CHAPTER SIX

ISOLATION AND DISINTEGRATION:
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 traveling 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 cooperation of the Company was requested.

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.

By the end of the 1770s, Kandyan courtiers tried to contact the French through their South Indian relatives. 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. 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. 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. 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