



සෙවනා

පරිසර පුනායනය

පරිසර ප්‍රවෘත්ති

HISTORICAL PROSPECTIVE OF FOREST COVER AND MANAGEMENT IN SRI LANKA

Fareena Ruzaik

B.A. (Hons) (Peradeniya), M.Sc. (S'Jayewardenepura)
Lecturer- University of Colombo

Introduction

Sri Lanka was a land of rich tropical forests, natured by abundant radiation, high temperatures and rainfall. The forest and people relationship has a long history since *King Vijaya* (543 B.C.) landed to the Island. There is no doubt that even prior to colonial times; the forest cover would have played a major role in the lives of inhabitants. A major percentage of area of Sri Lanka was covered by rich tropical forests in the early stage. This consisted 90% of the total ground area. There is no doubt that ever period to colonial days forest cover was have played a major role in shaping of the lives of the inhabitants. Over the last two centuries much of this heritage has been destroyed gradually along with many of its material benefits to extend development activities and to fulfill day-to-day needs of peoples (NRSL, 1991).

As a strategy of forest management, it was found that the plantation forestry is an ideal alternative to minimise present problems as well as to meet present and future demand for forest products. The plantation forestry was originally introduced to Sri Lanka in 1870s (FSMP, 1995). However, most of the plantation programmes were introduced and conducted on during the latter part of the 20th century (e.g. Dawatagolla Jack (*Artocarpus intergrifolia*) and Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophlla*) plantation was also established in 1930s).

With the adoption of advance techniques pertaining to the forest management the concept of sustainable development became a common point in early 1970s. After the "Rio Summit" in 1992, probably, the concept of sustainable development was applied in every development activities including forestry sector. The

increasing needs for forest products and deforestation are two contrasting elements which to be managed in the middle level without compromising to the social and ecological environment. To fulfill unlimited demands for forest products, the "multiple-use of forestation" was introduced. Meanwhile, the concept of "Public Participation" in the forest management activities (participatory management) has become a center point of forest management. This concept strongly believes that any social or environmental problems, which are being arisen due to the human activities, cannot be mitigated or stopped without the participation of the public. As a modern form of this approach, "social forestry or community forestry" was implemented with the participation of the people (FSMP, 1995).

Historical background

The British Colonial Ruling took over the coastal areas of the Island in 1796. Subsequently, they were successful in capturing the upcountry kingdom through a peaceful conspiracy in the year 1815.

Since then, the destruction of forests for the purpose of developing and expanding of Timber Industry had been carried at large scale. This has resulted in percentage reduction of forests through out the Island.

Further, during the early stage of the 19th century (in 1835) both Coffee and Tea plantation were introduced in Ceylon, which had required more land area for cultivation in the central province (particularly in the N-Eliya District). This too had contributed in great measures towards the destruction of forests during the period under reference.