27 Nov.	1912	Commissioner of Requests, Colombo
1 Nov.	1913	Acting D. J. Kandy
19 June	1914	D. J. Galle
3 Dec.	1915	D. J. Jaffna

## R. N. THAINE

3 Nov.	1898	Appointed Cadet
18 Mar.	1902	Acting A. G. A. Kalutara
14 May	1902	Acting D. J. Badulla
19 June	1906	Acting A.G.A. Trincomalee
3 June	1908	A. G. A. Puttalam
8 July	1908	D. J. Jaffna
4 Jan.	1911	Commissioner of Requests, Colombo
26 Feb.	1913	Acting G. A. Sabaragamuwa
3 Nov.	1915	Police Magistrate, Colombo
18 Apr.	1917	Censor
24 May	1918	Deputy Collector of Customs, Colombo

85 Paul E. Pieris, M. A., LL. M., Litt. D. (Cantab.), Hon. D. Litt. (Ceylon), Barrister-at-law (Inner Temple), was the author of many scholarly works on history of Ceylon.

86 The Thomson Committee conceded that there was evidence of discrimination against Ceylonese; 'we do not think it can be seriously contended that this dissociation of the Ceylonese Civil Servants from the most responsible and therefore most coveted posts in the Service is entirely fortuitous . . . .'. S. P. X (1922), *Further Employment of Ceylonese in the Public Service*, p. 3.

87 *Ceylon Civil Lists*, 1930. Only the important acting appointments have been included. The abbreviations used are as follows: D. J. - District Judge; G. A. - Government Agent; A. G. A. - Assistant Government Agent; O. A. - Office Assistant. For a similar comparison see- S. J. Tambiah, 'Ethnic Representation in Ceylon's Higher Administrative Services, 1870-1946', *University of Ceylon Review*, XIII, No. 2 and 3, 1955.

PAUL PIERIS		R. N. THAINE	
5 Mar. 1919	Acting D. J. Colombo	22 June 1920	G. A. Uva Province
15 April 1920	Acting D. J. Kandy	4 Apr. 1923	Food Controller and Principal Collector of Customs
26 July 1921	D. J. Kandy		
1 Oct. 1928	Public Trustee (seconded for service)	1-Dec. 1923	G. A. Western Province
		18 Oct. 1925	Acting Colonial Secretary
		30 Nov. 1925	G. A. Western Province

It is clear from the above that whereas Thaine was able to obtain a Government Agency in 1920, and was in 1923 appointed to the most important of these, that of the Western Province, Pieris had to be content with the relatively unattractive District Judgeship. Nor was Thaine's case exceptional. In 1930, the Government Agents of all the Provinces (all Europeans) were Pieris' juniors in the Service.

The trend was clear. Until the 1920's the government seemed to believe that it was judicious to exclude Ceylonese from positions of administrative authority. And even when agitation in Ceylon made changes inevitable, concessions were granted grudgingly and cautiously. The first Ceylonese Assistant Government Agent, C. L. Wickramasinghe, was appointed to the post as late as 1923 and even then was given Mannar, one of the smallest Districts. It was only in 1931 that he was also to become the first Ceylonese Government Agent.

The gradual Ceylonization of the Civil Service was thus achieved in two stages. The first stage was the deliberate attempt to increase the number of Ceylonese by introducing a Subordinate (Local) Division. This device enabled the government to recruit Ceylonese locally without seriously affecting the Civil Service proper, based on open competition in England. The local recruits were considered inferior to the Cadets selected in England, and since candidates for the subordinate Division were not required to have a University degree there was much truth in this contention. The virtual absence of any local institution for University education until as late as 1921, was a serious obstacle to obtaining local recruits of quality. Besides, it must be remembered that the Subordinate Division was not intended for highly educated men who, if they wished, could enter the Service through the competitive examination in England; such persons, in any case, were a small minority and thus became automatically, privileged beings. The Subordinate Division was established to benefit the increasing number of young men with a modest western education, who nevertheless felt they were entitled to more responsible employment than mere clerkships. Due to this disparity in quality between the Local Division and the Civil Service proper, it was possible, with justification, to allocate only minor appointments to local recruits — a tendency which continued right up to the reorganisation of the Service in 1920. The first stage in Ceylonization was therefore a gradual increase in the proportion of local recruits, who were confined to subordinate positions.

The unification of the Service in 1920 began the second stage of Ceylonization. The abolition of the Local Division and the establishment of a unified service, removed, at least in theory, the inferiority attached to local recruits. Besides, there was now no built-in mechanism to keep Ceylonese in subordinate positions. When the Service was integrated, it became inevitable that many Ceylonese would, in the course of time, rise to positions of authority. Mobility, however, was not unconditional and Ceylonese were channelled mainly to the legal branch of the Service. But cracks in the structure began to appear in the 1920's partly due to the agitation by the western educated elite for greater employment of Ceylonese in the higher grades of the Public Service. Although Ceylonese were increasingly given revenue posts in the 1920's, the transition was a slow one. Even in 1930 practically 80% of the appointments in Grade III and above (the positions of power and responsibility in the Civil Service) were still held by Europeans.