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

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# Part One
# Temptation island

CHAPTER ONE

# LOCAL POLITICS AND FOREIGN INTRUSION

> *"Ceylon, from whatever direction it is approached, unfolds a scene of loveliness and grandeur unsurpassed, if it be rivalled, by any land in the universe. The traveller […] is entranced by the vision of beauty which expands before him as the island rises from the sea, its lofty mountains covered by luxuriant forests, and its shores, till they meet the ripple of the waves, bright with the foliage of perpetual spring."*[30]

Travellers have always praised Sri Lanka for its physical beauty and its agreeable climate, but this is not what attracted the Portuguese merchants in the beginning of the sixteenth century. They were tempted by the island's exclusive resources of cinnamon, one of those exotic spices that were increasingly in demand in Europe. They settled on the shore to set up commercial strongholds, but soon got involved in local political conflicts and were drawn inland. As a result, the Portuguese merchants willy nilly acquired governmental responsibilities in the coastal regions of the island. This introductory chapter deals with those early political developments and the political constellation at the time of the Dutch arrival about one hundred fifty years later. Furthermore, it discusses the political organization of the Kandyan Kingdom, the last indigenous Kingdom to survive the Portuguese confrontation and which remained a political factor of great importance on the island until 1815.

## 1.1 *Sri Lanka prior to European arrival: the ancient civilizations*

With a surface of 65,610 square kilometres, Sri Lanka covers an area about the size of the present states of the Netherlands and Belgium together. Located in the Indian Ocean off the southern end of the Indian subcontinent, the island is connected with the Indian mainland by a string of islands called Adam's Bridge. Geographically, Sri Lanka can be divided into three regions: a lowland dry zone in the north and east, a mountainous region in the central part of the island and a lowland wet zone in the south and west. Plenty of rivers run down from the mountains into this region. The climate of the island is regulated by two monsoons: the southwest monsoon from April to September and the northeast monsoon from October to March.[31]

Rubies and other precious stones are found in the mountainous part of the island, and this has always attracted the attention of travellers and merchants. In addition, the various pearl banks on the northwest coast, around Manaar and Aripo, produced fine pearls of a type very popular in Europe.[32] This undoubtedly added to Sri Lanka's reputation of being "the finest island of its size in the world".[33] At the time the famous Venetian thirteenth century traveller Marco Polo gave Sri Lanka this epithet, the island was in a transitional phase, ancient civilizations were disintegrating and large groups of people were migrating from north to the south.

The ancient civilizations (c. 500 - c. 1250 A.D.) were found in the northern dry zone of the island, around the present-day towns of Anurādhapura and Pollonaruwa. This region is often referred to as *Rājarata,* or the hydraulic civilizations of the *Rājarata Kingdoms,* because of the extensive irrigation systems and a corresponding social and political organization that characterized these civilizations. Large ruins of ancient monasteries, palaces, temples and water tanks can still be admired. This era of Sri Lankan history was of a high cultural level: witness its beautiful sculptures and the important Pali texts that have passed down through the ages.[34]

The kingdoms were part of the large Theravada Buddhist tradition which spread from Sri Lanka to the Southeast Asian mainland after the third century. The *Sangha*, the Theravada monastic order, formed a crucial element in the religious and political organization of the region. The Pali records and Sinhalese chronicles like the *Mahāvamsa* all bear witness to the vivid political, cultural and economic exchange between the Sri Lankan and Southeast Asian kingdoms. At the same time, the proximity of Sri Lanka to the Indian subcontinent and the frequent invasions from there from the tenth century onwards resulted in local cultural and religious fusion with South Indian Hindu traditions.[35] Agricultural production was substantial, thanks to the massive irrigation works. The maintenance of the large tanks and other waterworks called for a complex level of social organization because it demanded intensive labour activities and large-scale co-operation. It is therefore assumed that government was highly centralized and that the monasteries played an important part in its organization.[36]

The remains of the old civilizations seized the imagination of both Dutch and British rulers on the island. In late eighteenth-century reports, a picture emerges of an ancient Sri Lanka at once rich and productive, but inexplicably degenerated prior to the Portuguese arrival. In fact, as shall be seen in the next chapters, this image of Sri Lanka's rich past developed into a guiding force for the new agricultural endeavours of the Dutch and the British rulers.[37] The idea that Sri Lanka was once the granary of the Indian Ocean was still widely supported in the 1970s, but is nowadays

under debate, since historians like W.I. Siriweera began questioning whether the irrigation works could ever have sustained such large surpluses.[38]

In the course of the thirteenth century, the northern civilizations collapsed and the inhabitants of the island migrated southwards. The cause for the collapse remained an enigma for the Dutch and British policy makers in the period under study, but in the course of the nineteenth century hypotheses were developed by British archaeologists and orientalists who concluded from the indigenous chronicles that the invasions of Pandyan and Colan troops from South India caused the collapse of the kingdoms. Later it was pointed out that invasions from South India were not a new phenomenon in Sri Lankan history and that earlier kingdoms had also suffered their share of them. This is one reason why some historians have argued that the abandonment of the irrigation works cannot have been caused solely by disruptive invasions. Some historians point at natural causes for the neglect of the irrigation works and the collapse of the kingdoms. An interesting theory is that the malaria-bearing anopheles mosquito migrated to Sri Lanka around the thirteenth century, with dire consequences for the health of the population. Its preference for the water tanks lasts to this date.[39]

The other Theravada kingdoms in Southeast Asia collapsed simultaneously with the fall of the *Rājarata* civilizations, which suggest a connected cause. Lieberman seriously argues for climate change as a major factor, namely the commencement of an extremely dry period from the end of the thirteenth century, but he also agrees that this could not stand alone as a cause for the collapse. In addition he points to the administrative structure of the kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia: the monasteries functioned as strong tax-free powerbases that strengthened regional power and this may have caused the breakdown of the kingdoms in the long run. These factors, combined with the violent invasions of Mongol troops into the Southeast Asian mainland explain the collapse of the kingdoms there. It is likely that the ancient civilizations of Sri Lanka suffered from a similar combination of climate change, internal collapse of the organization of the kingdoms and invasions from outside, southern India in this case.[40]

### 1.2 *Political fragmentation and the drift to the South*

On the Southeast Asian mainland the kingdoms shifted to the lowland maritime regions which were free of monastic strongholds. This marked the beginning of a period of political fragmentation and increased maritime commercial activity in the Indian Ocean. Once again, this mirrors exactly what happened in Sri Lanka in the same period. The drift to the

south after the disintegration of the centralized civilizations resulted in the growth of smaller political entities in the north and the southwest of the island. Jaffna in the north and Kotte in the south were two major kingdoms that emerged in the fourteenth century, Kotte being the strongest because of its extensive involvement in maritime trade. Later, Sitavaka and Kandy became principalities of the Kotte kingdom. The Jaffna kingdom, established by the Pandyan invaders, was essentially Tamil and Hindu. The others were Sinhalese and Buddhist and more or less regarded themselves as successors of the *Rājarata* kingdoms, which is clear from the continuation of the *Mahāvamsa*, the Great Chronicle. At the same time, the South Indian influences increased: the many Hindu temples in the southwest dating from this period bear witness to this. These developments were undoubtedly related to the maritime activities of the Kotte Kingdom.[41]

As in the Southeast Asian mainland, these smaller kingdoms and principalities were oriented towards trade rather than agriculture. Politically, the kingdoms were much less centralized than the *Rājarata* kingdoms. There were no large irrigation works to require a strict and firm organization of society and some groups managed to gain strong regional power. In the scarcely populated areas of the Vanni in the north and around Trincomalee in the east practical power was entirely with the local chiefs, or *vanniyārs*.[42] The island's central location made it a popular venue within the trading network of both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.[43] The export products ranged from areca nuts and coconuts, to cinnamon, gems, pearls and elephants. Imports included basic commodities like rice and textiles. Perhaps most important for this period's economic history was the growth of coconut production after the thirteenth century and the increased export market. This expanding trade should however not be exaggerated. It remained largely restricted to the Jaffna peninsula and the small ports along the southwest coast, and although the circulation of money was increasing, it was carried out on a small scale.[44]

### 1.3 *Island society around 1500*

At the time of the Portuguese arrival in 1505 most people on Ceylon relied on subsistence agriculture and the village formed their main frame of reference. In the dry north, some of the smaller water tanks were still in use and were vital to the livelihood of villagers. In the south, paddy was cultivated on terraces, with an abundant water supply from the hills. Over-flooding was a regular problem in the lowland villages, but this did not result in the creation of large-scale irrigation projects to drain the water. Garden culture played a major role in this small scale economy, where fruit and nut trees were grown both for personal consumption and

for trade. Waste land and jungle adjacent to the village was used for shifting cultivation (*chēna*) of small grains and for the collection of various forest products like timber, honey and wax.[45]

In the course of time, various systems of land tenancy developed, which varied greatly in commitments due to the lord of the land. In the Sinhalese kingdoms this meant that some lands were held against a tax of fifty per cent of the produce, while others were held against a tax of only ten per cent. Moreover, most of the land was held in service tenure, meaning that the occupants had to perform labour for their lord for a certain number of days each year. In the Jaffna kingdom the tenures were a little simpler. Produce was usually taxed at ten per cent, but poll-taxes were added and bonded labour was just as much part of the system as in the Sinhalese kingdoms.[46]

Perhaps the most general feature of the social stratification among all societies on the island was the importance of caste hierarchy. Interestingly, the highest in the hierarchy, namely the farmer caste – *Goyigama* in the Sinhalese part and *Vellale* in the Tamil part – formed by far the largest caste. With reference to this, some historians point out that Sri Lanka was blessed with a relatively egalitarian society in comparison to India. However, it should not be overlooked that these castes were divided into various sub-castes which were again subject to a strict hierarchy. The castes were organized by occupation, hence there were fishermen, washermen, barber, and silversmith castes, to give only a few examples. This did not mean that all members of the castes actually performed this labour, as most people on the island were involved in subsistence agriculture. Among the Sinhalese, the highest subgroup of each caste comprised the headmen, below which were the *lascorins* or guards. The lower echelons, called *naindes*, usually formed the largest group and performed manual labour. They had to undertake specialized or coolie-labour for their headmen and the king depending on their caste. This labour was used for a variety of projects including road repair, irrigation and general building activities for the benefit of the community, but it was also used for private activities of the headmen.[47]

The island's relative wealth and central position in the Indian Ocean attracted groups of settlers and traders, and between c. 1300 and 1600 there was a high level of immigration from South India. The immigration of the *Salāgamas* to the southwest is probably the most important example, but other groups like the *Mukuvas* in the east and the *Karāva* fishermen in the south should be mentioned too. All found new positions as a group in the caste-based societies of either the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna or the other Sinhalese kingdoms. A cultural division between the Tamil north and Sinhalese south remained, despite these waves of immigration: the immigrants adapted themselves at least in language and religion to

their respective host society. These assimilative features of the Sri Lankan kingdoms are often noted in the current discussions on the development of ethnic consciousness.[48] Some Muslim traders from the Arabian Sea and Hindu *Chetties* from Coromandel settled either temporarily or permanently on the Jaffna peninsula or in the many small ports along the southwest coast; nonetheless they kept their distinctive cultural identity. Later, after the European arrival, many Muslims moved to the east coast.

## 1.4 *Portuguese political infiltration and the origin of the Kandyan Kingdom*

On a macro level, the political history of Sri Lanka up to the sixteenth century had much in common with that of mainland Southeast Asia. The simultaneous political fragmentation of the late thirteenth century is remarkable. The maritime focus and commercialization of the small political entities in the lowlands of the island from the late thirteenth century onwards again show great resemblance to the fragmented political organization that developed simultaneously in the maritime regions of Burma, Thailand and Vietnam. Despite the similarities with the Southeast Asian pattern, the distinctive South Indian influences on the island's political and religious life, in the form of the caste system and Hindu cults, should not be disregarded.[49] In the sixteenth century a new power arrived on the island. This time it was not an invader from South India, but from Europe. What was the effect of the Portuguese arrival on the political constellation on the island, and how does it compare to developments on mainland Southeast Asia?

It has been estimated that at the time of the Portuguese arrival in 1505, about six hundred thousand people inhabited the island.[50] Of these, about one hundred fifty thousand were ruled by the king of Jaffna and about four hundred thousand lived in the kingdoms of Kotte and Sitavaka. The rest were spread across the various *vanniyār* chieftaincies in the north and east and the central highland area, or the principality of Kandy, which was later to grow into a kingdom. The Portuguese sailed in the wake of the Muslim traders. They tried to take over their networks and attempted to ban all Muslim competition anywhere in Asian waters.[51] Within a few years they had taken over the larger part of Sri Lanka's commerce. As stated in the beginning, they were not after pearls, rubies, elephants or coconuts, but cinnamon. This spice had always been a minor product of interest to the inhabitants of the island, but had grown in importance not long before the Portuguese arrival, due to increased European demand. It grew wild in the forests in the southwest and by the time the Portuguese arrived it was a royal monopoly of the maritime kingdom of Kotte and had to be bought from the king.[52]

There is no need to discuss the Portuguese infiltration on the island here *in extenso*; for that I refer to the work of T. Abeyasinghe and C.R. de Silva, among others.[53] Still, a few things need to be pointed out to understand how the Portuguese traders came to govern part of the island. First of all, they arrived at a period of political instability. There was a succession dispute going on between the king of Kotte and his brother who ruled at Sitavaka, and these two power-blocks sought for external allies in their struggle. While Kotte found its ally in the Portuguese merchants, Sitavaka relied on support from the Muslim traders. This situation led to a classic history of "reluctant imperialism": the Portuguese promised their support in exchange for concessions in the cinnamon trade and the possession of coastal forts. The conflict lasted nearly a century, but finally in 1593 the Portuguese helped Kotte to defeat Sitavaka. By that time the Kotte kingdom itself had come entirely under Portuguese influence, a change that was not approved of by all its subjects.[54]

At about the time of Sitavaka's fall, the Jaffna kingdom also came under Portuguese sway. Though commercial opportunities had attracted the Portuguese to the Jaffna peninsula, the Portuguese and the king of Jaffna were in conflict over religious matters. In 1544 Portuguese missionaries had arrived from South India and were successful in the conversion of fishermen in Manar and Jaffna. The Hindu ruler of Jaffna reacted violently against these conversions and killed a large number of the new Catholics. This led to a protracted war between the Portuguese and Jaffna, and the Portuguese managed to place their influence over the kingdom by the 1560s. In 1590, the Portuguese placed their own puppet on the throne, and in the second decade of the seventeenth century the Estado da India confiscated the kingdom and placed it directly under its government.[55]

At the end of the sixteenth century, disaffection over Portuguese control of the kingdom led some powerful nobles to flee to the principality of Kandy in the mountainous interior where they established a new successor kingdom to Kotte. The almost unpopulated interior became inhabited by refugees from the wars in the lowlands and by those who followed the noblemen to their new kingdom. After the defeat of the maritime governments of Kotte and Jaffna, the young Kingdom of Kandy was the last indigenous power left on the island.

The early seventeenth century formed the heyday of Portuguese rule, which more or less integrated once more the fragmented political entities in the lowland area. The Portuguese government thereby mainly followed the local administrative organization and made no attempt to unify the island or to impose a distinctively Portuguese administration except in the colonial towns of Colombo, Galle and Jaffna. Apart from the courts in these towns, justice was left in the hands of the native powerholders; in

the southwest these were the *mudaliyārs* of the *Goyigama* castes who enjoyed the same power in the former kingdoms.[56] The focus of the Portuguese continued to be on the maritime trade, with cinnamon their most important export. Intercourse between the Portuguese rulers and native society on the coast was stimulated by the Portuguese government and created mixed communities on the coast, which resulted in strong cultural influences and the adaptation of the Portuguese language. The Portuguese names held by so many of the coastal inhabitants point at the local intermarriages, but also at the large scale of indigenous Catholic baptisms. Catholicism gained a strong foothold and resulted in a substantial Portuguese religious and cultural influence that was to outlive Lusitanian presence on the island.[57]

Meanwhile the Kandyan Kingdom strengthened its local power and shook off the Hindu Saivite and Portuguese Catholic local influences and made a definite shift to Theravada Buddhism, organizing the state accordingly. As a result the island was now divided in two states, each contesting the power of the other and constantly at war from the beginning of the seventeenth century.

A thorough comparison between mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Victor Lieberman argues that in Southeast Asia, the sixteenth century marked a new phase of political, economic and cultural integration. Marginal ethnic groups merged with the dominant ones, which resulted in the emergence of unified identities that were associated with the central state but at the same time distinguished themselves from outsiders through religion and language. While Burma and Thailand stuck to the Indic Theravada tradition, northern Vietnam remained part of the Sinic Confucianist tradition. Also in political and economic terms, each region became more centralized, with strong revenue systems that benefited from the increased maritime trade. In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a general population growth as a result of increased wealth and agricultural extension and intensification strengthened the power of these states. The provincial elites gained interest in the central states, through tax-farming and labour coercion, and as a result access to office became more regularized. Another crisis in the middle of the eighteenth century led to the last and most intense phase in this long-term state formation process.[58]

The Kingdom of Kandy and the Portuguese coastal possessions are good objects for comparison. Like most of the mainland kingdoms Kandy opted for Therevada Buddhism as its centralizing ideology and it was trying to expand to the maritime regions. The Kandyan kings certainly saw themselves as the only real power on the island, as can be read from the *Cūlavamsa,* the final part of the *Mahāvamsa*. The integration of the

maritime regions under the Portuguese was not yet complete, but it is easy to draw parallels with the Southeast Asian port polities thanks to the maritime focus and religious and cultural binding in the form of Catholicism brought in by the missionaries. The power relation between the Kandyan Kingdom and the Portuguese was not yet balanced out, when the Dutch offered their help to the Kandyans in 1638. After twenty years of warfare and negotiation, the allies managed to expel the Portuguese from the island.[59] The subsequent wars with the Dutch over the coastal region reveal the Kandyans' persistent interest in the maritime corridor.

### 1.5 *Dutch Ceylon: the formative years*

The high quality of cinnamon that had first tempted the Portuguese to involve themselves in Sri Lankan politics attracted the Dutch when they expanded their trading network in Asia during the first decades of the seventeenth century. When the king of Kandy asked the Dutch East India Company for help in expelling the Portuguese, they responded positively. In 1638, the Dutch admiral Westerwolt concluded a treaty with the Kandyans that, according to the Dutch interpretation, assured payment by the king of Kandy, Rajasinha II (1635-1687), of all Dutch war expenses and at the same time stipulated a Dutch right to take over the Portuguese strongholds on the island. After the Dutch expelled the Portuguese from the island, Rajasinha II did not pay for all the expenses made by the VOC. In fact, he managed to foil the Dutch plans to take over all the Portuguese coastal possessions by effective warfare. It was only in the 1680s that the Dutch and Rajasinha II concluded a truce and the Dutch had to give up much of their inland territories but retained most of the coastal forts and adjacent districts. They valued especially the southwestern districts and the Jaffna peninsula – indeed, the regions that had developed as centres of power in the island since the thirteenth century.[60]

This development needs to be placed in the general context of seventeenth-century Dutch expansion in Asia. In 1602 the Dutch East India Company was established. It grew out of several smaller trading companies that had sponsored exploratory voyages to the east in the previous decade. An important motive of Dutch expansion in those days was the expulsion of the Portuguese from the Asian trade. In so doing, the Dutch hoped to gain the monopoly on the lucrative spice trade with Europe and control the intra-Asian trade network. Obtaining a monopoly of trade in Asian spices gave the VOC the power of price-fixing on the European markets and therefore guaranteed a high profit. The possession of territo-

ry was not a primary objective of the Company's activities in the east, but was a by-product of its pursuit of monopolies. This commitment led to various wars in Asia during the seventeenth century, between the Dutch and the Portuguese and between the Dutch and indigenous rulers.

The protracted warfare was expensive and by the 1680s there was a total change in mentality in the *Heren Zeventien* of the VOC. The costly wars had to be put to an end and a further cut in expenses in the east was required. At the same time, the existing monopolies of trade in spices and other products had to be kept firmly in Dutch hands. That is why the VOC persisted as a territorial power on Sri Lanka and why after all, the coastal regions on the island remained under Dutch control. As a result Ceylon developed as one of the major stations of the VOC in Asia, next to Batavia and the Moluccas.[61]

It was in those early years that Dutch policy for the island was formulated, and although it was not unanimously agreed upon at the time, it was this policy that determined the further path of the Dutch on the island. It had been the original aim of the directors of the VOC that the cinnamon of Ceylon should be delivered to them absolutely without cost. This turned out to be a vain desire, because competition from other European traders had to be prevented. The preservation of coastal forts prevented any competitors from getting a hand on the trade or any influence on the island, and the possession of the adjacent territories for the collection of the cinnamon required additional governmental infrastructure. These contradictions in Dutch policy placed a heavy burden on the local governors.[62]

The demands from the Netherlands led to the paradoxical situation in which the High Government of Batavia had to look for other means to pay for Ceylon's administration. More direct local involvement inevitably cost more. Rijckloff van Goens the Elder, governor of Ceylon between 1660-1663 and 1664-1675, had already warned the directors about this problem in the 1670s. He proposed to either conquer the whole of Ceylon and attract European settlers to fully develop the island's potential, or to restrict the territorial possessions on the island solely to the cinnamon producing areas in the southwest. His appeal fell on deaf ears, and despite his critique, the *Heren Zeventien* in the Netherlands refused to adopt a clear policy and left it to the governors on the island to meet their targets. Van Goens was however not entirely incorrect in his predictions.

From the 1680s until 1796, the Dutch on Ceylon found themselves in a kind of vicious circle. Their financial situation asked for increasing exploitation of local society, but this in turn required further involvement and responsibility, which brought about new costs. Good relationships had to be maintained with the Kingdom of Kandy, which again triggered extra expenses. This development, which turned the Dutch East India

Company on Ceylon from a trade operation into a territorial power with full-time administrators, would shape Dutch colonial rule in the late eighteenth century.

## 1.6 *Political organization of the Kandyan Kingdom*

Before moving on to the actual analysis of the political developments in Dutch Ceylon and the Dutch-Kandyan relationship, the Kandyan political constellation needs some further explanation. As noted, the Kandyan Kingdom inherited a state ideology in the form of the Theravada tradition, but unlike other Therevada kingdoms of the time, it did not manage to secure enduring stability and growth. As we shall see, this was to have major consequences for the relationship of the young Kingdom with the colonial rulers on the coast.

The political and social structure of the Kandyan Kingdom has been analysed by Ralph Pieris in his monumental book *Sinhalese Social Organization: The Kandyan Period* and by Lorna Dewaraja in *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka*. Both these authors depend heavily on the seventeenth-century description of the Kingdom by the English captive Robert Knox and the descriptions of the Kandyan institutions by D'Oyly and John Davy, colonial officials who wrote their respective accounts soon after the fall of the Kingdom.[63] In addition, Pieris and Dewaraja use a list of questions and answers on the Kingdom and the Buddhist religion apparently posed by Governor Willem Iman Falck (1766-1785) around 1769 to the chief monk of the maritime districts.[64] In general Dewaraja and Pieris concur in their descriptions, though they do place different emphasis on certain aspects of the Kandyan institutions. That is why the following account is largely derived from these two authors.

The Kandyan Kingdom was an economically weak polity, with a low population density (the total population probably never surpassed 250,000 people), a negative trade balance and a poor agricultural base due to its mountainous topography. Only the lowland provinces bordering the "European" maritime possessions were relatively fertile and more extensively cultivated.[65]

The king's power was considered absolute, though in practice it was limited in certain ways. The Kandyan king was seen as the successor of the great ancient kings of the Anurādhapura and Pollonaruwa kingdoms and most information on the manner of good rule was gathered from the examples given in the *Mahāvamsa.* He was to rule within the tradition and to follow examples of the good princes; he had to observe customary laws and written rules, governing in the interest of his subjects and fol-

lowing Buddhist precepts. Ralph Pieris points out that various rebellions against the king were the practical outcome of these limitations. If the king was not ruling "justly", his subjects could revolt.[66]

The absence of strict hereditary rules of succession was typical for Theravada kingdoms of the time. Though the king was considered almost godly, this divine characteristic was not necessarily transferred through direct bloodlines. He did have to be of *chastrya* origin, meaning that he belonged to the "caste of kings". The coronation ceremony was decisive in the transfer of the legitimacy of power and elevated the human king to a godly status. Over time, this divine element in Kandyan kingship became more central to the ideology of the Kingdom. A new king, if he was not already appointed during the lifetime of the former king, was chosen by the highest nobles at the court.[67] In practice this meant that princesses of *chastrya* origin were brought to the island from South India to marry the present king and to produce a future king. It is not difficult to intepret this as a means to prevent competition for the crown among the Sinhalese nobles at the court.

This was the case in 1739, when king Narendrasingha (1707-1739) had not produced a heir to the throne and a prince was brought from South India to be king. From then onwards, we see various attempts of Kandyan nobles to have new kings from outside the island placed on the throne. This important element of Kandyan kingship reminds us of the stranger-king concept. The enthronement of a king from outside the circle of nobility functioned as a means to channel or avoid political tension among powerful noble families. In a way it served as a compromise between rival nobles and prevented outbreaks of violent succession-disputes: instead of claiming the throne themselves they placed on the throne an outsider with no political or family ties within the Kingdom. The stranger-king concept is popular with scholars of Southeast Asian history and helps to explain how, in many cases, European power expanded over the Indonesian archipelago in early modern times without much violence, but rather at the invitation of native power groups.[68]

The retinue of the king existed of a variety of palace officials responsible for his protection, his kitchen, his baths and so on. In total there were about thirty-one departments. Ralph Pieris points out that the composition of the king's retinue was not always the same and that in the late period of the Kingdom there was an abnormal growth in these offices, the holders of which received land in lease for their often marginal duties.[69] According to him the purpose was to strengthen the position of the monarch. The officials of the palace service stood apart from the public or district service and even the chief ministers, the *adigārs*, did not have any jurisdiction over them.[70]

The king's power was delegated through his two ministers, *adigārs.*

These men held considerable power, both in the central government and in the provincial government. In the central government they functioned as advisors to the king, chief justices and military chiefs. Advice was given in cases of new appointments of chiefs, the election of the principal ecclesiastical offices and in the transfer of land grants and service rewards. A land grant or any other official ordinance of the king needed to be countersigned by either one of the *adigārs*. As an emolument each held five villages the inhabitants of which performed particular services for them and the king.[71] If the *adigārs* were present at the capital, all communications with the king went through them. Consequently they had a powerful influence on the external affairs of the Kingdom, since they could manipulate the foreigners to suit their interest. This is reflected in the reports of Dutch and British embassies to the court. The ambassadors never got to meet the king, he remained behind the curtain in the audience hall, and all dealings were discussed with the *adigār*s.[72] The *adigār*s were also responsible for the town of Kandy. They organized the ferry to the palace and kept order in the city. This implied mostly that they had to secure safety during the big festivals and kept temples and public buildings in repair. Each *adigār* held jurisdiction over half the Kingdom, the first *adigār* over roughly the north and east and the second over the south and west. Appeals from these regions could be made to them.

Like all officials, the *adigārs* had to pay *däkum,* tribute, to the king for their office: at their appointment and subsequently each year in April before the commencement of the New Year.[73] The *adigār*s in turn received money from the headmen in their five villages and kept the fines resulting from court cases. Other income they acquired through their position in the provincial government, since they often held the position of *disāva* in one of the *disāvanies* simultaneously. As we shall see, some of them managed to collect many offices at the same time. The status of the *adigārs* was second to that of the king; hence many rituals to enhance their status were performed when they moved around the Kingdom.[74] The two *adigār*s often came from opposing factions, which was done intentionally to prevent them from working together against the king.

The provincial government was split in twenty-one sections. In the mountainous area surrounding the capital there were nine small provinces called *ratas* and governed by *rata mahattayos*. The twelve other provinces were called *disāvanies* and were headed by *disāvas*; the four most important were called *maha disāvanies*. The *rata mahattayos* had less power than the *disāvas*, because the servants of the palace held lands in the *ratas* and the authority of the palace officers penetrated their area. Also the proximity of the palace in Kandy made the *rata mahattayos* less independent in the execution of their office. In comparison to the *disāvas* they had fewer privileges.[75]

The *disāva* resided in the capital or left his family there when on tour. His tasks were to administer justice, collect revenue and extract labour service, to execute the king's orders and to propagate good government. The *disāvas* and *ratas* paid a *däkum* to the king each year, and the king could continue or eliminate the office at will. The *disāva* had a deputy in his *disāvany*, called the *rata mohottala,* and an administrative staff composed of the local aristocracy. The possibility of the *disāva* becoming too popular in his own province was undermined by the fact that the *disāvas* usually came from the aristocratic families in the *ratas* of central Kandy. These people were of most noble birth and they held no blood-ties with the provincial aristocracy. Since the *disāva* often held various offices at the same time and often had to be present in Kandy, the *rata mohottala* had almost arbitrary power in the province. The *disāvany* was split up in *kōralēs* and the *kōralēs* into *pattus*. The *rata mohottala* had in turn deputies in these districts. All these offices had to be paid for and the appointments were always temporary; the threat of removal from office served as a means to extract more money from these officers.[76]

There were certain checks to the seemingly unlimited power of the *disāva* and his deputy. Temple lands or *viharagam* and *devalagam*, were given respectively to the monks and the *basnāyaka nilamēs*, lay caretakers of the *dēvalēs,* who were appointed by the king. These lands were free from the authority of the *disāva*, and they served as an independent source of information about developments in the province. The lands held by the officials of the royal households formed a second check on the power of the *disāva*, because these lands were also beyond the *disāva*'s authority. The king was free to give his *gabadāgama*, royal villages, to his chiefs in which case these villages turned into a *nindagama*. According to Lorna Dewaraja, "This was a necessary precaution at a time when palace intrigues were common. A palace official, even a minor one, could be a useful tool in the hands of an ambitious chief. For the former had access to the person of the king. The king did not wish to see those on whose loyalty his life depended having any dependence upon his nobles."[77]

The *disāva* profited from the *nājakāriya*, or the services due to the king. This was necessary, because it gave him status in the province and it ensured his dignity. If the income of the *disāva* in cash was rather limited, his income in terms of land and labour was more considerable. He gained cash from his appointees (usually the offices were given to the highest bidder) and some castes paid money as a substitute for their services. The *disāva* also kept the fines that were imposed in criminal cases. Next to this hierarchical system of administration there was the *badda*, which cut vertically across this system. The *badda* can best be translated as a functional system of "caste groups organized as a unit for purposes of revenue and services to the state – a mechanism by which the labour

resources of the Kingdom could be mobilized for public service". Although originally the *badda* system functioned as another check on the powers of the *disāva*, in the course of the eighteenth century the *disāvas* gained control over the *baddas*, which can be seen as a sign of decentralization of power in the Kingdom.[78]

### 1.7 *Eighteenth-century Kandyan kingship and Buddhism*

Sinhalese kingship was strongly connected with Buddhism, and Buddhist monks always had political connections in Sinhalese society. During the time of the Kandyan Kingdom Buddhist influence waxed and waned. The early Kandyan kings were greatly influenced by both Catholicism and Hinduism. It was only by the end of the seventeenth century, under Vimaladharma Suriya II (1687-1707) that Buddhism was given a new boost.[79]

Kitsiri Malalgoda has written an excellent study on the development of Buddhism in Sri Lanka from the eighteenth century onwards. In the late seventeenth century, the influence of Buddhist monks upon Kandyan politics was on the rise. Some monks even held administrative positions: for instance the chief monk of the Poyamalu *vihāra* in Kandy served also as *disāva*. According to Malalgoda "the growing political influence of the monks indicated a general trend to worldliness". In the management of the temple lands, similar developments were detected. Some monks held private property and rights to land, which conflicted with the Buddhist purity laws. Moreover noble families held interests in temple properties and even in the pupil-teacher relationship.[80] The Buddhist revival included new interest in the other Theravada states, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, various missions to Arakan, Pegu and Ayutthaya were conducted to bring monks who could reinforce the Buddhist order on the island. The contacts and exchanges between Kandy and mainland kingdoms were purely religious, and in no way commercial.[81]

Although the stimulus of Buddhist revival was given during the reign of Vimaladharma Suriya II and was more or less followed by his successors, it was not until the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinha that this revival reached its peak. It has generally been accepted that the Buddhist revival under Kirti Sri was inspired at least as much by political strategy as by religious piety. With the reign of his predecessor a new dynasty had come to the throne; this dynasty had its roots in the South Indian Nāyak chieftaincies, hence the name Nāyakkar. Though there had always been a South Indian connection with the Kandyan kingship, the accession of Sri Vijaja Rajasinha in 1739 is generally seen as a breach with the former dynasty.

Being an outsider, and facing opposition of certain nobles and monks, Kirti Sri Rajasinha openly converted to Buddhism and became its patron. During his reign the *sangha*, the order of monks, was revived. The festivals were intensified and temples renovated and rebuilt. This king's affiliation with the *sangha* may well have served a political purpose because it created a power block against the Sinhalese nobles.

Dewaraja points out however that if this was the king's goal, he greatly failed. In the 1760s the main priests and monks were all of noble, *radala*, background and consequently had strong family ties with the Sinhalese aristocracy. These families monopolized the high positions in the temples and made sure that no one of lower caste than *radala* could enter the higher orders. At the same time, the reorganization of the Buddhist institutions served as another factor in the factional battles among the aristocracy. For example the members of the two main temples in Kandy, Malvatta and Asgiriya, were constant rivals for the privileges of the king. Kirti Sri centralized the order of the *sangha* by making the chief priests, or *maha nayakas,* of the Malvatta and Asgiriya temples heads of all the minor temples in the country. As noted above, the temple lands were free of the *disāvas*' and *adigār*s' jurisdiction; instead jurisdiction was held by these *maha nayakas*. During Kirti Sri's reign, many of the king's lands were transformed into temple lands, which gave the monks a strong landed base and paradoxically connected them once more with the internal politics in the country.

The revival of the festivals served as an instrument to display the social order in the country, stressing the subordination of the aristocracy to the king.[82] Thus strangely enough, a Buddhist revival that had started out in the seventeenth century to free the *sangha* from its worldly attitude, eventually led to an even stronger tie between government and religion. It must be mentioned though that the revival also led to a renaissance in literature and an increase of knowledge and education. Writings of priests like Samarananka in the mid-eighteenth century and his successor Moratota in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries bear witness to this. The Buddhist revival was not limited to the Kandyan highlands of the country, but also spread to the maritime districts. This led to the bloom of the Mulkirigala monastery near Tangalle, whose head had been appointed as chief monk of the maritime provinces.[83]

To conclude then, the Kandyan Kingdom was characterized by a fragile stability, with a king with foreign roots constantly engaged in keeping his power centralized. His main tool was to play his nobles against each other through three officially independent institutions: his palace, his provincial administration and his temple organization. Despite the system of checks and balances, the king was in practice highly dependent on the

nobles, and effective power appears to have been in their hands. There are certainly good examples of nobles who collected various offices simultaneously, which implies a concentration of local power with some individuals. Furthermore, there were other means to undermine the system of checks and balances. People running the *vihāres* were often related to the noble families, and many of these family members in turn entered the palace service. Dewaraja formulates the paradoxical situation as follows: "Although in theory there was a strict division of administrative functions, in the practical working of the Kandyan administration a few families dominated the entire structure. These families often at loggerheads with one another, were again connected by marriage."[84]

Considering the vague and unfeasible goals of the Company on the island and the vulnerable political organization of the Kandyan Kingdom, it is not surprising that the relationship between the two remained tense after the intial wars between 1638 and 1678. As shall be seen, while the Nāyakkars were brought in as stranger kings as a means to keep the Kingdom together and at first were successful in resisting the Company's infiltration, they later became a bone of contention among the nobles, who started to search for other options.