

Hidden Objectives of Frederick North's Treaty and the 1803 Victory of British Protest Battle in Ceylon

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Abstract: This paper is a review of the first treaty proposal of Frederick North in 1800 and Ceylon's first battle against the British rule in 1803. The British conquered coastal areas of Ceylon in 1796. Then they wanted to be dominant in the economic and administrative sector in whole Ceylon. The first British governor of Ceylon, Frederick North, decided that the British must develop state relationships with the king of Ceylon: Sri Wickrama Raja Singha to convert the Ceylon into a crown colony. North appointed General Hay Macdowall as an ambassador to the Kandyan kingdom of Ceylon and ordered him to develop diplomatic relations with the Kandyan king through a treaty. This article, using the historical method, aims to review the content of the treaty, which, North tried to initiate with the Ceylon monarchy and to cogitate the first British invasion of Kandy in 1803, which, was the consequence of North's failed process of establishing a treaty with the Ceylon monarch.

Keywords: Frederick North's Treaty, Embassy of Macdowall, 1803 Battle of Ceylon, Sri Wickrama Raja Singha.

INTRODUCTION

First half of the 19th century is an important era of the Lankan history. After conquering Ceylon's coastal areas in 1796, British then started planning the establishment of their economic and administrative power.

As an initial step to the plan, Frederick North (The first British governor in Ceylon and from here onwards mentioned as North) decided that the British must develop state relationships with the king of Ceylon: Sri Wickrama Raja Singha. He appointed General Hay Macdowall (from here onwards mentioned as Macdowall) as a mayor. Mayor Macdowall was ordered to visit Kandy (the main administrative city of Ceylon) with a troop in 12th of March 1800 by North with the intention of inducting a treaty with the Ceylon monarchy. However, by citing Cordiner, Henry Marshall [1] mentions that this diplomatic visit of Macdowall was planned to distract any strategic thinking of Pilimatalauva Adigar who was the head minister of the Ceylon monarch (Pilimatalauva is known as a Ceylon official who supported British to achieve his personal agendas). Yet, the Macdowall's embassy to Kandy seems to be a visit solely planned on establishing British trade and military authority in Ceylon with the support of the king of Ceylon. The key objectives of this article are (1) to review the content of the treaty, which, North tried to initiate with the Ceylon monarchy and (2) to cogitate the first British invasion of Kandy in 1803, which, was the consequence of

North's failed process of establishing a treaty with the Ceylon monarch.

Content of the Treaty

Macdowall's embassy to Kandy in 1800 is known as an unsuccessful visit as the Ceylon monarch and ministers did not want to sign a treaty that was suggested by North. Rejecting the diplomatic proposal of British by the Ceylon monarchy shows that the Ceylon king and officials cleverly paid more attention to the conditions of the treaty. The conditions of the treaty emphasized following particulars. The British monarch and the East India Company were abided by the treaty to fight against the enemies of the king of Ceylon and to protect the King's seat. The treaty allowed the British to construct forts/ station garrisons to protect the kingdom of Ceylon and only allowed British troops to reside in the garrisons [2]. Such conditions of the treaty reveal that the British had the opportunity to conquer Kandy by pretending to be the guardians of the Ceylon monarch. In addition, the conditions allow the British to develop a huge authority over the military of Ceylon by constructing fortresses with no objections from the Ceylon's governing officials. Another condition of the treaty said that the

Ceylon monarch's orders could only be delivered through the king's head minister to the British troops in Kandy. This condition allowed the British to grant an appropriate authority in Kandy to Pilimatalauva Adigar (king's head minister) who was an ally of the British. Thus, the British could ensure that the rulings of Ceylon king were in favour of the British. Even though the orders were not favourable to the British, Pilimatalauva and the British could have discussions and come to a final decision in favour of the British. As there were disagreements and mistrusts between the king Sri Wickrama Raja Singha and Pilimatalauva this condition supported the British to upsurge the conflicts of the Ceylon king and Pilimatalauva.

In addition, other conditions of the treaty mentioned that the British should have authority over the previous Dutch ruling areas of Ceylon, the British could send their people to anywhere in Ceylon to harvest cinnamon, the British could cut trees and export the trees to their country and the British should be exempted from taxes at the border areas of Ceylon. Should such conditions were being processed by the Ceylon monarch, it is clear that the British could have upturn their economic power. Another condition of the treaty was to establish the legal status of both the British and Sinhalese in Ceylon. During the era of king Sri Wickrama Raja Singha, there was no need of establishing a legal state in relation to the Sinhalese. However, through this condition, it seems that the British wanted to discourage the feudal authority and power in Ceylon by bringing social egalitarianism. There was another condition on appointing commissioners to estimate the income of the king of Ceylon. Further, the condition mentioned that the estimated income would be used to protect the glory of the king, maintain the British troops and to carry on the civil administration duties. Until the estimations were done the King must allocate some amount from the generate income through areca, coffee, pepper, rice, cows and cardamom for the maintenance of the British troops in Kandy. It seems that such a condition was introduced to establish a sole British commercial and administrative authority in Kandy by meddling to the king's business in Ceylon. Further, the condition would support the British to get clear information on the income of the Ceylon monarch and to save the budget of the British on the expenditures of their troops in Kandy.

There was another condition saying that two of the Ceylon Adigars could have their official authority over the British to their death. However, the Adigars authority would be signed to British officers after their death. The two Ceylon Adigars who related with the treaty were Pilimatalauva Adigar and Meegastanne Adigar (the second head minister of the Ceylon king). Both the Adigars were allies of the British and having such a condition was another tact, which was introduced to gain advantages for the British. The

condition on pardoning the citizens who claimed the right for kingship and handing over those citizens to the British custody can be viewed as an important strategy that was planned by the British. Such a condition would become a huge advantage for North to eliminate future local rulers of Ceylon if the treaty was accepted. Another condition that the religion of the Sinhalese, temples and all the Buddhist monks were to be treated respectfully [3]. This clause might be included to win the complacency of the peasants, to achieve the goals of the British, as the religion is a sensitive fact that neither the king nor the ministers could ignore.

When reviewing the Ceylon monarch's response to reject the treaty proposal of North, it can be identified that the Ceylon ruling during Macdowall's embassy was an analytical and deeply perceived reign. The panel of Ceylon ministers did not allow the British to either station barracks in Kandy to protect the king or to meddle with the king's income. By rejecting North's proposal, which was delivered by Macdowall, the Ceylon ministers mentioned that the local military of the king provide the monarch a sufficient security. Further, the ministers emphasised that the only responsibility that the British have was to protect the coastal area of Ceylon from any kind of enemy [2]. According to such particulars, it is found that the embassy of Macdowall in 1800 had hardly become successful in terms of strengthening the military and commercial power of the British in Ceylon.

Other than the first embassy of Macdowall in 1800, there were many negotiations in the first decade of the 19th century in between the British and Lankans. During each of those times, the Lankans did not agree with all the conditions of the British and the Lankans were strategic enough to negotiate with the British to make amendments to the British suggestions by making sure that the people of Ceylon could be in advantage. Hence, it was not easy for the British to conquer Kandyan kingdom of Ceylon and to gain the military and commercial authority for themselves. However, during the Macdowall's visit to Kandy, the British could gain an idea and an understanding of the geographical characteristics of the Kandyan kingdom as well as the weather and climate conditions, illnesses and the available short cuts to visit Kandy from the coastal areas. The British had seen this mission as an opportunity to be informed that they could not easily conquer Kandy with less knowledge on the geography and the access facilities to Kandy.

In addition, North had viewed his failure as being misguided by Pilimatalauva while Pilimatalauva was also hoping that the British would contact him instead of negotiating with the king. By the time, the British and the Kandyans had their own suspicions that they would be attacked by their enemies. The civilians were also informed on such situations and they were preparing for a war situation by evading their habitats

for their own safety. Most of the Kandyan women and children started living in forests and the men by hiding in groups started preparing for battles [2].

Background of the 1803 Battle

North had a huge need of meddling the political administration of the Kandyan kingdom of Ceylon. To do so, he had to have a fair reason. During such a situation, a case was reported on a theft. "In July, 1802, North's opportunity presented itself. The seizure by the Adigar's officials of the stock of areca nuts belonging to two parties of Moor men from the coast had led to a British demand for compensation. The Adigar (the Adigar who was referred in the text was Pilimatalauva) proved dilatory, and North, after six months of unproductive correspondence, decided that the time for intervention had come. On 31st January, 1803, Macdowall again started for Kandy, but this time as an invader" [2]. The amount of areca nuts, which were stolen was around 7,008,000-8,760,000 [3]. (D'Oyly reported this incident in a different way. He mentioned that Pilimatalauva Adigar's people stole areca nuts and cows of the merchants of Puttalam district in Ceylon and the people of that Adigar sold areca nuts, which were worth of 1000 pounds at Ruwanwella, Ceylon [4].

However, Powell's book [2] mentions that the negotiations related to the 'areca nut incident' because unproductive and consequently North had submitted 10 new conditions to the Kandyan king, Sri Wickrama Raja Singha. Those were: handing over the Seven Korala (known as the North-western province at present) as a compensation for the theft and to cover the expenses of the British troops when they had to visit Kandy, allowing the British to consume everything that the Dutch were consuming, handing over the power to control the immigration of Malays and Europeans, allowing to build a road from Colombo to Trincomalee, allowing to transport goods across waterways and letting them to have wood from the king's forests, handing over the monopoly of cinnamon trade, protecting the status of the Kandyan king, when the king needs urgent security proving the security through British soldiers at king's expenses, cancelling border patrols and allowing king's people to have salt from British areas. These conditions provide clues to understand North's intentions such as activating North's military power in Kandyan region discourage international relationships of the Kandyan kingdom, strengthening the monetary value of the British treasury, constructing a road from Colombo to Kelaniya across Sinhalese communities, perpetuity of boarder areas and deport all the Europeans who resided without passports. However, North could not achieve his objectives as the Kandyan kingdom once against rejected his proposals. Thus, North by advising Macdowall emphasise his strategy. On one hand, he wanted to convince the king that he was starting a war by using Pilimatalauva Adigar's 'Arca nut incident' as an

excuse. On the other hand, if the Pilimatalauva Adigar was the person who had the power over the British during the war to be started, North wanted to emphasise Pilimatalauva Adigar that the British started the war on behalf of Pilimatalauva Adigar to make him the most powerful person in Kandy [3]. Based on this fact North and Pilimatalauva Adigar exchanged letters for six months and their discussions were not successful. Consequently, the invasion of the Kandyan kingdom was started on 31st January 1803.

The invasion troop was consisted of more than 1900 soldiers with the leadership of Macdowall. "Not counting the hordes of coolies, pioneers, gun-lascars, servants and wagon drivers, whom no one seems to have counted, Macdowall's column contained some 1900 fighting soldiers. The understrength 51st Foot, mustering only 600 or so men, together with two companies of the 19th Foot...there were two weak companies of Bengal Artillery and the Ceylon Native Infantry, one thousand strong but nearly all recruits...[2]" According to English Battle poem series (*Ingrisi Hatana* in Sinhala) Macdowall and the troops had rode horses and come on palanquins by spreading the sounds of gun shots with flags, various kind of guns, gun powder, bullets, pikes, steel quoit, swords, bows, spears, javelins, clubs and with equipment for overnight stays [5]. The troops entered the upcountry across Seven Korale, Dambadeniya and Giritigama [5]. Another troop of 1200 joined with the British army under the leadership of Colonel Barbut [5]. In 05th February 1803, this troop left Trincomalee to Kandy across Matale, Nalanda and Ethgaala guard-post [5].

According to sources such as *Ingrisi Hatana*, the British had plenty of armoury and experiences and the British troops were trained overseas. However, when the British troops were entering the Kandyan city, the Ceylonese army with the king put up a fire to the city and receded [5] to *Hanguranketa* [5]. The British occupied the Kandyan city, which was relinquished by the king and the civilians in 08th March 1803 [6] and crowned *Muttusami* who was considered as the true successor of the Kandyan kingdom. One of the strategies that North wanted to apply was developing the animosity in between *Sri Wickrama Raja Singha* (from here onwards *Raja Singha*) and *Pilimatalauva* as well as in between *Pilimatalauva* and the loyal servants of *Raja Singha*. Through Macdowall, North wanted to inform *Raja Singha* that he was going to support *Muttusami* unless *Raja Singha* supports him. At the same time, North wanted to convince *Raja Singha* that he crowned *Muttusami* as per the will of the Ceylon ministers. The intention of using that strategy was to encourage the conflicts between *Raja Singha* and his ministers.

It seems that *Pilimatalauva* reacted beforehand, to dethrone *Muttusami*. *Pilimatalauva* had a comprehensive understanding of the situation

(*Muttusami* had the opportunity to win the trust of the civilians and the skills to develop his power) which was in favour of *Muttusami*. This incident is an example to understand the enharmonic situation that the Lankans had and it revealed a common weakness (which was hardly seeing the British as their common enemy) of both *Muttusami* and *Pilimatalauva*. If *Pilimatalauva* could develop a positive attitude toward *Muttusami* should there be an opportunity to mislead the British and ensure the power of *Muttusami* as the new king and took his revenge against *Raja Singha*. However, *Raja Singha* used an anti-British policy since the beginning to the end of his regime though *Pilimatalauva* used an anti-British policy at a time and an anti-*raja singha* policy at another time. Should *Pilimatalauva* support *Raja Singha* all the time; the British could not easily conquer the Kandyan city in 1803. However, the animosity between these two local parties acted in favour of the British and the country was not stabilised politically. Thus, *Raja Singha* and the other officials had to organise well and fight against the British to re-establish their governing power in Kandy.

Battle Organisation Strength of the Lankans

The key strategist and the organiser of the 1803 battle against the British was *Raja Singha*. As an initial step, the king (*Raja Singha*) sent letters to territorial leaders of the Kandyan kingdom to meet him. At the meeting by presenting the villages and awarding designations, the leaders were given orders by the king to prepare for a war [5]. To strengthen the territorial governance *Raja Singha* delegated responsibilities of controlling territories to each leader such as *Seven Korale* area to *Meegastanne*, *Four Korale* area to *Lewke*, *Matale* to *Keppetipola*, *Sabaragamuwa* area to *Kahandawa*, *Uda Palata* area to *Palipana*, *Udu Nuwara* area to *Mattamagoda*, *Yatinuwara* area to *Moladande*, *Siusiya Pattuwa* area to *Doranegama*, *Dumbara* area to *Madugalle*, *Ja* troops, *Panna* troops, *Masuwe Peruwa* and *Gamkara Peruwa* area to *Dehigama*, *Walapane* area to *Mullegama*, *Uwa* area to *Ahalepola* and *Hewaheta* and *Gonagama* area to *Galagoda*. *Millawa* was the official who was appointed by the king as the chief-secretary [5]. Accordingly, these leaders (Local source introduce these leaders as war captains) organised soldiers by working together with their relevant villagers. During an epoch of war, the counting officers had to count the army who were got together at the main arena. Then the king had to speak with the commanding officers of the troops about the way of leading the war. It can be assumed that the king *Raja Singha* had done number of pre-tasks before the initiation of the battle with a strategic war mind.

The king (*Raja Singha*) did not forget to obtain the Buddhist religious security from the society [5]. The specialty of this battle organisation process was that *Raja Singha* got involved in religious activities though there were enemies in Kandy. Thus, it was found that during the battle organisation process a major

consideration was given to religious concepts of Ceylon. When a king is giving special attention to either religious or cultural status of a society or a country that supports the king to win over the hearts and the loyalty of the people. Thus, it seems that *raja Singha* as a political leader used that strategy to obtain the trust, loyalty and the blessings of the Kandyan people. It is mentioned that the reconquering of Kandyan kingdom was started at an auspicious time called "*Vijaya*" [5]. It is an important fact to mention that the Lankans were considerate of astrology and they believed in auspicious time even when they were starting battles against their enemies. The way the king *Raja Singa* decorated the city to follow religious customs, the way he asked reasons from the enemy for the are being recorded in literature [7]. Even in medieval Lanka the contribution of an astronomer can be seen in military [8]. Before announcing the starting of war it was a custom to ask from the enemies whether they were going to surrender or not. *Raja Sinha* had also used this custom and the battle was started by giving a shooting signal to the British after covering the whole Kandyan border using the four forces such as elephants, horses, foot and wagons.

Evidence on the strategies that were used by North to discourage the organisation of 1803 battle can also be found. *Meegastanne* was threatened by North to stop supporting *Raja Singha*. The threatening letter contained that the North was going to reveal the conspiracy against the king *Raja Singha* that *Meegastanne* planned with *Pilimatalauva* [3] though the threat was not ineffective.

All the troop leaders of Ceylon started attacking several areas at the same time and destroyed the British forts in Kandy. *Mullegama* attacked the British garrison in *Udawatta* forest and robbed all the treasure. At *Kumaruppa*, *Ahalepola* Adigar killed number of enemies [5]. *Dehigama* followed the enemies and attacked while *Wattewe* waited at the city wall for the enemies to come closer to him to get destroyed [5]. In search of victory, *Millawa* stationed his army near *Malwatu* temple, *Galagoda* stationed his army at *Welewihoole*, *Madugalle* stationed his army at *Wewala Pitiya*. *Palipana*, *Moladande*, *Mattegoda* and *Doranagoda* stationed their armies at *Kotugodella*, *Wadugoda Pitiya*, *Bogambara* and *Mahaiyawa* respectively [5]. The positioning of Ceylon army had hardly given an opportunity to the enemy to evade and their stationing proved the battle organisation abilities of Sinhalese during the battle against the British rule in 1803.

Ingrisi Satana [5] mentions how the Ceylon army caused a huge damage to the British by killing the soldiers and destroying and stealing the belongings of the British such as clothes, flags, elephants, horses, cows, jackets, hats, rice, money boxes, glass pipes, arrack and rum pipes. The British soldiers who were

evading were captured by the Ceylon army and as per the king's command, they were killed [5]. In addition, Colonel Barbut and another person called *Bankalu* were killed by attacking on head [5]. Even though, some enemies pleaded to be pardoned it is mentioned that none of the enemies of the Ceylon soldiers were spared [5]. Thus, the battle point *Wagoda Pitiya* had become a cemetery with full of dead bodies. It is recorded that the Sinhalese army from 01st January to 30th June 1803 killed 1091 British soldiers out of 3387 [9].

CONCLUSION

The British decided to declare war against the Kandyan king in 1803. Because, Frederick North's strategy of sending Hay Macdowall as an ambassador to Kandy with a treaty to establish British commercial and administrative authority in the Kandyan kingdom was rejected by the Kandyan monarch. Though the Kandyan king evaded the kingdom strategically at first, the king could cause a huge damage to the British and conquer the kingdom once again by showing his battle organisation capabilities.

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