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

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CHAPTER SIX

ISOLATION AND DESINTEGRATION:
THE KANDYANS AND THE DUTCH

Thus far, the last years of Dutch-Kandyan relations have been left aside. Usually the war of 1762-1766 is seen as the last major upheaval in the relationship between the Dutch colonial government on Ceylon and the court of Kandy. Now that we know how much the policy of the Dutch government on the island was changing, and the extent to which it was more and more focused on the interior of the island, we may wonder whether this relationship was as tranquil as it is usually described. Moreover, considering the fragile state of the Kingdom it is unlikely that the political tensions within the Kingdom that were so characteristic for the 1750s and 1760s faded away entirely. Picking up where we left off in Chapter Two, we should examine how the relationship between the two political entities on the island fared after 1766.

6.1 *Diplomatic relations after 1766*

In relation to Kandy, Dutch official policy aimed to abide by all articles that were settled in the treaty. After 1766, the yearly embassies continued to be the main feature of the Dutch-Kandyan diplomatic relationship, but it was decided to drop all degrading rituals, which the Dutch had had to perform in earlier times. Embassies now went back and forth, the Kandyans usually arriving in Colombo in January, and the Dutch travelling to Kandy in March or April. The Dutch government of Ceylon had lost its vassal-status and was considered as equally sovereign on the island. At the same time economic control which the Dutch had held over the Kandyan territory grew even tighter.³⁵⁴

The settlement was very advantageous for the VOC. Its subjects were allowed to peel cinnamon in the king's territories every season, as far as the mountain of Ballane, although as in former times they had to officially request permission for this at the yearly embassy. In addition, the Dutch were now in a good bargaining position since they had gained possession of the coastal salt pans near Puttalam on the west coast, north of Colombo, and near Matara in the southeast, which had formerly been in Kandyan hands. Thus, in exchange for a permit to peel cinnamon, the Dutch allowed the Kandyans to collect salt in their maritime districts.

A second advantage was the exclusion of the Kandyans from contacts with foreigners, especially other Europeans. The Dutch feared that the Kandyans would otherwise seek to challenge the Company's cinnamon monopoly by calling in other European powers to establish themselves on the island. Contact with South Indian powers also had to be conducted through the Company. Even when relatives of the king had to travel to and from Madurai or if brides for the king had to be collected in South India, the co-operation of the Company was requested.³⁵⁵

The treaty made it possible for the Dutch to enforce a policy of isolation of the Kandyan Kingdom and of making it totally dependent on them for their contact with the world beyond Ceylon. Isolation of the Kingdom was what they had always aimed for, but they were now in a much better position to impose it. The Kandyans on the other hand never fully complied with all articles of the treaty, which they felt had been imposed on them, yet in the years immediately after the war, fear of Dutch aggression prevented them from disputing the treaty. For about sixteen years after the conclusion of the treaty, Dutch-Kandyan relations were relatively smooth apart from some disputes on the establishment of the new borders.³⁵⁶

By the end of the 1770s, Kandyan courtiers tried to contact the French through their South Indian relatives.³⁵⁷ These efforts came to an end in 1782 when, during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, Trincomalee was occupied by the British, who immediately began negotiations with the Kandyans through their ambassador, Hugh Boyd.³⁵⁸ The British sought to conclude a treaty with Kandy to oust the Dutch. Remarkably enough, the Kandyans decided not to go into further dealings with the British.³⁵⁹ Despite its limited results, Boyd's mission placed the Dutch in an awkward position. They had to be grateful now for the Kandyan court's not taking its chances with the British. Understandably, the court expected something in return. L. Wagenaar has described how in 1782 the degrading rituals at the yearly embassies to the court were reinstated despite Dutch opposition. The Dutch could not refuse to comply, because Hugh Boyd had performed all the rituals at his embassy earlier that year and they feared that if they refused the Kandyans would decide to ally with the British after all. Wagenaar also points out the court's increasing demands for a return of the ports in the Puttalam area.³⁶⁰ Indeed, after 1782 it was this issue that defined the relationship between the two powers.

At their yearly embassy in the spring of 1784 the Dutch came to understand that they were not allowed to peel cinnamon in the king's land because of the ports question. Governor Falck attempted to soothe the Kandyans by stating that it was only because of the threat from other Europeans that the shores could not be given back. He argued that this was even to their own advantage because the Dutch were protecting them

from European invaders. He also maintained that not giving permission to peel the cinnamon was an absolutely unacceptable act between two friendly powers.³⁶¹ During the visit of the Kandyan embassy to Colombo in January 1785, Falck pointed out desperately that it really was not up to him to hand back the ports, but that it was something that could only be decided by his superiors.³⁶²

In his last years as governor, Falck could not take a firm line anymore towards the court. In a final attempt to appease the court he approved of the Kandyans sending a letter with similar requests to the *Heren Zeventien* in the Netherlands via commander Jacob Pieter van Braam who was at that moment passing Sri Lanka with his squadron. This was obviously an attempt to put off giving a final answer to the Kandyans, but also placed the responsibility of further developments with his superiors. It is clear that the Boyd episode had given the Kandyans a new bargaining position which led to a new crisis in the relationship between the Kandyan court and the Dutch. It was however not Falck who had to deal with this new situation, since he passed away on 6 February 1785.³⁶³

6.2 Official policy 1785-1795

To understand how Dutch policy towards the Kandyans evolved, it has to be remembered where and how this policy was determined. Following the line of authority in the organization of the Dutch East India Company, the decisions made by the *Heren Zeventien* in the Netherlands concerning policy in Asia were conclusive. In practice however, the High Government at Batavia, being much closer to the scene of action, had a more immediate influence on the policy that Company officials in the outposts had to bring into effect. The hands of the governor of Ceylon were tied, and the possibility of conducting an independent policy in any field were limited because he had to account for all decisions and expenses made. With Batavia about a two months' sail away, the decision-making process was slow, and only in emergencies could the governor act on his own responsibility.³⁶⁴

As we saw above, Dutch power and prestige on the island was seriously harmed after the English occupied the harbour of Trincomalee and the Kandyans dared to revive their claim to the coastal ports. The letter the Kandyans sent to the Netherlands in 1785 was not answered directly, although both in the Netherlands and in Batavia it was determined that none of the coastal possessions of the Company were ever to be given up.³⁶⁵ Governor Van de Graaff, Falck's successor, considered it unwise to convey this message to the court straight away, and with Batavia's consent, he tried negotiation, offering a share in the trade in areca nuts and

elephants with the Indian continent on condition that Kandy would give up the demand for the shores.³⁶⁶ At the same time Batavia stationed extra European mercenary regiments on the island for defence against foreign nations, thereby re-establishing the power of the Dutch after the debacle of Trincomalee and intimidating the Kandyans. Batavia firmly adhered to its strict policy which Governor Van de Graaff and his successor Van Angelbeek had to uphold despite Kandyan pressures. Obviously the High Government had placed its Ceylonese deputies in a difficult position.

With the tension between the two powers building up in the last years of Falck's reign, it is remarkable that Van de Graaff managed to relax the situation as quickly as he did. After his accession to the office of governor in 1785 he declared to his council that it was his intention to make the Company independent of the court as soon as possible. By speeding up the creation of cinnamon plantations in the Colombo and Galle district, he hoped that the Company would soon be self-sufficient in the production of this valuable spice. Up to that time, he would make use of the salt boycott whenever necessary to put pressure on the Kandyans, and also took serious measures against salt smuggling.³⁶⁷ From his reports we learn that his policy of pacification was successful, and that he managed to control the crisis. Until 1789, the reports of embassies are positive, the Company was free to peel cinnamon in the Kandyan territory and the relationship seems to have been cordial.³⁶⁸ Though yearly requests for access to the shores continued, these were usually left undiscussed. Batavia appears to have been content with this and agreed with Van de Graaff that the negative answer of the *Heren Zeventien* to the Kandyan demands should be postponed for as long as possible, certainly while the Kandyans were well disposed towards the Company.³⁶⁹

From 1789 onwards, a new phase of Dutch-Kandyan relations commenced that is quite difficult to unravel because the two main sources dealing with this period are contradictory and it is difficult to get a grip on the real motives behind the plans and schemes that were proposed. These will be discussed later. Here it is sufficient to note that relations were strained and that Van de Graaff, encouraged by secret contact between his own *mahāmudaliyār*, Nicolaas Dias Abeysinghe, the king's first *adigār* Pilime Talawe, and the *basnāyaka nilamē* of Sabaragamuwa Eknelligoda, made plans for war.

If we are to go along with Van de Graaff, developments that led to the absolute deterioration of Dutch-Kandyan relationships were as follows. From 1789 the request for the harbours was revitalized and he could no longer postpone conveying the message from the *Heren Zeventien* that they did not want to compromise on this issue and that by no means were any of the harbours to be given up to the Kandyans. Moreover, the cinnamon peelers were continuously hindered in their work, especially in the

Sabaragamuwa *disāvany*. This was discussed at the embassy in February 1790, but the Kandyans denied any role in this, and in fact they accused the peelers of stirring up the inhabitants of that district. In the end peeling was not forbidden, but it was not explicitly allowed either.³⁷⁰ As a consequence, Van de Graaff decided to close all saltpans for the Kandyans. Next, there was a rumour that Kandyan soldiers were mustering at the border crossings (*gravetten*) and he decided to close these and put his garrisons on standby.³⁷¹ In May 1791, an expedition was commenced into the Sabaragamuwa *disāvany* under the pretext that the cinnamon peelers needed protection. The expedition was supposedly without much risk because Eknelligoda, the *basnāyaka nilamē* of Sabaragamuwa, who held extensive lands in that area, had promised Van de Graaff that his people would support the Dutch. The expedition under Colonel de Meuron lasted no more than four days, having returned because of bad weather and the absence of the promised local support for his troops.³⁷²

Batavia's reaction to this episode was very negative. The Batavian council members wondered whether the governor could not have foreseen the rains, and suspected that other motives played a role in the whole affair. In the meantime Van de Graaff learned that the court had again corresponded with the French in Pondicherry and had asked them for help.³⁷³ This gave him another impetus to pursue his war plans and in the spring of 1792 he wrote another extensive letter to Batavia detailing a new plan of attack. Again he counted on the cooperation of the inhabitants of the Kandyan districts and he intended to conquer the outer districts one by one before marching up to the capital. This strategy was meant to prevent a situation like the one that occurred in 1765, when the Dutch garrison in Kandy was isolated by Kandyan troops and eventually forced to abandon the capital. Van de Graaff was of the opinion that the Kandyans had absolutely violated the treaty by seeking contact with the French. As soon as he found out about it, he had contacted the French commander of Pondicherry and demanded an explanation. The French, still allied with the Dutch, confirmed the Kandyan overture, but assured Van de Graaff that there had been no intention whatsoever to actually assist the Kandyans. The fact that the French proved unwilling to ally themselves with the Kandyans did not matter to Van de Graaff, because according to him the whole affair showed how unreliable the court was. In fact, if he could manage to overthrow the king he already had a pretender to the throne ready to assume his position. This man, Sri Sanka Sarie, was said to be a descendant of the last Sinhalese king of the solar dynasty.³⁷⁴

In the end the expedition was cancelled because of a veto from the High Government, which did not take the French menace seriously and urged Van de Graaff in June 1792 to stop organizing a new expedition against the Kandyans. Batavia felt that the governor was too eager for war

and was afraid that the whole affair would eventually turn out to be too costly for the Company. Apart from this financial argument one may wonder whether a lack of insight into South Asian continental politics could also explain their reaction. In any case, Batavia's firm stand left Van de Graaff in a difficult position.

The response from the Netherlands was rather different. The *Heren Zeventien* accepted the Kandyan-French connection as a *casus belli* and when they wrote their response late in 1792 they expressed their surprise but also their hope that the expeditions had been successful. In South Asia, European power politics were much more a daily feature of international relations than in the relatively quiet environs of Java, where peace had been predominant for some forty years, and where threat of other European powers was not as apparent as in South Asia.³⁷⁵

The relationship between the governor and the court relaxed a little in the autumn of 1792 when the borders between the two territories were again opened and the Kandyan people could come down to collect salt and trade. Van de Graaff waited anxiously for the first embassy to come down to Colombo; it was beyond his pride to send one up first. Yet as events would prove, no embassies were exchanged between the Dutch and Kandy from 1790 onwards.³⁷⁶ Correspondence between the two parties was now cold and distant. This lasted until mid 1795, when the new Governor Van Angelbeek, confronted with the British ascension on the island, reopened negotiations with the court in order to prevent the Kandyans from siding with the British.

At decisive moments the High Government of Batavia stuck to its own line of policy, ignoring or rejecting the initiatives of the Ceylonese governor. Though the 1766 treaty was and remained the starting-point of its policy, the High Government was not willing to sanction its violation. Batavia feared an enormous increase of expenses if war would break out, that could not be accounted for. Batavia's superior authority to make policy was re-established in 1792, but this severely strained her relationship with the government of Ceylon. This is something which Van de Graaff could not hide in his *memorie van overgave* to his successor and father-in-law Johan Gerard van Angelbeek (July 1794), in which he clearly stated that had it not been for Batavia, all troubles with the Kingdom could have been settled once and for all in 1792.³⁷⁷ At the same time the High Government had grown suspicious of Van de Graaff. This suspicion was fostered by the writings of Pieter Sluijsken, who suggested treason on the side of Van de Graaff and his *mahāmudaliyār* Nicolas Dias Abey-singhe.

6.3 *Ulterior motives: the Sluijsken-Van de Graaff controversy*

In previous chapters we have already come across the writings of the former commander of Galle, Pieter Sluijsken.³⁷⁸ The purpose of these writings was to show how damaging Van de Graaff's interior policies had been to the Dutch establishment on Ceylon and he had some specific criticism regarding Van de Graaff's Kandyan policies. His greatest mistake, according to Sluijsken, was to place his absolute reliance in his *mahāmudaliyār* Nicolaas Dias Abeysinghe, who deliberately set Van de Graaff against the Kandyans.

Nicolaas Dias was the *mahāmudaliyār* of the "governor's gate" from the start of Van de Graaff's governorship, and responsible for correspondence with the Kandyans via the *disāva* of the Three and Four *kōralēs*.³⁷⁹ Sluijsken maintained that under Nicolaas Dias contact between the Company and the court officials became secretive, and he maintained that even the council members were not taken into confidence about the dealings of the Governor and his *mahāmudaliyār* with the Kandyans. Sluijsken makes clear that Nicolaas Dias Abeysinghe and his Kandyan accomplices succeeded for a long time in maintaining the façade that all was well between the Dutch and the Kandyans. In exchange for expensive gifts, they assured the safety of the cinnamon-peelers working in the Kandyan country. According to Sluijsken, Abeysinghe instigated war and unrest in the country for fear of being exposed and both sides' realizing that he had misled them by keeping all the expensive gifts for himself.

He began in April 1790 by instigating the revolt in the Matara *disāvany*, but when this did not have the desired effect he decided to trigger war between the two powers. It was his idea to invite a pretender to the throne to the island. The documents are full of accusations from Sluijsken towards the *mahāmudaliyār* and the governor. In a 1796 account, he attributes the loss of the island to Van de Graaff's careless policy. Had relations between the Dutch and Kandy remained cordial, the Kandyans would have chosen the Dutch side as they had done in 1782 and would have helped Dutch in their defence against the British.³⁸⁰

Now Sluijsken's accusations are certainly sensational and very severe, but one should be careful in using them as authoritative sources. The historian V. Kanapathypillai has accepted Sluijsken's criticism lock, stock and barrel and used them as the basis for condemning Van de Graaff. He does however not explain why he chose to rely exclusively on Sluijsken's writings. What makes these authoritative? The fact that Sluijsken contradicted the official account of Van de Graaff does not automatically mean that his own version was correct.³⁸¹

Any reader of Sluijsken's writings should realize that his relationship with Van de Graaff was a troubled one to say the least. We have seen how

from the end of the 1780s the two men were levelling accusations at each other in official and unofficial correspondence with the Batavian authorities. One of the main problems appears to have been that Van de Graaff as governor tended to extend his authority over the Galle district, which in former times had been governed through the *commandeur* without much interference from Colombo. Van de Graaff, who had many plans for improvement of the agriculture on the island, meddled more than his predecessors with the policies of his inferior officials. In a hierarchical environment where social status depended to a large extent on one's official position, such infringements on another's authority were taken seriously. The interference of the governor with Sluijsken's *commandement* degraded his position as *commandeur* of Galle (which had always been the third-highest position on the island). This in turn may have influenced the latter's relationship with the native elite and with the other Company officials, and it would certainly have given him concern about his further career.³⁸² Considering this background the accusations of Sluijsken have to be taken with a grain of salt.

Sluijsken's criticism is especially thin on three accounts: first, he failed to deliver some crucial information, to buttress his story. For example, we do not learn from Sluijsken what exactly the *mahāmudaliyār* would gain from his machinations. The *mahāmudaliyār* already held the highest position on the island of any native official. He had proven his loyalty to the Dutch during the war with Kandy in the 1760s, and had been officially honoured with a gold medal in 1766. Why would he have risked all this by deceiving his closest ally, the governor? Secondly, we do not learn much about Van de Graaff's Kandyan complice, the *adigār* Pilime Talawa, whom Sluijsken mentions only incidentally. What were his motives? Knowing how important a role that man later played in the affairs with Governor North, it is difficult to believe that at this point he was only a marginal player in the *mahāmudaliyār*'s game. Finally, Sluijsken does not go into Van de Graaff's motives for his supposed deceit, nor why he joined the *mahāmudaliyār* in his war plans in the first place.

Sluijsken also appears to have been badly informed. Some of the incriminating evidence he gives on Van de Graaff had already been dispatched to Batavia. With respect to the so-called secret dealings between Van de Graaff and the pretender to the throne, Sri Sanka Sarie, Sluijsken says he stayed in Colombo when in fact he was sent to Batavia in 1791.³⁸³ Moreover, Van de Graaff had informed the court of Kandy when he had first come to know about this man in the first place. It was only later that he planned to use this person as a puppet in his dealings with the court. Van de Graaff was also quite open with Batavia about the plans he developed in early 1792 to overrun the Kingdom and to take certain provinces in possession by keeping the local *disāvas* as native rulers and allies of the

Company. Van de Graaff also acknowledged the fact that his *mahāmundaliyār* was corresponding secretly with the first *adigār*, although he often referred to him secretly as *den bekenden hofsgroote*, the familiar courtier. Finally, Sluijsken states that when Colonel de Meuron and his troops entered the Sabaragamuwa province, they were chased by the Kandians and had to run back to the borders. Knowing that the *mahāmundaliyār* joined De Meuron on his expedition, it is difficult to argue that he intended the regiment to be attacked by the Kandyans. Why would he have risked his own life? One starts to wonder whether Pieter Sluijsken himself did not have some interest at stake in this whole Kandyan business, and whether this might explain why the governor was so secretive about his dealings with the *adigār*.³⁸⁴

6.4 Revenue and conspiracy

On the other hand, the secret correspondence, which Sluijsken grumbles so much about, is undeniably an interesting factor in the late Dutch-Kandyan relations in this period. While Sluijsken regards the *mahāmundaliyār* as the main instigator of intrigues with the Kingdom, it seems from Van de Graaff's letters to Batavia that the initiatives lay more with the *adigār* than with the *mahāmundaliyār*. Moreover, we learn that other people were involved in the whole plot most important of whom were the high priest of the lowlands, Karatota, and the *basnāyaka nilamē* of Sabaragamuwa, Eknelligoda. It is important to realize that these three men were to play a part in the subsequent British affairs with the Kandyans. Eknelligoda was in fact the person who caught the king at his hiding place in February 1815 and thus sealed the end of the Kandyan Kingdom and the start of Britain's colonial rule in the Kingdom. This complicates the matter, and forces us to look further than Sluijsken's writings and to step into the power politics in the Kandyan Kingdom during the reign of Rajadhi Rajasinha. This will be done in the next part of this chapter.

Van de Graaff's own evidence leads us in the same direction. He states in his correspondence with Batavia that Pilime Talawe, the *bekende hofsgroote*, had asked him in a letter in 1792 to jointly depose the king. Batavia considered this an unacceptable proposal and it made them wonder how reliable this *bekende hofsgroote* could be if he was so disloyal to his own lord. Van de Graaff however used another argument, stressing that the *adigār's* intentions were honest and that all he aimed for was the salvation of his Kingdom. That he was not averse to severe interventions to achieve this goal had to be understood as proof of his noble character.³⁸⁵

From Van de Graaff's later correspondence we finally learn why he was so interested in the conquest of the Kingdom. Apart from the cinnamon,

Van de Graaff was also after the revenues of the lowland provinces of the Kingdom. We saw how when confronted with financial deficits and a lack of rice supplies for the garrisons he worked hard to achieve an increase in the agricultural output of the maritime provinces. The acquisition of the fertile Seven, Three and Four *kōralēs* would yield him more revenue while the occupation of the Sabaragamuwa *disāvany* would ensure enough cinnamon for the Company. However, while Batavia only feared extra expenses from the acquisition of Kandyan territories, he saw in the takeover of the fertile lowland Kandyan provinces a solution to his problems.³⁸⁶

6.5 Political developments in the Kingdom: Rajadhi, his nobles and the Europeans

As said above, the role of the *adigār* in the political game between Van de Graaff and the court of Kandy needs further elaboration. To understand the *adigār's* motives and actions, we need to turn to the political relations within the Kingdom and the role the king of Kandy. We have already seen that in the 1750s and 1760s the presense of the relatives of the king who accompanied him from South India caused tension at the court. Kirti Sri Rajasinha managed to channel this by playing up his divine calling and focusing on Buddhism. His successor was not as skillful in the game and as we shall see, his relatives, called *Nāyakkars* or Malabars by the Dutch, emerged as a strong faction at the court, thereby undermining advantage as stranger-king in the eyes of the Sinhalese nobles.

As the younger brother of Kirti Sri, Rajadhi grew up in Kandy a devout Buddhist. After his brother's death in 1781, he ascended to the throne early in 1782. He is usually referred to as the poet-king, because at least one poem from his hand is known. He was apparently a patron of Buddhism, like his brother, and mention is made of temple restorations and land grants to temples under his name.³⁸⁷ K.M. de Silva even places him on the same footing as his brother, noting that "The Nayakker dynasty, especially under Kirti Sri Rajasinha and Rajadhi Rajasinha, had identified itself with the Kandyan national interest and blended the Nayakker personality into the Kandyan background with consummate skill".³⁸⁸ At the same time neither De Silva, nor anyone else, discusses his policies or relationships with his nobles. Yet a very different picture of this king's government emerges from the Dutch sources.

As we have seen, faction and strife were endemic in the Kandyan court and the reign of Rajadhi was no exception. Hugh Boyd, who visited Kandy shortly after Rajadhi's accession, described the factions at the court as those who were inclined to the Dutch and those who were not. He

ascribes the failure of his mission to the fact that the Dutch-inclined faction was in the lead, and that the king himself could not violate the strongest faction in his Kingdom at such an early stage of his reign.³⁸⁹ Governor Falck did not report much on Kandyan internal politics and faction. Van de Graaff was more actively interested in Kandyan politics and from him we learn that Rajadhi was a playful and politically disinterested king who spent too much time on leisure and left the execution of his government to his Nāyakkar relatives.³⁹⁰ Van de Graaff complained a lot about these Nāyakkar relatives whom he considered a dangerous factor, because of their South Indian connection. He both feared competition in trade and their political alliances in South India. He mentioned several times that the king was placing more and more reliance on them and was granting them extensive lands in the several *disāvanies*. The historian Ralph Pieris has also noted that the king's South Indian relatives occupied the key military positions in the palace administration.³⁹¹ This is an important observation and though several historians have contested this, it is corroborated by information from the Dutch sources. According to Van de Graaff, this even led to unrest in the *disāvanies* because the Nāyakkars oppressed the people in the provinces.³⁹²

In the spring of 1792, while fully occupied with the development of his war plans, Van de Graaff wrote a pamphlet to be sent into the various *disāvanies* through which his army marched. The purpose was to assure the inhabitants of his good intentions. What really stands out in the pamphlet is that the derogatory tone he took towards the Nāyakkars: they are described as harmful for the Sinhalese nation, vengeful, oppressive and absolutely unreliable. It is easy to write this off as sheer propaganda. But Van de Graaff would not specifically mention the Nāyakkars as a negative power in the provinces if he did not think it would strike a chord. This would only have decreased his credibility in the eyes of the intended readers. Clearly Van de Graaff was appealing to existing sentiments among the higher echelons of Kandyan society, probably prompted by his accomplice Pilime Talawe.³⁹³

Van de Graaff and Pilime Talawe had a very good relationship. Until 1790, Pilime Talawe was *disāva* of the Three and Four *kōralēs* and he was usually present at the embassies sent by the king to Colombo. Any suspicious reader of the reports of these embassies would wonder whether information was omitted. Only the official meetings were reported upon, but from these it is clear that there were several instances each year when the governor spoke to Pilime Talawe alone. This usually happened after the first audience, when the governor offered the *disāvas* a tour around the castle of Colombo, or invited them for a demonstration of the cannons. Whatever was discussed during those tours was never mentioned in the reports.³⁹⁴

It can be argued that Pilime Talawe's rise to power was connected to his good relations with Van de Graaff. This assumption is reinforced by the following example. Some time before Pilime Talawe was appointed first *adigār*, we find the governor writing to Batavia for permission to give Pilime Talawe two thousand *pagodas* (c. 4,000 rixdollars). The reason for this was that this money had to be given to the king for the journey of some of the his Nāyakkar relatives to the coast. When one considers that offices were usually bought in the Kandyan Kingdom and that money was scarce, the timing makes it very likely that the money was to serve at the same time as a gift (payment) for the office of *adigār*. The governor had given Pilime Talawe the ability of offering the highest bid. Obviously, for the Dutch governor it was advantageous to have Pilime Talawe as most powerful man in the Kingdom because he could then direct the official relations with the court.³⁹⁵

It is not unreasonable to suggest that the rival faction of Pilime Talawe, composed of Erevvala, Leeuke, and Dumbara, was backed by the Nāyakkars. In the end, that was the only other source of money to pay for offices. They attempted to restrict Pilime Talawe's rise to power by seizing his authority over the Sabaragamuwa districts, and Erevvala was raised to the office of second *adigār* in 1792. General unrest in the Kingdom in the 1790s can be detected from the many shifts in offices within only a few years. In this case, the system of checks and balances worked against the interest of the king, since Eknelligoda, the *basnāyake* of Sabaragamuwa, who held extensive lands, sided with Pilime Talawe thus ensuring that the latter maintained an influential position in this province, despite the fact that his opponent Leeuke was now in charge of it.³⁹⁶

Not only did the king lose his power over some of his nobles due to Dutch intrigues, even his control over the *sangha* was loosened. Arguments with the lowland head-priest Koratota over the control of the temple of Buddha's footprint at Adam's Peak, Sri Pada, led to a breach between Koratota and the king. Koratota decided to ally himself with Van de Graaff, who accordingly gave him a yearly stipend of 25 rixdollars. Koratota, who sought the priesthood of Sri Pada, even encouraged Van de Graaff in 1792 to conquer the Sabaragamuwa province.³⁹⁷ Later Koratota allied with the British, and was highly esteemed by them. He had good relations with John D'Oyly and instructed him in the Sinhalese language. In the early nineteenth century, the Kandyan king completely lost control over the *sangha* when the *maha nayaka* Moratota was also set against him.³⁹⁸

Active Dutch intriguing in Kandyan affairs in the 1780s proved the first step in the collapse of the Kingdom. The economic isolation of the Kandyan Kingdom and its decentralized power inevitably brought further

misfortune. From Van de Graaff's war plans we can conclude that disintegration was exactly what he and the *adigār* were aiming at. He wanted to conquer the provinces one by one, and make the nobles collaborate with him. They would be left in power, but the Company, acting as a stranger-king amidst the Kandyan nobles, would pocket the larger share of the revenue of these provinces.

It is attractive to understand the whole affair as a political solution of the Sinhalese nobles to get rid of their competitors, the Nāyakkar relatives of the king. The king had been invited as stranger, and to balance the power between the Sinhalese nobles he had allowed his own relatives to become far too involved in local politics and thereby turned into a local power factor. That is why the Sinhalese nobles searched for a new outsider to strengthen their power and found this in the person of the Dutch governor. As we shall see, the troubles within the Kingdom were far from over and in the end this played a large role in the final subjugation of the Kingdom by the British.

6.6 *The aftermath: Batavia's opposition and the fate of Van de Graaff*

Under Governor Van de Graaff the administration of Ceylon began to drift away from Batavia and set its own course. Naturally this caused opposition from Batavia. The great expenditures, the troubles with Kandy and the rebellion in Matara worried the High Government. In the Netherlands the *Heren Zeventien* were pleased with the development of the cinnamon plantations. When it was announced that Van de Graaff was to come to Batavia to serve as director general his enemies made sure that Batavia was kept informed about his schemes and cast him in the worst possible light. Van de Graaff's fate in Batavia was tragic; he never gained the seat of director general and was sent away from Batavia in 1796. And while he quarreled in Batavia, his prophesy came true: the British attacked Ceylon.

