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

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Citation

Schrikker, A. F. (2007). *Dutch and British colonial intervention in Sri Lanka, 1780 - 1815: expansion and reform*. Leiden: Brill. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/5419>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE COLONIAL PROJECT COMPLETED:
THE FALL OF THE KANDYAN KINGDOM

In the preceding chapters on the development of British policies on the island, Kandy was discussed only sporadically, but it certainly deserves more attention. If we can identify Governor Maitland as the one who laid the foundation of the definite reorganization of the British administration, his successor Robert Brownrigg should be singled out as the governor who took care of the formal political unification of the island under the British flag in 1815, thereby completing the colonial project in Ceylon. A lot has been written about the fall of the Kingdom of Kandy and it is usually seen as an isolated incident that came about as a result of either British expansionist attitudes or the tyranny of the last king. However, as has been pointed out earlier, the Kingdom suffered from continuous political tension in the late eighteenth century, and this tempted certain nobles to intrigue with Van de Graaff. At the same time, the Dutch Governor thought that the acquisition of the Kandyan territories could solve his financial troubles and increase the necessary agricultural output to feed the labourers on the plantations and the soldiers in the garrisons on the coast. The literature generally fails to connect the breakdown of the Kingdom with other long-term political developments on the island. Here I will attempt to fill this gap and present a fresh view on this episode of Sri Lankan political history.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first deals with official and unofficial policies towards the Kingdom adhered to by British governors and their superiors. In this analysis both external, “global” factors and local factors that affected the policy are taken into account. The second part deals with the “Kandyan factor”: how relations between the Kandyan courtiers and the British government were conducted, to understand the effects of Kandyan internal developments on British policy. Finally, I will show how closely Dutch and British colonial policy were intertwined with Kandyan political developments, and how a complicated set of developments led to the fall of the Kingdom.

11.1 *Defining a course: Colombo, the EIC, and the Secretary of State*

In previous chapters we saw how the British lines of authority changed several times between 1796 and 1802. First, the government of the island

was placed entirely under the government of the Madras presidency of the East India Company. By 1798, the government was headed by a governor appointed by the Crown, but the commercial affairs were still decided by the East India Company.⁶¹⁴ Under Governor Frederick North the ties with Fort St George were loosened because he did not get along very well with the Madras officials and was more inclined to work with Governor-General Wellesley at Fort William, Calcutta. Large bundles with correspondence between North and Wellesley, preserved in the Western manuscripts collection of the British Library, attest to this.⁶¹⁵ Finally, after it was decided by the Treaty of Amiens (1802) that Sri Lanka was to remain a British possession, all matters – administrative, economical and military – were decided in London. In the meantime, Secretary of State Henry Dundas had drafted new guidelines for the policies to be followed by the governor of Ceylon. All successive governors received such a charter upon accepting their office.⁶¹⁶ As we saw, this significantly changed how policy was made. With London nearly six months away, there was more latitude for governors on the spot to decide urgent questions.

In general, British governors followed their superiors' policy towards the Kandyans more closely than the Dutch did. However, owing to the frequent changes in personnel and shifting international circumstances in the period under research, the policy of the superiors and their capacity to impose it upon their governors varied quite a bit. Just as in Dutch times, the main aim was to secure a treaty with the king to formalize the relationship with Kandy. In fact the British were negotiating with Kandyan envoys that had arrived at Madras in early 1795 even before they had captured the Dutch possessions on the island.⁶¹⁷

A lot has been written about the British arrival in Sri Lanka and their preliminary contacts with the court of Kandy.⁶¹⁸ After Boyd's failed mission of 1782, contacts were not renewed until the 1790s. Relations between the court and Madras intensified in July 1795, after the landing of the British at Trincomalee earlier that month. The British wanted to gain Kandyan support in their battle against the Dutch, and despite Governor Van Angelbeek's desperate appeals they did support the British. Not aware of the contents of the Dutch treaty, or perhaps too eager to have an official alliance with the Kandyans, the English drafted a treaty that agreed to let the Kandyans occupy certain parts of the coast then in Dutch hands.⁶¹⁹ This treaty was never ratified because the British realized soon enough that the Dutch possessed the entire coast and that if they were to follow in their footsteps, they would also have to hold on to these possessions. Moreover, it was feared that if the European powers arrived at a peace settlement, they would have to return their possessions on the island to the Dutch, and there would be significant repercussions if it was found that they had ceded part of them to the Kandyans. So from 1796

onwards, the policy followed in Colombo and Madras was to obtain a treaty based on conditions similar to those the Dutch had. If that was impossible, it would be better to have no treaty at all.⁶²⁰

The years 1796-1801 were marked by British attempts to obtain such a contract with the Kandyans. Embassies were exchanged and as they had with the Dutch, the Kandyans continuously demanded part of the shore, which the British did not want to surrender. Fearing French intrusion, the British felt rather uncomfortable with the situation.⁶²¹

11.2 *North's ambitions and the first Kandyan war*

From 1800 onwards, approaches by the first *adigār* Pilime Talawe marked the beginning of a new episode in British-Kandyan relations. Governor North started to push his own demands further when he decided it would be a good idea to have a garrison stationed at Kandy. Not only was a treaty with the same terms as the old Dutch one required, North envisioned a British garrison in Kandy of about one thousand men whose avowed mission would be to protect the king. Stationed midway between Trincomalee and Colombo, these troops would also ensure quick communication between the two ports in case of a French attack, and they could be flexibly deployed. North's strategy to station a garrison in Kandy was based on Wellesley's policy of subsidiary alliances in India.⁶²²

In his negotiations with Pilime Talawe, North stressed that he wanted permission to construct a road between Trincomalee and Kandy to facilitate contacts between the two places. Depending on the circumstances the troops could descend from there to either Trincomalee or Colombo. In those days rumors of a French attack were common and the possibility could not be ruled out. Because the troops were to protect the king, he was to bear part of the costs. Long negotiations with the first *adigār*, who seemed to prefer to dethrone the king with the help of North's forces, led to nothing but strained relations between North and the *adigār*. The main problem was that the *adigār*, who agreed to North's plans, could not prove to North that the king himself also agreed to it. North did not want to violate the position of king because it could make him the instigator of war. From the correspondence between North and Wellesley, it is clear that the latter, as North's superior, agreed with and even encouraged this policy. The historian Wickremeratne sees in this proof that the initiative in the negotiations between the first *adigār* and North was taken by North himself, thereby making the *adigār* more a victim of North's plots than the initiator of intrigues, as he is depicted in the British sources.⁶²³ One may wonder whether this is not a simplification of the whole affair, given how much Pilime Talawe stood to gain from the new plan. Moreover we have

seen that intriguing with foreign powers on the island was not a new game for him. This argument will be elaborated upon further down in this chapter.

This new policy, revealed a shift from commercial to strategic motivations in the British dealings with the Kandyans. Certainly, the policy of isolation which North's predecessors had held on to was to some extent inspired by strategic motivations as well, namely to prevent any foreign intrusion. However, North took a more active stance in this respect and at the same time cinnamon, which had always been a major point in Dutch policy towards the court, became only a minor point of interest. The emphasis on strategy in North's policy perfectly suited the spirit of the time, when the British Empire was still expanding at a brisk rate.⁶²⁴ Wellesley concurred with the whole of North's plan, and Secretary of State Dundas gave his final approval from London. Though at first he had been reluctant to allow North to interfere too much in Kandyan affairs, Dundas later argued that even if it would lead to war, not too much damage could be done. It was clear that a Kandyan defeat would not confront the British with a new frontier, and a chain reaction of expensive wars, as had happened in India, was out of the question.⁶²⁵

The secret contacts with the first *adigār* Pilime Talawe were mainly conducted through the governor's *mahāmudaliyār*, Johannes de Saram.⁶²⁶ It was unclear to North whether or not the king was going to agree to his proposals and he gradually lost faith in the *adigār* and started to contact other court officials. By 1802, North was so disappointed that no treaty had been signed that, with disaffection spreading through the Kandyan provinces, he returned to his old accomplice Pilime Talawe. The *adigār* convinced him that the time was good to invade the country since many of the chiefs and the people in their *disāvanies* would readily collaborate with the British. In January 1803, an attack on certain areca nut merchants whom the Kandyans considered spies gave North his *casus belli*.⁶²⁷

Unravelling the episode that followed is complicated by official and unofficial stories of secret contacts and treachery. North invaded the Kandyan territory and even occupied the Kandyan capital, which had been abandoned by the king and his retinue before their arrival. But either through treachery of the first *adigār*, or through miscommunication, the British troops already weakened by lack of provisions and injuries, were ambushed and massacred at the moment they intended to retreat. This offensive act made it impossible for North to negotiate for peace with the Kandyans and they remained in a state of war until he left office, although hostilities remained limited to the border areas.

11.3 *A period of passive appeasement*

When Thomas Maitland was sent to the island to succeed North in 1805, the Kandyans and the British were still at war. Before his departure from London, Maitland had discussed the situation on the island with the new Secretary of State, Lord Hobart. Maitland had studied the papers and had come to the conclusion that there were no valid grounds for seeking possession of the whole island. The preceding war had been costly and had led to nothing. In Britain, willingness to pay for expensive colonial wars was fading and a general cut in colonial expenses was required. Hence already before Maitland departed, it was decided that he should stop the war and attempt to appease the Kandyans. Any negotiations would use the Dutch treaty of 1766 as the starting point, and the plan to place a garrison in Kandy would be abandoned.⁶²⁸

During the six years of Maitland's rule, there was no official diplomatic contact between the two parties, but active warfare was over from the moment he commenced as governor. Maitland stuck to his promise and thereby followed the policy decided upon in London by him and his superiors. Contact with Kandyan parties was kept up through the correspondence of Maitland's secretary and interpreter John D'Oyly. The *mahāmudaliyār* lost thus his traditional position as mediator between the Kandyan court and the government in Colombo. Instead of relying on only one person, contact was maintained with several parties in the Kandyan court. One of the main issues in this contact was the fate of Major Davie, who was kept as a war captive by the Kandyans since 1803. Among Maitland's despatches to London are some agonizing requests for help that Davie managed to smuggle across the borders. Maitland sought his release but was not prepared to use force and Davie died in captivity somewhere in the Kandyan hills in 1813.⁶²⁹

In a way Maitland's policy resembled that of the Dutch who, after the severance of diplomatic contacts in 1792 still honoured the treaty of 1766. Maitland was determined to keep the status quo, staying informed about Kandyan affairs through contacts with monks via his interpreter John D'Oyly. As in the 1790s, cinnamon was receding into the background as an issue in determining policy. But possession of the coastal saltpans proved to be an effective means of putting pressure on the Kandyans. In the last year of Maitland's rule, there were rumours of suspicious moves on the Kandyan side, and after his departure in 1811, correspondence more in the style of Governor North was resumed with the Kandyan nobles.

11.4 *Irresistable temptation*

Finally, on 18 February 1815, the Kandyan Kingdom ceased to exist. It was late in the evening, when king Sri Vikrama Raja Singha was caught at his hiding place by his own first minister (*adigār*) Ehelapola, the British interpreter John D'Oyly, and the *disāva* Eknelligoda. In a violent arrest, described in a vivid account by William Granville, the king and his four wives were stripped of most of their clothes and valuable ornaments and delivered to Governor Brownrigg in Colombo. They were eventually sent in exile to Vellore.⁶³⁰

The coup was the result of collaboration between Kandyan aristocrats and British officials. Under the terms of the so-called Kandyan Convention, it was decided that the nobles would rule their respective provinces in relative independence. In return they agreed to deliver a certain amount of their revenue annually to the British. In justifying the scheme, both parties pointed to the king's oppressive behaviour towards his subjects and emphasized that their pursuit of the king's ousting was first and foremost in the interest of the people. Saving the people from their tyrant king was all that counted and it had been worth surrendering the Kingdom.

The prelude to the final fall of the Kingdom had been launched by Pilime Talawe's cousin and successor, Ahelapola, and Eknelligoda who had also been involved in the secret plans with the Dutch. The latter assured a revolt in the Seven *kōralēs* and Sabaragamuwa, two Kandyan provinces bordering the British possessions. Robert Brownrigg, who succeeded Maitland in 1811, found a cause for war in the otherwise insignificant intrusion into the British territories by Kandyan troops chasing rebels near the Sabaragamuwa borders. He was joined by Ahalepola and Eknelligoda, whose assurances about the state of affairs in Kandy proved correct, and Brownrigg managed to capture the Kingdom with hardly any bloodshed.

Like Maitland, Brownrigg had been cautioned by his superiors to keep expenses to a minimum. In a private letter to Brownrigg written in 1814, William Huskisson, the colonial agent for Ceylon in London, aired the sentiments then prevailing in Britain: he warned Brownrigg that no one was prepared to spend anything on war now that peace was coming to Europe. Moreover, so many colonies had been added to the British Empire recently that military costs in times of peace were already much larger than before the wars, and the government most certainly did not need the expense of another war. He further cautioned Brownrigg of the fear that the governor's military background and inclination would automatically lead to an increase in military spending.⁶³¹

Brownrigg finally decided against the good advice of his friend when

he thought the time was ripe. Assured by the Kandyan chiefs of popular support for British military action against the king, he took his chance. When he reported his success, he was promptly and enthusiastically congratulated from the London office.⁶³² The expedition had not cost much and the additional Kandyan territory would bring in extra income: the Kandyan chiefs were to remain in their position and hand over part of the revenue from the lands under their control. Had London been closer, the home government might have prevented the invasion, just as the High Government in Batavia had vetoed Van de Graaff's plans in 1792.

About twenty years after the fall of the Kingdom, Henry Marshall, a surgeon in the British army at the time, published a quite different account of the fall of the Kingdom. He pictured the Kandyan nobles as selfish, treacherous and unreliable and the British as naturally inclined to imperialist and expansionist acts.⁶³³ Other historians lay the blame entirely with the British. Following Marshall's argument, they emphasize that the British consciously intrigued with the Kandyan nobles and they hold that, even if the nobles were treacherous, the British are still to blame because they really took the initiative in the negotiations and should therefore be considered responsible for the fall of the Kingdom.⁶³⁴

Before further elaborating on these issues, it should be remarked first of all that the unification of the island under the British was not an isolated development, but clearly related to new developments in maritime Ceylon. The British governors were not as secretive about their contacts with the Kandyan nobles as Van de Graaff had been, and coincidentally there are not such severe accusations of treachery by the British governors. However, Marshall's accusations that Brownrigg covered up his real motives when he wrote that he occupied the territories to protect and help the Kandyan citizens are not difficult to accept nowadays. In fact, during the expansionist years of British Empire, it was not uncommon to describe political enemies as tyrants and to use their crimes as a pretext for conquering their kingdoms. Such legitimization fitted the contemporary ideals of progress and improvement discussed in the last chapter, and this example shows clearly how such rhetoric carried a strong opportunistic element.⁶³⁵

Clearly Brownrigg had the same ulterior motives for accepting the offer of the Kandyan nobles that Van de Graaff had had a quarter century earlier, for he was really after the revenue of the Kingdom.⁶³⁶ Just like their Dutch predecessors, all British governors had to cope with serious budget deficits and financial cuts by their superiors. With no funding available for extensive warfare, both Brownrigg and Van de Graaff could only execute their plans with the help of the Kandyan nobles. Still this does not explain the entire context of the intrigues. After all, Brownrigg managed to incorporate the Kingdom without much bloodshed. Did Van

de Graaff and his British successors consciously aim at the overthrow of the Kandyan Kingdom, or was it because of its disintegration that they were approached by some of the courtiers?⁶³⁷

11.5 *The Kandyan factor*

Many historians have accepted Brownrigg's official account placing the cause of the fall of the Kingdom entirely upon the oppressive character of the last king's rule. Central to this view are the facts that the king was a tyrant and that he was an outsider of South Indian origin. A closer look at political developments within the Kingdom is necessary to explain its relatively smooth subjugation.⁶³⁸

If certain Dutch and British personalities played an important role in European-Kandyan relations, the same counts for the Kandyans. Though in theory the king's power was centralized, courtiers heavily influenced his decision-making. We already saw how in the second half of the eighteenth century, and specifically from the 1780s onwards, various power-groups at the court strove for political influence and control in the Kingdom. Each group had different means of accomplishing their goals and in their schemes the Dutch or the competing European powers played an important role. Basically, three groups could be distinguished.

First was the group of the pro-Dutch Pilime Talawa. Second was the faction of Erevvala, who was first *adigār* between 1783 and 1790 and second *adigār* from 1792 to 1798. He was anti-Dutch and looked for other allies. In a memorandum to Batavia, Van de Graaff wrote that

it is well known that the second *adigār* is a cunning and evil man, of totally different principles, who has together with the courtiers of his party, among whom Dumbere and Leeuke, for long conspired to destroy both the court and the Company, and that moreover it has appeared from the intercepted correspondence with the French, that he is the most important actor in the scheme.⁶³⁹

In the British sources, Pilime Talawe only really enters the picture after he had Erevvala and several other opponents murdered in 1798, the same year that he selected the eighteen-year-old nephew of the king, Sri Vikrama, to be crowned. In the course of this king-making process, Pilime chased away the king's South Indian courtiers. These kinsmen of the king made up the third faction at the court. That party, usually referred to as *Nāyakkars* or *Malabars* in Dutch and British sources, is the most obscure to foreign observers but, because of their affiliation with the king, the most debated in contemporary literature. Central to this debate is the question of whether the whole affair should be seen as an early expression of what was later called Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism.

11.6 *The Sinhala consciousness debate*

It has been argued that the Sinhalese nobles of the court deposed their king in 1815 because of their aversion to his ethnic background. Indeed, in the Kandyan Convention, the use of the word Tamil (*Demala*) is strikingly negative.⁶⁴⁰ This issue has received much attention. Some historians explicitly connect it with the current ethnic problems on the island, while others passionately reject the idea. This has led to overemphasis in the literature on the king as an outsider on the one hand, and on the assimilative features of the Kingdom on the other hand. Two lines of inquiry flow from this. The first had to do with the legitimacy of the king as a South Indian ruler of a Sinhalese kingdom, and the second with the degree of ethnic consciousness in the Sinhalese part of the island and the emergence of a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in the same period.

For some scholars it is clear that the Nāyakkar kings were never fully accepted and that a general aversion to their background finally led the people to dethrone the king. According to Dewaraja's study on the Kandyan Kingdom, there were two reasons why a South Indian had been made king in 1739, both having to do with Sinhalese (and general South Asian) conceptions of kingship. Marriages between Sinhalese kings and the daughters of the petty aristocracy from Madurai were already prevalent in the seventeenth century, before the rise of the Nāyakkar dynasty. The selection of brides from abroad has been interpreted as a political move consciously designed to curb the power of rival Sinhalese nobles.

Secondly and more central to Dewaraja's argument is the fact that with the extinction of the other kingdoms on the island it became more difficult to marry a wife of *chastya* origin as was required for a king. Dewaraja accepts this for long prevalent South Indian connection, but when she comes to discuss the origin of the first Nāyakkar king, she strongly emphasizes that in fact he was not of real *chastya* origin. Therefore in hindsight she questions the legitimacy of the Nāyakkar dynasty.⁶⁴¹ By combining this doubt of royal ancestry and the foreignness of the Nāyakkar kings she implicitly justifies the opposition of the nobles against their alien kings, which ultimately led to the deposition of the king in 1815.

K.N.O. Dharmadasa takes the issue of the foreignness of the Nāyakkar dynasty farther still and argues that it was the adoption of alien kingship that triggered the rise of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in the eighteenth century. He uses indigenous poems and songs to underline his argument and stresses that though the first three Nāyakkar kings did relatively well, an anti-Nāyakkar sense was present all the time. He stresses that the Sinhalese political and religious leaders never forgot the kings' alien origins, and in his view the rebellion against Kirti Sri in the 1750s proves this. However, it was not until the last king, Sri Vikrama, behaved so

tyrannically and went against the Buddhist ideology in his policies that the opposition became widespread enough for a rebellion bring about the fall of the Kingdom.⁶⁴²

In a recent interpretation of famous Sinhala war poems written in praise of those who dethroned the Nāyakkar king, Michael Roberts concludes that there was an absolute sense of Sinhala consciousness in this period, and that this was restricted not only to the Kandyan area, but encompassed all Sinhala-speaking people on the island.⁶⁴³ Roberts is careful and precise in his use of the war poems, and while he convincingly shows that these texts reveal a degree of Sinhala consciousness, his conclusion that this consciousness was at all times widespread among all segments of society is not persuasive.⁶⁴⁴ Nor, and perhaps more importantly, does he prove that this ethnic consciousness was a driving force in Kandyan politics and society. The study of ethnic consciousness or identities in the pre-modern era is a slippery field and historians have to acknowledge that identities were not as fixed as they have become in modern times, and that they were usually applied very pragmatically. We may wonder whether this approach really contributes to our understanding of eighteenth century Kandyan politics and society.

Two historians, R. Gunawardena and John D. Rogers, leave no doubt about their objections to such an approach. They convincingly point out the inconsistencies in the former historical representations, emphasizing the long-lasting ties between Kandy and the South Indian kingdoms, the general acceptance of Tamil (Telugu) as a court language, and the fact that after the British take-over of the Kingdom the Kandyans supported South Indian pretenders to the throne on various occasions.⁶⁴⁵ Gunawardena also points out that the extant versions of some of the Sinhalese poems are actually nineteenth-century copies and that their authenticity can be doubted. John D. Rogers has built a similar case against the European sources to argue that the representation of the Kandyan king in British travel writings changed over time. First represented as a Sinhalese king, he only changed into an evil South Indian king when the British needed to convince their audience at home of the justness of their actions.

Unfortunately, none of these historians show a way out of this bickering over sources, the ambiguity and inconsistency of which remains a problem that has not been dealt with properly. It is striking that the available Dutch archival sources of the late-eighteenth century have been almost entirely ignored in these studies. Moreover, the tendency to look at the Kandyan Kingdom as an isolated case and overemphasizing its specifically Buddhist ideological characteristics limits the view of the political processes at stake.

11.7 *The stranger king as political factor*

More exciting views concerning the subject have been expressed by H.L. Seneviratne, J.C. Holt, and J.S. Duncan. Not coincidentally, they hold a more balanced position in the Sinhala consciousness debate and point at competition at the court between Sinhalese and Nāyakkar noblemen. While Holt stresses the importance of economic factors, Seneviratne and Duncan expand upon the ideological factors in Sinhalese kingship. They conclude that opposition to the king was not endemic among the people in the Kandyan Kingdom and that the kings, by fitting into the ideal shape of a Buddhist king, held their position legitimately. However, in his analysis of the building projects of the last king, Duncan shows that he shifted to a more worldly ideology. This estranged the clergy and certain noble families, but he maintains that this did not negatively affect popular support for the king. Only when the building projects demanded an unreasonable amount of labour from the peasants in 1814 did the latter start to oppose the king. Seneviratne rightly points out that although opposition to the king was largely absent there certainly was friction between the nobles and the Nāyakkar kinsmen of the king owing to economic competition. Unfortunately, neither Seneviratne nor Holt expands further on this issue.⁶⁴⁶

Pilime Talawe's palace revolution following the death of Rajadhi Rajasinha in 1798, ironically reveals the more pragmatic attitude among exactly those Sinhalese nobles who were supposedly the great propagators of Sinhala consciousness. Through the reports of Governor North one learns that shortly after his arrival on the island in early 1798, there was great unrest in the Kingdom, and that many Malabaris and certain important Sinhalese nobles were killed and that a Malabari was placed on the throne again. North writes how he took care of the Malabari relatives of the former king who fled to Jaffna: not knowing yet which side he was going to chose, he thought it best to help them to keep all options open. Clearly there was an anti-Malabari or -Nāyakkar attitude among certain nobles at the court, of whom Pilime Talawe was the most outstanding. But ethnicity did not play any role in this political event: a South Indian king was placed on the throne by the same person who was responsible for the killing and chasing away of both South Indians and Sinhalese nobles.⁶⁴⁷

If the political intrigues of British times are placed in the perspective of that of the Dutch it becomes clear that the disintegration and factionalism of the court was an ongoing process. Earlier I have introduced the concept of the stranger king, a concept generally accepted among historians as a political means to channel factions in Southeast Asian political entities in early modern times, and I suggested that this could be applied

to the political situation in the Kingdom of Kandy in the eighteenth century as well. If we accept that his outsider status was essential for a Kandyan king to maintain the balance of power in the small Kingdom, we may arrive at a closer understanding of the political process that led to the transfer of power over the Kingdom to the British in 1815. Moreover, it also helps us to understand the revolt of the Kandyan nobles in 1818. Within three years the nobles had come to realize that they had lost rather than gained power under the British regime, and they intended once more to install a South Indian stranger king named Dore Swami. The rebellion was crushed violently by the British and led to even tighter control over the Kandyan provinces and a sharp curtailment of the Kandyan nobles' autonomy.⁶⁴⁸

What had been happening since the 1780s was that the relatives of the "stranger king" had become more and more established in Kandyan society and became serious economic and political competitors to the traditional nobles. Their inherent proximity to the king, combined with their access to resources outside the Kingdom, endangered the position of the traditional nobles and turned the outsiders into a new political factor at the court. Paradoxically it was because of this that the king lost his important political quality as outsider, which in turn fanned Sinhalese hatred of their king and his "Nāyakkar" retinue. Indeed, as Seneviratne and others have pointed out, their opposition was inspired not by ethnicity but by political and economic concerns. The Sinhalese nobles wanted to replace the king with other strangers, first the Dutch and later the British, to secure and probably also increase their own autonomous power in the Kingdom.

11.8 *A long-term view of Kandy's collapse*

Political factionalism rather than ethnic strife caused the Sinhalese nobles to collaborate with the British and brought about the fall of the Kingdom of Kandy. How these factions developed and the sources power of the king's Nāyakkar kinsmen are difficult to determine, and these questions have certainly not received enough scholarly attention. The literature generally refers to the reign of only two kings: the second, Kirti Sri, and the last, Sri Vikrama. Undeniably, they were the most notable and their policies the most radical of the four Nāyakkar kings. It is, however, impossible to connect the developments in the 1750s under Kirti Sri and those in the early nineteenth century under Sri Vikrama without taking into account the developments in the intervening period. The third king, Rajadhi Rajasinha, reigned for almost eighteen years and it was during his rule that the first signs of disintegration took shape.

Active Dutch intriguing in Kandyan affairs in the 1780s proved the first step to the collapse of the Kingdom. The economic isolation of the Kandyan Kingdom and its decentralized power almost naturally called down misfortune. From Van de Graaff's war plans, we can conclude that disintegration was exactly what he and the *adigār* intended. 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 would pocket the revenue of these provinces.⁶⁴⁹ Indeed these plans are very similar to the ones made in 1803 and 1815.

The faction best-disposed towards the Nāyakkars comprised Erevvala, the second *adigār*, Leeuke, and Dumbere. They gained the lead after the failure of the war plans made by Van de Graaff, Pilime Talawe, and Eknelligoda. After 1792, the Dutch worried that Pilime Talawe was losing his power and influence at the court, and there were rumours that his treachery had been revealed and that he was to be removed from his position as *adigār*. This did not happen, but for some time he kept a low profile and moved to the background. Despite this, Van de Graaff remained loyal to him and in his *memorie van overgave* he once more stressed the virtues of this Kandyan minister.⁶⁵⁰ In the meantime, Erevvala and his party not only contacted the French for support, but the Nāyakkars also requested their South Indian relatives to send troops.⁶⁵¹

It is not clear whether these forces were meant to fight the Dutch or their Kandyan enemies within the Kingdom. Erevvala was the one who in 1782, while still *disāva* of Matala *disāvany*, had enthusiastically invited Hugh Boyd for an embassy to the king.⁶⁵² In 1795, when contacts with the British were renewed, it was again Erevvala they dealt with.⁶⁵³ In fact, until 1798 the British dealt mostly with him, and Pilime Talawe remained on the background. However, in 1798 Pilime Talawe made his move, killed Erevvala, chased the king's Malabari relatives to the coast and crowned his puppet Sri Vikrama thus re-establishing his supremacy over the other nobles.

The Van de Graaff-Pilime Talawe episode even helps our understanding of why the alliance between Pilime Talawe and North failed. The *adigār* wanted to work out the same plan as he had made with Van de Graaff and hoped to work on the same basis of trust. North, as we saw, wanted something else, and was less inclined than Van de Graaff to play the secretive game. After Pilime Talawe's treachery was revealed, the young king grew more and more attached to his Nāyakkar advisers. This increased power of the Nāyakkars finally led to conflicts with those nobles who had earlier been allied to them. This once more underlines the idea that anti-Nāyakkar sentiments were economically and not religiously or ethnically inspired. Though the Dutch sources illuminate certain political developments in Kandy and even show that the Dutch played an active

role in these developments, the story is still not complete. Many unanswered questions about the part of the Nāyakkars in the whole affair remain. What exactly was their power? What lands did they hold? With whom were they allied? What were their intentions? A careful approach is essential though, and one issue in particular that requires attention is that at least some if not all of them used Sinhalese names when performing palace services.⁶⁵⁴

If nothing else, the fate of the Kandyan Kingdom shows the extent to which developments in Kandy were related to developments in the Dutch period and at the same time inherent to the political organization of the Kingdom. The processes of disintegration that irreversibly started in the 1780s could not be ignored by the British and called for a clear response. This is not to say that the British had no ulterior motives: North wished to secure Kandy as a military base, while Brownrigg saw in the occupation of the Kandyan Kingdom as a solution to the island's financial troubles.⁶⁵⁵