

## VIMALA DHARMA SURYA II (1687-1707) and HIS RELATIONS WITH THE DUTCH

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Vimala Dharma Surya II had inherited a number of problems from his father, but he did not inherit the drive and energy needed to attempt a solution of them. Having been brought up in seclusion for a greater part of his life for reasons of security, probably in a monastery, he was handicapped by being out of touch with affairs of state and the ways of the world in which he now found himself. Evidence is almost unanimous to suggest that he was of a deeply religious temperament, and he was credited with other such qualities as gentleness and good nature that went with it. The most independent confirmation of this comes from an English fugitive from Kandy, William Hubbard, one of those who had been taken in captivity along with Robert Knox and fled to Colombo in 1703.<sup>1</sup> This mild disposition and lack of experience in state craft would certainly have resulted in making him a much less forceful personality at court than his father Raja Sinha. It is reasonable to assume that both the court nobles and dignitaries of the Buddhist hierarchy had opportunities for a greater display of influence and power than they did under his predecessor.

The actions of his predecessor Raja Sinha in the twilight of his reign had cleared considerably the atmosphere of ill-will and mutual fear that had pervaded relations between the Dutch and Kandy in the past twenty years. These acts, together with Governor Pyl's tactical policy, had re-established contact on a superficially friendly basis between the two and this was no doubt a happy position from which the new king could begin. But this new camaraderie was essentially skin deep and there were many outstanding problems awaiting solution. The challenge posed by the second phase of territorial expansion of the Dutch and the threatened encirclement of the Kandyan Kingdom had not been met as yet. All that Raja Sinha had done had been to halt their advance but the gains made were to a large extent still in their hands. They had, no doubt, evacuated the more remote lands of Panama and the Lewayas in the South East and the Attakalan, Kuruvita and Kukule

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1. William Hubbard, fellow prisoner of Knox in Kandy, by S. Arasaratnam, *University of Ceylon Review*, April 1961, p. 34.

Korles in the highlands. But there was still a considerable extent of territory in their hands in the South and the South-west.

The trade blockade and the control of all points of entry into and exit from the kingdom, was what hurt the Kandians most. Increasingly, this became the real concern of Kandyan policy in the succeeding years. Pyl had raised some of the more drastic restrictions imposed by Van Goens, but the authorities were not very enthusiastic about this and he had to proceed very cautiously. All the Eastern ports were in Dutch hands and Puttalam, the only port in the King's possession, was guarded by armed sloops. All arecanut had to leave through Dutch ports and it was only here that cloth could be brought in. Cloth was in any case a Dutch monopoly. This denial of free trade and the absence of ready outlets for their produce, caused a great loss of revenue which was felt by the royal administration, the chiefs of the court and the province, and the people. The Dutch stopped the process of liberalisation of trade because, with the accession of a new King and the consequent uncertainty of policy, they did not want to lose the advantages they held.

If the King was to break through this chain, he had to take the initiative. Whatever benefits could have been achieved as a result of Raja Sinha's policy ended with him. Now the Dutch were content with marking time and watching the situation. The urgency of some years ago, to come to terms with Kandy at whatever cost, was not there. They had a lot to bargain with. Dutch policy in South Asia was now controlled by Adrian van Rheede, ennobled as Heer van Meydrecht and appointed Commissioner for the Company's affairs west of Malacca. As a subordinate Officer in Ceylon in the time of Van Goens he had been an opponent of the latter's policy and had favoured a settlement with Raja Sinha. Now his line had changed considerably and under his influence Pyl too changed. They were now of the opinion that the only security of the Dutch lay in their strength and not in any accommodation entered into with the King. A settlement was desirable but it was not to be achieved at the cost of conceding too much to the King.<sup>2</sup>

On the occasion of the investiture of the new King, it was found that a number of Sinhalese from the low-country proceeded to Kandy to pay homage to him. The Dutch were greatly alarmed at this. An even more singular incident occurred immediately after. Some chiefs arrived with an *ola* from the King conferring the village of Weligame on the sea coast between Galle and Matara on the Basnayake, a Sinhalese officer of the Governor's gate.<sup>3</sup> The Dutch considered it high handed that the king should present to one of their subordinate servants a village which they had been in possession for about half a century. It was the King's way of asserting his rights over the lowlands and was an ill omen for the future. A further request was made to exercise

2. S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon 1658-1686*, (Amsterdam, 1958), pp. 105-107.

3. Minutes of Political Council of Ceylon, 1 November 1699. Dutch Records No. 37, (Ceylon Government Archives, Nuwara Eliya), p. 366.

control over the major Buddhist shrines and places of pilgrimage in the low country, with a view to rehabilitate them and recover them from decline. The King was keen to assume and act upon his role as the protector of Buddhism throughout the island, and herein is seen the religious aspect of his policy towards the Dutch occupied parts of the island. He was particularly keen on rebuilding the neglected temple of Kelaniya, a few miles from Colombo, where a few years later he sent his Maha Nayake with a large following to attend to this work.<sup>4</sup> This activity too was no less annoying to the Dutch than the earlier one. They did not want to see the existence of a popular and flourishing centre of Buddhist worship so near to their centre of power, which would attract not only the Buddhists of the area but also, and this was what they feared most, make the newly converted Sinhalese Christians falter in their loyalty to the church and take them back to their traditional faith. From now on the King's concern for Buddhism throughout the island is reflected in various acts that he committed in his reign and becomes an important facet of Kandyan policy.

Of more immediate practical concern to both parties was the question of the harbours and policy towards trade. From the outset, the King's envoys made it very clear to the Dutch, that the Kandyans desired to participate fully in the trade of the island and share in its fruits.<sup>5</sup> They demanded the right to export the produce of their territories from South Indian ports in their own or hired vessels, and to bring in all the cloth their subjects needed. For this purpose it was necessary that the two ports, Puttalam in the West, and Kottiyar in the East, should remain open and free and, indeed, in the full possession of the King. The extent to which Kandyan interest in trade had grown may be gauged from the fact that now they demanded the right to export cinnamon to the Netherlands in the company's vessels on the King's own account. There was a great awareness of the possibilities of trade and a greater knowledge of what the Dutch were reaping as a result of their trade monopoly. There is also another aspect to this growing desire to keep open Kandy's outlets to the world round it. There had been continuous contacts with the Buddhist world of East Asia for centuries. These contacts had been cut off for some time after the predominance of the Portuguese in Ceylon and throughout the 17th Century because of the unrest and political uncertainty in the island. Sinhalese Buddhism was now anxious to revitalise itself by renewing these contacts and for this purpose it was necessary that the harbours be open. This was then a persistent demand made by all Kandyan envoys to Colombo.

4. Minutes of Political Council of Ceylon 27 October 1699. Dutch Records No. 37.

5. Minutes of the Political Council of Ceylon, July 1688. Dutch Records No. 30, f. 113.

In the face of this Kandyan diplomatic offensive, a policy had to be evolved by the Dutch. The contract of 1638, renewed in 1649, had been signed with Raja Sinha and on its clauses hung precariously the legal justification for Dutch dominion in Ceylon. It was necessary to enter into a treaty with the present King which would define their rights less ambiguously and would serve as a document to which they could appeal with confidence while protesting their rights to other European rivals. The existing position was that the Dutch were keeping the conquered lands as trust till the King paid off his debts to them incurred in this conquest. If the new treaty could put things on a surer footing, so much the better. It had to leave sovereignty in the lowlands unmistakably in the hands of the Dutch. Secondly, it would have to do something about the relation of the King and another European power. At present, there was nothing to prevent the King, legally from inviting another power into his land. There had to be some clause, agreed to by the King, which the Dutch may appeal to if any other European power tried to set foot in the island. If they could get the King to agree to these, the rest would be mere matters of detail.

A draft, along these lines, was drawn up in the Political Council in July 1688 to be presented to the King.<sup>6</sup> The first two articles made the Dutch the protectors of the Kandyan Kingdom against all enemies and pledged their assistance against external attack. The third article, one of the two key ones, said that the company would hold the present lands till the debts incurred by Raja Sinha were paid off according to the 8th article of the contract of 1638, or in the alternative that these lands would be given over in absolute possession to wipe off the debts. These lands were mentioned as the Korles along the sea coast from the Walawe Gange to the Kalu Ganga, the island of Pulianthivu on which the Batticaloa fort was situated and the fort and inner Bay of Trincomalee. The fourth article gave the King's subjects free entry into all the Dutch lands for purchase and sale of goods, but cinnamon, pepper, wax and elephants could only be sold to the company. The fifth article, the other important one, forbade the King and the chiefs of his Kingdom from having commercial dealings with any European or oriental nation or permitting any of their ships from coming to the coast of Ceylon. All the goods found in their kingdom could only be sold to the Company. An exception was made with regard to sailing to and from the Kingdom of Tanjore with food provisions. Article six bound the king only to permit the Company to peel cinnamon in his lands. Articles 7 to 10 contained the customary provision regarding treatment of criminals and fugitives, and security against non-fulfilment of trade agreements. By Articles 11 and 12 the King again promised not to have anything to do with the enemies of the Dutch and not to admit Roman Catholic priests and monks into his lands.

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6. *Ibid.*, ff 107-112.

An embassy was to be sent to Kandy with this draft contract and it was to be authorised to discuss it and seek the approval of the King. Opperkoopman Alebos was selected as ambassador. It was realised that the third and the fifth clauses would cause the greatest difficulty in the negotiations. If the King and court were adamant about the opening of the port and the freeing of trade, Alebos was instructed to offer an increase of two to three larines per annum in the price paid to the Kandyan arecanut, and that a tax of 7% would be paid to the King on cloth taken into Kandy. Under no circumstances was he to agree to the opening of the ports. He must try to impress strongly on the court that the opening of the ports would be harmful to the interests of the King and of the Company, and would only benefit the Moors of the Indian Coast. The Company had done and was continuing to do the King great service and if the ports were opened it would deprive the Company of its profit and it would not be able to subsist on the island. The Company would be prepared to grant passes for an occasional vessel to be sent out in the name of the King, with goods. By these arguments and concessions, Alebos was instructed to achieve the end of getting the King's approval for this contract. The embassy left in July 1688 with presents for the King and the chiefs at court.<sup>7</sup>

Alebos was received well by the King and submitted to him the draft treaty. The King appointed Gane Bandare, the chief priest, and some other chiefs to confer with the Dutch ambassador. From the report of the ambassador, it appears that he ran into serious difficulties. The Kandyan deputation was not in a mood to rubber stamp the terms proposed and, as was expected, they seriously challenged the validity of clauses 3 and 5. The old argument over the alleged debts of the King was again raked up and the Kandyans took up the position taken by Raja Sinha years ago that the King did not owe the Dutch anything. They further asserted that it was the Dutch who first broke the first treaty and gave several instances of their violation. Alebos retaliated with his own arguments of Kandyan violations of this treaty and it was obvious that there was no common ground between the two parties. The Kandyans neither agreed to clause 3 which would give over to the Dutch full possession of the coastal lands nor to clause 5 which shut the ports to them. The ambassador bravely stuck to his brief and repeated all the arguments against opening the trade of Ceylon to all but failed to create an impression on the courtiers. He was dismissed from court in September and returned without having achieved his primary aim. He took with him the impression that the Kandyans were full of pride and thought that everything depended on their favour.<sup>8</sup> He had certainly met his match in diplomacy and negotiation.

7. *Ibid.*, ff 114-115.

8. Beknopte Historie, *JRASCB*, XI, pp. 99 ff.

The cold war over the ports increased in intensity. The Kandyans encouraged by the private Muslim traders of the coast, kept pegging away on this issue. They sent vessels from Puttalam in the name of the King with goods to South Indian ports to test Dutch reaction. The Dutch were ever vigilant. They seized the vessels, released only those goods which were the King's own and confiscated the other articles of trade.<sup>9</sup> The Dutch were convinced that the court was being set up on this issue by the private traders who were deprived of their profits by the Dutch monopoly. But it does seem as though the interests of the Court and those of private traders coincided here. Because the more goods came into the Kingdom, the more was royal revenue on customs duties; and if more of the country's produce was sold, there was increasing prosperity in the country. Whereas if all this were channelled through Dutch ports and their vessels there would be a great reduction in the volume of trade besides the disadvantage of being dependent on one power for the entire trade of the country. The nagging desire of the Kandyans to have the ports opened left the Dutch desperate. They wanted to settle it amicably and at the same time not give up their basic position. They were at one stage driven to use the threat of the Southward expansion of the Moghuls in India as an argument on their side. They wrote to the chiefs that the Moghul was threatening to come up to Rameshvaram and thence to Ceylon and that the Muslim traders of the coast would betray this land to their co-religionists.<sup>10</sup>

If they could have come to a new settlement with the King, it was Dutch intention to withdraw many of the forts they had both in the interior and along the coast; thus economising on soldiers necessary to man them. With the failure of this attempt, the attitude of the Ceylon Government hardened. There were to be no withdrawals and no concessions. There was a deterioration of relations leading in 1690 to a war scare, so much so that the Dutch were constrained to bring across about 1300 Indian mercenaries from Madura to be in a state of preparedness.<sup>11</sup> This scare was only temporary for the Court was not inclined to plunge the country in strife again. Good relations were restored with the help given by the Dutch to send ambassadors to Arakkan for the purpose of bringing Buddhist priests to Kandy. On the Dutch side there was the realisation that cinnamon had to be peeled, to a large extent, from the King's lands. Permission was granted every year by the court when an embassy and a gift was sent to Kandy for this purpose.

The Kandyans were not giving up their attempts to get the harbours opened to free trade. Repeated messages were sent by the chiefs to the Governor

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9. Minutes of Political Council of Ceylon, 17 February 1690, Dutch Records No. 31, ff. 50-52.

10. *Ibid.*, f. 53.

11. Beknopte Historie, *JRASCB*, XI, pp. 99 ff.

requesting this. Occasionally, they would try to send out a vessel with the King's flag loaded with some goods to the Coromandel coast. But the Dutch were always on the alert. They would intercept the vessel, seize its contents, pay for them at local prices and confiscate the goods such as cinnamon and pepper. No action was taken by the Kandyans, as they may well have by stopping the peeling of cinnamon. So far they were content with protests and messages and a superficial friendship was maintained. This was partly due to the confidence that Pyl had created in the Court. After a long tenure of office he was succeeded in February 1692 by Thomas van Rhee.

This persistence on the part of the Kandyans, together with some purely economic factors, seem to have persuaded the supreme Government at Batavia in 1697 to recommend a partial liberation of the trade of Ceylon. Now private traders could freely sail in and out of the King's ports with goods other than cinnamon. This was no doubt partly motivated by the good effect it would have on Dutch-Kandyan relations. It was also caused by some other factors. The closing of the Kandyan ports had discouraged the arrival of rice ships from Bengal and Coromandel which usually supplied the country with this vital commodity. This was one trade which it was in the interests of the Dutch to keep going. For the rice was needed both by the community and by their own establishment. Then there was the fact that rulers of neighbouring Indian coastal states where the Dutch enjoyed trading privileges were beginning to complain of the denial of trade in areas under Dutch domination. All these considerations took the edge off the obvious advantages of trade monopoly.<sup>12</sup>

The Supreme Government went even further in its recommendation. Seeing the recurring heavy expenditure on the many fortifications in the island, they decided that there should be a general reduction of their number and a demolition of those they considered unnecessary. Among these they reckoned the two large fortresses of Trincomalee and Batticaloa on the East coast, which they felt should be vacated and demolished or handed over to the King. Now that the trade on the East coast was open to all, there was no point in maintaining these expensive fortifications. It was sufficient if two factories were maintained there in the charge of a few European officers, merely as proof of the Company's rights there and to conduct purely commercial dealings.<sup>13</sup> This decision sparked off a major controversy, reminiscent of a similar one in the time of Van Goens over a similar issue. The Commissary Van Rhee had already considered this and declared positively that the Eastern fortification must be maintained and a considerable power lodged there. The Ceylon Government now echoed these views. They asserted that, if the Dutch withdrew, there would be nothing to prevent the King from inviting some other European

12. Gov. Gen. and Council to Directors, 30 November 1697, Koloniale Archief 1475 ff. 196-7.

13. *Ibid.*, f. 205.

power as he had done in 1672. And once this power set foot on the island, it would be difficult to remove it.<sup>14</sup> The Batavian Government pointed out that the existing garrison was not enough to prevent a large fleet coming in and would, in any case, have to be withdrawn to safer positions. Trincomalee was not easily accessible from the centres of Dutch power in the West. As for the King, it was better to ensure against his alliance with a foreign power by friendship and treaty than by force. And so they proposed that this evacuation should be combined with renewed attempts to come to a treaty with the King. Accordingly in January 1697 an embassy was sent to Kandy with presents to explore the possibilities of a new treaty under the favourable conditions created by a withdrawal from the East coast.

This trend was suddenly interrupted by the intervention of the Directors. They had for some time been of the opinion that too many concessions were being given to the King. They had opposed the conceding of passage to the envoys of the King for the purpose of bringing priests from Arakkan. They had urged that the value of presents given to him be cut down. They had objected to the humble forms of address adopted towards the King by the Governor. Now they positively ordered that the fortresses of Trincomalee and Batticaloa should not be abandoned nor should they be over anxious to come to a settlement with the King.<sup>15</sup> They felt that the Dutch should assert more positively their rights in the lowlands. This attitude seems to have stemmed from a consideration of over-all strategy in the East. In the last decade of the 17th Century the French had appeared in the Eastern waters with fleets of considerable size. The contest had begun between them and the English in Siam, and Ceylon assumed a great strategic importance in relation to this contest. Though the Dutch had taken Pondicherry in September, 1693 they were constrained by European considerations to return it in 1699. In 1697 the old East India Company of the French was reformed radically and was back in the trade with great vigour. In the face of this potential threat, it seemed foolish to the Directors to leave an attractive harbour and Bay like Trincomalee unprotected. In the light of subsequent events, it can be seen how a harbour of this nature was just what the French required in this area. Accordingly, in 1698 the earlier orders were countermanded and ports continued to be garrisoned and occupied.

Encouraged by the attitude of the Directors, the Government of Ceylon also adopted a tougher line towards the King. Van Rhee was succeeded in 1697 by Gerrit de Heere as Governor of Ceylon. Van Rhee had more or less followed the policy of his predecessor Pyl and now recommended to his successor that

14. Minutes of Political Council of Ceylon, 1 November 1699, Dutch Records 37, pp. 356-362.

15. Directors to Gov. Gen. and Council, 27 December 1697, Kol. Arch. 462.



the King 'may best be won by kindness and courtesy.'<sup>16</sup> De Heere did not share this opinion and agreed with the Directors that they should not truck too much to the whims of the King. If they had their way, they would have done away with the annual presents given to the King in return for permission to peel cinnamon. They would have written letters which the King would doubtless have considered impertinent and relations would have deteriorated considerably. They wanted to challenge the right of the King to send his priests into the low country for the purpose of rebuilding some of the Buddhist temples.<sup>17</sup> But they held their hand because the Supreme Government ordered in the strongest terms, even over the wishes of the Directors, that the officials in Ceylon do everything in their power to remain on the best possible terms of friendship with the King and that this was of utmost importance to their interests.

In 1700 the Kandyans closed all the outlets from their Kingdom into the low country and prevented the flow of goods. Strict guard was placed in all the major passes to see that this order was carried out. The purpose of this was to channel all the export of arecanuts and other produce through their own ports of Puttalam, Kottiyar and Batticaloa and to prevent them going through the Company's ports.<sup>18</sup> This measure imposed great hardship on the Company. They missed the food provisions that used to come in from the highlands. They found their supply of arecanuts heavily reduced, not having enough even to send to their own factories in Bengal and Surat. Cloth which they had earlier sold with fair profit now lay unsold in their warehouses. Private merchants were flooding the country with cloth through the King's ports. Even Indian merchants with English passes, probably freighting goods for English privateers, were coming in to share in the trade. Both the Kandyans and the merchants of the Indian coast were making full use of the recent liberation of the trade of Ceylon. The Ceylon Government, reporting these new developments recommended a reversal to the old policy.<sup>19</sup>

Again it was the Directors who ordered a tougher line than the Batavian Government was prepared to adopt. In September 1702 they wrote ordering the immediate closing of the ports.<sup>20</sup> This was given effect to in 1703. No passports were given to the private Indian traders to any of the King's ports. To soften the blow, an embassy was sent to Kandy with a present and a pleasantly worded letter repeating the old argument that if the ports were left

16. *Memoir of Van Rhee to his successor*, 1697 (Colombo 1915), p. 58.

17. Minutes of Political Council of Ceylon, 1 November 1699, Dutch Records 37, pp. 366-371.

18. Gov. Gen. and Council to Gov. and Council of Ceylon, 4 November 1701, Kol. Arch. 839 f. 1125.

19. *Ibid.*, f. 1126.

20. Directors to Gov. Gen. and Council, 18 September 1702, Kol. Arch. 462.

open, the coast Moors would begin their intrigue against the King. It was also promised that the King could send out a vessel if he desired, under Dutch protection. The envoy reported that there was no visible adverse reaction to this obviously unfavourable proposal.<sup>21</sup> The Dutch fully expected something to happen and were on guard. That the Court let this pass, without even a diplomatic protest, was an obvious index to the comparative weakness of the Kingdom and the lack of leadership of her King. The peeling of cinnamon and the transport of elephants through Kandyan territory were permitted unhindered. Their anger may be seen from the fact that the passes continued to be closed and though now the Dutch ports were the only outlet for their produce they would rather leave them unsold than sell them to the Dutch. They also refused to buy cloth from the Dutch and some modification had to be introduced by the latter in their policy. In 1705 they decided to issue permits to Indian traders to frequent the Kandyan ports, provided they first called at Colombo or Jaffna where the Company would have first preference on the goods they brought. Similarly on the out going produce, the Company could first buy whatever quantity it wanted. It could thus keep a check on the quantities taken by private trade.<sup>22</sup>

The acquiescence of the court in these above moves may best be understood in the light of their contemporary needs. Once again in 1705 the King desired to send his envoys to Arakkan in search of Buddhist priests. And for this he solicited the assistance of the Dutch. Of more immediate concern were the attempts which were now begun to secure princesses of the Madura Nayaka dynasty for the Kandyan royal family. This was not a new phenomenon. Its significance now, was that, because of Dutch control of the seas round the island it needed tacit Dutch approval. Early in 1705 the chiefs wrote to the Dutch asking them to grant passage in their ships to two persons from Madura who were obviously acting as middlemen to the whole transaction.<sup>23</sup> To fulfill both needs active Dutch help was necessary and the Dutch did not lose anything by obliging the King. On the contrary, they stood to gain a great deal. They put the King and the Kandyans under obligation to them and could pass off as their great friends. In 1706 two Sinhalese chiefs, Palacumbara Mohottiyar and Uduwutte Muhandiram, embarked in a Dutch ship to Tuticorin from where they proceeded on an embassy to the Madura court obviously on the same errand. They returned in the same manner to Colombo where they were treated by the Dutch with full honour.<sup>24</sup> Connections were established with the authorities in Arakkan for another deputation of priests to visit Ceylon. With both these negotiations unfinished, the King died in Kandy in July 1707.

21. Gov. Gen. and Council to Directors, 1 December 1703, Kol. Arch. 1560, ff. 177-179.

22. Resolutions of Gov. Gen. and Council, 20 October 1704, Kol. Arch. 619, pp. 491-493.

23. Court Chiefs to Governor Simons 1705, Dutch Records 3259.

24. Court Chiefs to Governor Simons, 1706, Dutch Records 3259.

The reign of Vimala Dharma Surya, lasting twenty years (1687-1707), was a period of undisturbed peace and contrasted with the turmoil and conflict of the preceding reign. This period of peace was very necessary for the Kandyan Kingdom and, indeed, for the entire island. The wars and expeditions and the constantly shifting boundaries had adversely affected production and life in the interior villages—a factor which was reflected in the increasing dependence not only of the Dutch establishment but also of the community on imports of food grains. Under Vimala Dharma Surya political boundaries became settled and neither party seemed to have had a desire to change them. This gave the people of the Dissavaniyas of Sabaragamuwa, Four Korles and Seven Korles a greater sense of security. It would appear that the people who benefited most by the settled condition of the country were the chiefs. The opportunity was not used by the King for an assertion of royal authority in the land. Instead it was the chiefs, who as his councillors and administrators of the provinces, seem to have control over affairs of state. All dealings with the Dutch were conducted through them and the former had no direct access to, or correspondence with the King. Though this was necessary as a matter of form to keep up the fiction that the Dutch were the King's officials managing the coast line for him, it at the same time contributed to increasing the political influence of the chiefs and paved the way for subsequent intrigue and interference by the Dutch in the politics of Kandy. Here are seen the beginnings of the emergence of the chiefs as an important factor.

Where the personality of the King did assert itself was in the aspect of religious revival of the period. Wars and unrest, and the preoccupation of Raja Sinha with politics had led to a decline in religion and the quality of the priesthood. Vimala Dharma Surya devoted his attention to the progress of Buddhism. It has been seen that his attention was drawn not only to Buddhist institutions in his own Kingdom, but also to those in Dutch lands. He was responsible for the improvement of Kelaniya as a center of worship. It is learnt from Dutch records that he went on frequent tours of pilgrimage to various shrines in the remote areas of his Kingdom. Perhaps his most significant achievement was the re-establishment of connections between Sinhalese and Burmese Buddhism. In 1697 a group of thirty-three Burmese Bhikkhus led by the great Theras Santane and Lokaragapudgale arrived in Kandy, resided there for a few months, and re-established the Upasampada. One of the consequences of the intense religious devotion of the King was the great influence on him of the Buddhist priesthood. There is enough evidence to show that during his reign the high ranking priests of Malwatte had a great influence in court. The Chief Priest led the Kandyan delegation which conducted negotiations with the Dutch Ambassador Alebos over the draft treaty. Under him Kandyan policy received an emphasis on religion that had been lacking for some time. An unintended consequence of this was to blur the distinction

between low-country and up-country, caused by distinct political boundaries, and to draw together the people of the highlands and the coastal areas through the bond of the common faith. The King did not seek to make political capital out of it, but the Dutch did not fail to see the potentially adverse effects of this trend. Their policy for a long time now was to emphasise the distinction between low-country and up-country, divide the Sinhalese into these two groups, the former of which would be loyal to them and the latter to the King. This trend was no doubt unmistakable and was conditioned by the political facts of the time. But the revival of Buddhism tended to cut across this trend and even reverse it, thus creating in their own lands a counter loyalty to this faith and through it to the King. Though inconspicuous at the moment, this factor was to play an important role in Dutch-Kandyan relations in the course of the next few decades.

The efforts made by the Dutch to sign a fresh treaty with Vimala Dharma Surya and the failure of these efforts influenced deeply their views as to the legal basis of their power in Ceylon. The attempt to legalise Dutch power and secure Kandyan recognition had failed. It was now recognised that they could not go on appealing to the treaty of 1638 because it was, in any case, signed with Raja Sinha and did not necessarily bind subsequent kings. With a view to discovering an independent title to sovereignty, there was an attempt to go back to the theory of succession by conquest from the Portuguese, a theory first put forward by Van Goens. With the failure of the embassy of Alebos, the commissioner Van Rheeде declared that they should now base their claims on the low-country by right of succession from Don Juan Dharmapala to the Portuguese and then from them to the Dutch. This left the Kings of Kandy out of the picture entirely.<sup>25</sup> Succeeding Dutch Governors discussed this knotty problem in their memoirs to their successors. Governor Simons (1702-1707) laying down office in the year Vimala Dharma Surya died (1707) stated the position clearly when he said: "The safest plan would therefore be to base our claims on the conquests made in open warfare on our public enemies."<sup>26</sup> Needless to say, this was not the position recognised by the Kings of Kandy who continued to refer to the Dutch as their guardians of the coast.

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25. Minutes of Political Council of Ceylon, 1 November 1699, Dutch Records 37, pp. 362-3.

26. *Memoir of Simons to his successor*, 1707. (Colombo 1914), p. 15.