

## The Portuguese and Seizure of Batticaloa Fort

Anuzsiya

Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Sciences, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

**Abstract:** It was quite interesting to know about the Portuguese relations in the history of Eastern part of Sri Lanka. Though the principal policy of Portuguese was to capture the monopoly of the spice trade flourished in Sri Lanka, they considered for the capturing of maritime regions of Sri Lanka specially the Eastern part of Sri Lanka. Their policy towards Kandy was also high important for their Batticaloa



Figure 1- Front View of Batticaloa Fort

relationship. The Portuguese captain general in Sri Lanka Constantino – de – Sa was quite keen to capture Batticaloa. This idea was taken by the *Conselho da Fazenda* in Portugal as reflected in the letters of the king to the viceroy during this period (1626 – 1628). The relationship between the Portuguese and the Kandyan king Senarath was also another historical factor for the Portuguese control over Batticaloa region. The findings shows that the capture of Batticaloa was an important strategical location for the Portuguese to rule in this region. The main objective of this research article is to find the reasons and the results of Portuguese intruding in the Eastern Province to capture Batticaloa. The Secondary sources like books, journals and other articles are referred to provide the information to write this research article.

**Keywords:** Portuguese, Batticaloa, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka, Kandy

### INTRODUCTION

After the Global trade communication center Constantinople (Istanbul) was closed in 1458 A.D., there was a great demand for the spices from South Asia. By about 1500 A.D. trade in the Indian Ocean was dominated by Arabs, Indians, Malay, and Chinese merchants who together used various sea faring crafts to transport spectrum of cargo from spices to elephants. In the early sixteenth century a new force, in the form of Portuguese ships with mounted guns, arrived in the ocean. These vessels, with their firepower and capacity, for high speeds, helped implement a policy of control that began to undermine the region's long standing, relatively

open trade competition by the Arab Muslims. First the Portuguese had contacted the Kotte Kingdom in 1505 – 6. The Portuguese were eager to establish hegemony over the entire island. The Portuguese later expanded to the lower reaches of the Central Highlands and annexed the east coast ports Trincomalee and Batticaloa.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this article are 1. to bring out the Portuguese administration in Batticaloa Eastern part of Sri Lanka and the seizure of Batticaloa Fort by the Dutch and 2. to analyze the reason for capturing the Batticaloa Fort by the Dutch.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

K.M.de. Silva's (1981) *A History of Sri Lanka* gives a good deep knowledge on the Portuguese arrival in Sri Lanka and their political, socio, and economic activities. Articles from the journal of Royal Asiatic Society are consulted C.R.de. Silva's (1972). *The Portuguese in Ceylon* talks about the annexure and fortification of major ports Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Related articles and other website information are also consulted.

## **RESEARCH AREA**

Batticaloa East Lagoon area.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To write this article I had followed the descriptive and analytical historical methodology. Site visits are made to get the firsthand information.

## **HISTORY**

The origins of Batticaloa in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka, indicates its rich antiquity tracing its foundation to Prince Vijaya, the chronicle 'Mahavamsa' claim that the region was inhabited long before his arrival. The natives of the region were referred to as 'Nagas' as they believed that they descended from the great serpent and as a civilization they established. After the fall of the Pollanaruwa kingdom, instigated a power in the country. Along with the political change, the significance of Batticaloa grew simultaneously. As a result, it caught the vested interest of the colonial powers. The first coastal region that was seized by the Portuguese was Batticaloa harbor in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka. The Portuguese initially constructed a Fort in the Batticaloa harbor in the East lagoon area. The economic powers of the coastal regions were in the possession of the Kandyan Kingdom. The loss of Batticaloa Fort to the Dutch was



the first of many losses. I குபைரசந 2- ஷாந ீழசவரபரநளந குழசவ இ ி power struggle between the Portuguese and the Dutch came into being.

### **KANDY AND ITS STRUGGLE WITH PORTUGUESE AND DUTCH POWERS**

Rajasinha occupied Kandy, a Sinhalese kingdom in the Central Highlands, about 1580, and its ruler took refuge with the Portuguese. In 1591 the Portuguese launched an expedition to Kandy to enthrone Dom Philip, an heir of the dispossessed ruler. They were accompanied by an ambitious and distinguished Sinhalese military nobleman, Konnappu Bandara. Dom Philip was installed as king but died under suspicious circumstances, and Konnappu Bandara enthroned himself, proclaiming independence from the Portuguese and taking the regnal name of Vimala Dharma Surya. The fall of Sitawake after Rajasinha's death left Kandy the only independent Sinhalese kingdom.

The Portuguese launched another expedition to Kandy, in 1594, under Gen. Pedro Lopes de Sousa, planning to enthrone Dona Catherina, a baptized Sinhalese noblewoman. Popular hostility soon built up toward the seemingly ever-present Portuguese troops. Vimala Dharma Surya took advantage of the agitated atmosphere and, making use of guerrilla warfare tactics, routed the Portuguese army in 1594. He captured Dona Catherina, made her his queen, and legitimized and consolidated his rule. He expanded into the old Sitawake kingdom and emerged as the leader of resistance to the Portuguese. The Portuguese made a few subsequent attempts to subjugate Kandy, but none were successful.

Vimala Dharma Surya realized that without sea power he could not drive the Portuguese out of Sri Lanka. He saw the arrival of the Dutch as an excellent opportunity to gain naval support

against his adversaries. The first Dutch envoy, Joris van Spilbergen, met the king in July 1602 and made lavish promises of military assistance. A few months later another Dutch official, Sebald de Weert, arrived with a concrete offer of help and, in view of favourable terms offered by the king, decided to launch a joint attack on the Portuguese. However, a misunderstanding between the king and de Weert caused an altercation between the Kandyans and the Dutch, and de Weert and his men were killed.

King Senarath succeeded to the Kandyan throne in 1604 and continued to solicit Dutch support. In 1612 a Dutch envoy, Marcelis Boschouwer, concluded a treaty with Senarath. The king granted the Dutch extensive commercial concessions and a harbour for settlement on the east coast in return for a promise of armed assistance against Portuguese attack. The Dutch ultimately were unable to offer adequate assistance, and so Senarath turned to the Danes. By the time a Danish expedition arrived in May 1620, however, Senarath had concluded a peace agreement with the Portuguese. The truce was short – lived, and in 1630 the Kandyans, taking the offensive, invaded Portuguese territory and laid siege to Colombo and Galle. Again the absence of sea power proved a handicap, and another peace was concluded in 1634.

### **King Rajasinha II**

In 1635 Senarath was succeeded by his son Rajasinha II. The Dutch were now firmly established in Batavia (now Jakarta) in Java and were developing their trade in Southern Asia. The king sent emissaries to meet the admiral of the Dutch fleet, Adam Westerwolt, who was then blockading Goa, India. The fleet came to Sri Lanka and captured Batticaloa. Westerwolt and Rajasinha II concluded a treaty on May 23, 1638, (Treaty of Westerwolt) giving the Dutch a monopoly on most of Sri Lanka's cinnamon and a repayment in merchandise for expenses incurred in assisting the king. In May 1639 the Dutch fleet captured Trincomalee, and in February 1640 the Dutch and the Kandyans combined to take Negombo. But differences arose over the occupation of captured forts. The Dutch refused to give Trincomalee and Batticaloa to the king until their expenses were paid in full, and Rajasinha II realized that what the Dutch really wanted was to replace the Portuguese as the rulers of the coast.

Rajasinha II nevertheless continued to work with the Dutch to expel the Portuguese. In March 1640 Galle was taken, but the progress of the allies soon was temporarily halted by a truce declared in Europe between the Dutch Republic and Spain, which at that time ruled Portugal and its overseas possessions. In 1645 the boundaries between Portuguese and

Dutch territory in Sri Lanka were demarcated. Jan Thijssen was appointed the first Dutch governor.

The Dutch Wanted the peace with the Portuguese and occupation of captured territory incensed the Kandyan king and strained relations between him and the Dutch. In May 1645 war broke out between them. Though Rajasinha II could not conquer the occupied lands, he made them worthless to the Dutch by destroying crops and depopulating villages. The Dutch then realized the advantage of coming to terms with the king. In 1649 a revised treaty was signed. The Dutch agreed to hand over some of the lands but again delayed it because of the immense debt the king was held to owe them.

The Dutch truce with the Portuguese expired in 1652, leaving the Dutch free to resume the war. Kandyans launched attacks on Portuguese positions in the interior provinces of Seven Korales, Four Korales, and Sabaragamuwa and pushed the Portuguese back to their coastal strongholds, despite fierce resistance. Rajasinha II was anxious to attack Colombo, but he was put off by the Dutch. He tried to secure guarantees from them for the return of that city after its conquest, and the Dutch made lavish promises. In August 1655 the Dutch were strengthened by the arrival of a large fleet under Gen. Gerard Hulft, and they laid siege to Colombo by sea and by land. In May 1656 the Portuguese surrendered the city to the Dutch, who shut the Kandyans out of its gates. Requests for the cession of Colombo met with evasive replies. Highly incensed, Rajasingha II destroyed the lands around Colombo, removed its inhabitants, and withdrew to his mountain kingdom.

After a brief respite the Dutch resumed the expulsion of the Portuguese from Sri Lanka. Adm. Ryckloff van Goens arrived with a fleet to continue the attack on Portuguese strongholds in northern Sri Lanka. The Dutch took Mannar in February 1658 and Jaffna in June. They had replaced the Portuguese as masters of coastal Sri Lanka.

The Dutch didn't declare war against Portuguese during the period 1642 – 1650 due to the truce between them in the Europe. However, a war broke in 1652 and seized the forts Kaluthara and Anguruvathota in 1655, captured Colombo fort on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1656, Mannar on February 1658 and Jaffna fort in June 1658. Since then, most of the areas held by Portuguese were passed into the hands of Dutch.

On the other hand, Dutch who captured Negambo fort in 1644, tried to capture Sathkoralaya too. But king Rajasingha II defeated them and annexed Sathkoralaya to the Udarata kingdom and Sabaragamuwa if Satharakoralaya in 1652. By 1658, the region from Puttalam to Negambo was owned by the Kandyan kingdom allowing the people to engage in trade with foreign traders. Likewise, by 1656, king had widened his territory to its maximum strength by shattering the belligerent policy of Governor Van Goens.

By the later stage of King Rajasingha II's reign, the cordial relationship between the Dutch and the king showed signs of shattering. The King stated to follow an anti-Dutch policy. He set fire to the regions captured by the Dutch; specially the cinnamon forests. He brought the settlers of those regions to Udarata with their consent or by force and settled them there. As a result, a lot of Roman Catholics were settled in Udarata.

In return, by 1659 Dutch captured the Port of Kalpitiya and in 1665 – 1668 Trincolamalee, Kottiyarama and Batticaloa which were owned by Udarata. Also, they spread their territory to Eastern and South Eastern coast and some regions of Sabaragamuwa and Sathakoralaya. Meanwhile, people were against the king due to his tyrannical acts and a rebel broke out in 1664, which was widely known as the 'rebel of Nillamba'. This was led by Ambamwela Rala. Thus due to the internal chaos, the king was unable to secure his territory.

But later in 1670 – 1675, king Rajasingha II suddenly assaulted the areas ruled by Dutch. He attacked Arippu and Ma-oya area in North West, Satharakoralaya and Sathakoralaya in west, Kottiyarama, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Panama in the east and won them. Thus, Udarata successfully manages the challenge caused by Dutch in 1659.

## CONCLUSION

The Portuguese relations with the Eastern part of the Sri Lanka and commercial Portuguese built their



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commercial and administrative activities and for their security. Though the Eastern Region was under control of Kandyan kings much of the cinnamon trade was carried out with concessions by the Portuguese. In order to capture the fort of Batticaloa the Dutch waged a war with Portuguese and succeeded them. Many peace agreements were also signed. The Portuguese surrounded the city to the Dutch and the Kandyan king was kept out.

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