

Survival of Kandy before Three European Nations

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Abstract— *This paper intends to trace the secret of survival of Knadyan kingdom till it fell down to the British in 1815. The innovational methods used by Kandyan since the day Kandy was attacked by Portuguese in later part of 16th century till the British period and more importantly how Kandyans adopted themselves to the novel aspects of gun powder and other military technology of the west would be deeply examined in this research paper. As Prof. Lorna Devaraja pointed out in her most notable paper “Survival of Kandyan Kingdom and its secret “ to Royal Asiatic Society, there were few crucial factors that made impacts on the survival of Kandyan kingdom. This paper examines how traditional knowledge factors and the intrinsic ability of surviving in Kandy with its geography caused to sustain its territory from any debacle. Furthermore this paper will trace the strategic actions laid down by Sinhalese soldiers in Kandyan kingdom against European invaders and how western technology was assimilated into the practice of native military as method of resistance will be questioned in this paper. The historical narratives written by European soldiers during the invasion and other historiographical literature will be used as the research method to carry out this paper work and this paper is based on a doctrinal research methodology to the research question.*

Keywords— **Technology, Warfare, Invasion, Kandy, Military**

I. INTRODUCTION

“Kingdom of Kandy first appeared as a separate entity in Sri Lankan history during the reign of Parakramabahu VI of Kotte Kingdom in Sri Lanka of 15th century A.D” (Dewaraja, 1985, p. 120). Initially kingdom of Kandy happened to be a sanctuary for all the rebels who were hostile to the rule of low country Sinhalese kingdoms like “Kotte” and “Sitawaka”, but the real strength and its *sui generis* nature was exposed when Kandy was at bay by the Western invaders (Dewaraja, 1985, p. 120 - 121) (Wickremesekera, 2004, pp. 133,145). In that point resistance against Western invaders who came with renaissance military technology such as gun powder and cannon balls turned into be a Herculean effort, but Kandy could hold its helm till 1815 (Schrikker, 2007, p.15). This paper intends to trace down how Kandy survived against all odds and what reasons strengthened its resistance militarily and strategically. In order to provide a proper analysis this paper discusses the time period of western invaders Portuguese, Dutch separately. Besides the fact of tracing the historiography of Kandyan resistance against Portuguese and Dutch powers this study intends to examine how Kandy was finally subjugated by British in

1815, which finally set the last nail in the coffin of Sinhalese sovereignty in the island (Vimalananda, 1970, p. 30).

II. KANDYAN AFFAIRS WITH PORTUGUESE

It is not an exaggeration to mention here the resistance envisaged by Portuguese in their Kandyan expedition was the most humiliating experienced by Portuguese in the East. Portuguese historian Fernao de Queyroz in his “The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon” has admitted the resistance shown by Kandyans for Portuguese was an infallible one (Queyroz and Perera, 1992, pp. 55 -66). In the question of how Kandy faced a highly developed military forces of Portuguese army, the first pivotal factor to concern is the natural fortification provided the first advantage to the native Kandyan soldiers (Queyroz and Perera, 1992, pp. 60 – 61). It was well known factor that Portuguese soldiers were militarily always ahead of the natives in terms of the technology and conventional war fares. Though Portuguese soldiers were quite capable of fighting in the plain lands their ability to fight in the hill areas was absolutely limited (Ibid, 61). By nature kingdom of Kandy was protected by its intrinsic natural landscape. The territory of Kandyan kingdom had covered from heavy mountains in its surroundings and it was further strengthen by “river Mahaweli”. In the initial stage of their attempts, Portuguese considered the conquest of Kandy would be a less troublesome task as they conquered the Maritime Provinces in the island but their early military attempts were failed with strong onslaught made by Kandyans in the late 16th century. Battle of Danture in 1594 was the first one Sinhalese recorded a massive victory over Portuguese and in this first encounter Portuguese learnt how nature would be so devastative to them (Perera, 2007, p. 197). In their first campaign in Kandy, Portuguese led a force about 20000 men under Pero Lopez de Souza and 45 elephants more supporting troops from Goa and cannon balls were used in this expedition (Queyroz and Perera, 1992, p. 488). In the beginning of the warfare Portuguese could enter Kandy without much resistance and kandyans strategically abandoned the city without any resources to Portuguese and they burnet the city before they retreated (Wickramasinghe, 2004, p. 16). When Portuguese force took hold of the city their situation became pathetic in the monsoon season with the spread of diseases and raining (Ibid, 154). The natural fortification of Kandyan kingdom did not allow Portuguese reinforcement to reach their troops in Kandy on time; instead of Kandyan resistance force led heavy guerrilla warfare against Portuguese soldiers. This resistance

campaign reached its culmination on 8th of October in 1594 in the historical battle in Danturai, where Kandyans could massacre the Portuguese forces which resembles what exactly happened when Napoleon invaded Moscow in 1805 (Perera, 2007, p. 197 - 198). Indeed historian Paul .E. Pieris has argued Portuguese warfare in Kandyan kingdom mainly got unsuccessful due to two main reasons. Firstly Kandy geography was completely a novel experience for Portuguese whereas they had heavy pressure from nature apart from the Guerrilla tactics of Kandyans (Pieris, 1983, pp. 356 - 376). In every invasion they led against Kandyan kingdom they could successfully capture the land in the first round. But the greater debacle befell them in terms of holding the territory for a longer period (Ibid). Every Portuguese captain general tried to surrender the territory from the very first unsuccessful campaign of Pero Lopez de Suza till 1638. In the correspondence made by one of ruthless Portuguese captain generals called Don Geranimodu Azawedu, he has stated "I carried continuous war into that kingdom, attacking it twice a year with the entire body of troops with the aim of making its life ebb away, by killing off the inhabitants or capturing them by destroying its food supplies and driving the cattle away into our conquered territories So that it is with this regime of war that kingdom is to be bled to death, until it is entirely depopulated and laid waste and in such manner that the life of no male of fourteen years or above is spared" (Goonatilake ,2012, p.5). This carnage went on for decades and the project of annexing Kandy was finally abandoned only after two Captain Generals had lost their heads in the endeavor. Secondly Paul. E. pieris has argued though Portuguese were militarily developed in their weaponry and technology, their military organization in Sri Lanka was a weak one to defeat Kandyans (Perera, 2004, pp. 65 – 66). In that context Portuguese mainly relied on the recruited mercenary soldiers in the low country of Sri Lanka, but when Portuguese reached the Kandyan territory those mercenary soldiers always changed their allegiance to Sinhalese king in Kandy (Perera, 2004, pp. 65 – 66). It became detrimental towards Portuguese war success in Kandyan expedition, because when Portuguese were surrounded by all the troubles in Kandyan territory their mercenary soldiers deserted the army with weapons to join the Sinhalese forces in Kandy (Perera, 2004, pp. 65 – 66).

According to military historian Bruce Vandervort the new weapon technology always became a myth in the colonial warfare (Vandervort 2012). He states "New weapons were slow to arrive on the periphery and when they did, they were often incompatible with the environment in which colonial wars were fought or the kind of warfare being waged" (Vandervort, 2012, p. 92). In the point of matter this theory was applicable to Portuguese experience in Kandy. It is true that Portuguese weapon technology was far advance than Kandyan Sinhalese machinery but that weapon did not fit enough to the geographic conditions of the Kandyan territory. In the

chronicles of Rebeiro (Portuguese army commander) it has been reported when the heavy rain hit Kandy those gun power and canons got ineffective to work in the battle field (Ribeiro and Pieris, 1999, p. 20). On the other hand Kandyans were witty enough to assimilate the western military technology into their resistance. As an example first Sinhalese king who could defeat Portuguese was Vimaladharmasuriya I I was earlier trained by Portuguese in Goa and finally he deserted the Portuguese after acquiring sufficient military knowledge and formed the resistance front against Portuguese (Pieris, 1983, pp. 334 - 355). On the other hand the successors of Vimaladharmasuriya I I started to adopt and imitate Western military technology in certain ways (Wickremesekera, 2004, p. 145). Robert Knox who was a prisoner of Rajasinha II had reported how Sinhalese king in Kandy kept Scottish mercenary gunmen and encouraged those Europeans to marry native women in order to keep them in his service (Bakel et al. 1994, p. 197). Apart from that Kandyans always maximally utilized the local knowledge against the gigantic European military tactics (Silva 2011). In some occasions those captured canons and guns were remanufactured by Sinhalese craftsmen in their own standards (Wickremesekera, 2004, p. 145). In the case of weapon technology Kandyans aptly understood the effectiveness of improvising their own arms and immunes in par with Portuguese. The historical references made by Portuguese historians like Queyroz and Ribeiro have affirmed how effective when Sinhalese soldiers used short swords against the conventional fencing technics of Portuguese (Ribeiro and Pieris, 1999) (Queyroz and Perera, 1992).

A modern historian who has extensively written about Kandy's wars with Portuguese Dr. Tikiri Abeyasinghe has commented in his book "Study of Portuguese regiments on Sri Lanka at Goa archives" (Goonatilake, 2012, p. 3 - 7). For four decades the Portuguese desire to annex Kandy had been nearly counterbalanced by Kandy's will to survive, and the Portuguese capacity to strike by Kandy's ability to resist. On every occasion the Portuguese attempted to tilt the scales in their favour, in 1602-1630 or 1638 - they had failed" (Dewaraja, 1985, pp 121 - 122). In modern understanding of a mind of a historian or an International Relations theorist one can simply say that this situation was akin to what described by historian Arnold Toynbee as "stimulus of blows" (Dewaraja, 1985, p. 122). In Toynbee's interpretation blow," there are sensational instances in history where military power had been stimulated by successive contests with neighbours. Kandy did not respond by being aggressively militaristic, but the heaviness of the blow evoked in the Kandyans a proportionately powerful psychological reaction, an abhorrence of foreign rule, a characteristic which they displayed on several occasions till all resistance was clamped down by the British in 1818" (Dewaraja, 1985, p. 122)

Another important fact regarding the new knowledge built by Kandyans in their extraordinary resistance before British was the way Kandyan kings maintained their geographic position without letting it to be spoiled by the novelties of time. As an example Kandyan kings had a deliberate policy of discouraging building roads and bridges which finally became the savior of Kandyan kingdom for a long period. In the historical annals of Sri Lanka the kingdoms which existed before Kandy had more sophistication in terms of infrastructure facilities within the main city. For instance today's ruins and monuments of "Anuradhapura" and "Polonnaruwa" are the evidence that demonstrate how Sinhalese kingdoms had been in its heyday. But under 300 years of constant struggle against Portuguese, Dutch and English, Kandy did not have the full pledge pleasure of nourishing herself as a conventional kingdom. Instead of it turned into be a bastion of natural fortification surrounded by untouched forests and those adoption were willingly accepted and adhered by her people. Dr. Lona Devaraja (Sri Lankan historian who had specialized in Kandyan history) states "It has often been said that the inaccessibility of the mountain kingdom, the ravines, swamps and rivers, the malarial mosquitoes and the blood sucking leeches that proved vicious under European armour had preserved Kandyan independence" (Dewaraja, 1985, p. 123). It was a "deliberate policy of the Kings to discourage the building of roads and bridges and the clearing of forests so as to make the kingdom even more unapproachable to intruders" (Ibid). In fact most of the nations in Africa and Asia had used the tactics that would stun the European invader. There are many examples such as how mighty British army of Lord Chelmsford was annihilated by Zulu tribe of Africa in battle of Isandlwana in 1877, where Zulu's favorite tactic was the *izimpondo zankomo* ("horns of the buffalo"), where the older warriors of the Zulu force engaged the enemy from the front while the younger warriors circled around both flanks and attacked (Peck 2014). In the context of Kandyan kingdom Kandyans firstly attacked the good carriages, animals and local coolies of the invader with the intention of cutting down the supply to the enemy. In most of the time their tactic was successful when Portuguese forces were left without food and other essential supplies.

A .Dutch Era

Kandy's strategic position with Dutch was shaped by different events and it was mainly culled by the diplomatic negotiations between Sinhalese king in Kandy and Dutch in Colombo. On the other hand it was Dutch who benevolently appeared to assist the Kandyan king Rajasinghe II to expel Portuguese from the Maritime Provinces when Kandy was in the doldrums after fighting for 40 years with Portuguese (Codrington, 1994, pp. 133 - 135). In the relationship with Dutch, both the parties hardly went for fight with each other except the fact that Kandy was attacked by Dutch in 1766 during the time of King Kirti Sri Rajasinha. But Dutch never had the true need to gain the control of whole Kandyan kingdom, because unlike ambitious Portuguese who believed they were on

holy quest to convert pagans into Christianity, Dutch interests were mainly confined to the commerce and trade (Codrington, 1994, 133 -155).

B. How British finally nailed Kandy

As it was stated in the beginning, another important motive of this paper is to analysis how Kandy reached its end by the last and deadliest attack from the British which was mightier and more strategic from both previous invaders (Sivasundaram, 2007, p). It was in 1796 British conquered the whole maritime provinces of Ceylon from Dutch and the rule of English East India Company continued till Maritime Provinces became a crown colony of the British Empire in 1802 (Wickremeratne, 1973, pp. 31 -33). As a matter of fact it is an interesting factor to examine how kandyan kingdom confronted by British forces. In an article written by Cambridge based historian Sujit Sivasundaram , author argues the topographic knowledge of Kandyans helped them to survive before British for few years but British too went for reverse engineering when they developed the skills of the Kandyan warfare and their technology in certain ways (Sivasundaram, 2007, p. 925). As an example after taming the last Kandyan resistance for British in 1818 in most brutal way British immediately built up a new road system to Kandy from Colombo and went on to cut down the surrounding forests which provided a natural canopy for Guerrilla war fares of the Kandyans (Sivasundaram, 2007, pp. 926 -931). But it important fact to remember even before Kandy fell into British hands, the first military expedition led by British in 1803 under the leadership of Gen. Mcdowell became a catastrophe for British mainly due their lack of awareness of the geography of Kandyan kingdom and the interesting factor is the same method used by Kandyan kings against Portuguese in 17th century lasted till 18th century Kandyans to resist for British attacks (Wickremeratne, 1973, pp. 38 -41). It is not the fact that Kandyans were the most brilliant soldiers in the world, but what made them unique was their adaptation of geographic spaces and guerrilla military strategies in action. In 1803, when British waged war with Kandyans, the lack of accurate maps proved perilous. Major Arthur Johnston of the Third Ceylon Regiment has described how those dark forests and abrupt attacks of Kandyan forces in the wilderness of Kandyan terrain (Sivasundaram, 2007, pp. 932). He states "In these thick forests, even in the brightest moon -light it is extremely difficult, and often impossible, for one not perfectly acquainted with the track to discern the footpath "(Ibid). In the cause of military technology Kandy had developed and duly adopted the Western technology by the time British intervened its territory. Kandyan kingdom's army was a palpable reflection of a pre modern Asian army and in fact a large standing army was not feasible due to the lack of money. Instead of keeping a regular force Kandy maintained voluntary force which was consisted of peasantry while having a small number of foreign troops as a permanent army. In the case of weapon technology Kandyans had the gun powder technology and according to Robert Knox's

narratives there were European residents in Kandyan kingdom who operated the guns (Wickremesekera, 2004, pp. 141,145). Apart from that Kandy's own invention called "Kodithuwakuwa" played a crucial role as fire weapon against the British (Wickremesekera, 2004, p. 145). Indeed it was an indigenous product and became an ideal substitute for artillery (Ibid). The officers who were in charge of "Kodituwakku" were known as "koddituwakku karayao"(Ibid, 141). This weapon as an indigenous product proves how those western military technologies had been absorbed by Kandyans in an innovative way in the process of resistance.

However in evaluating the reasons to the decline of Kandy as the last sovereign kingdom in Sri Lanka, one should understand Kandyan kingdom's decay and its subjugation to British in 1815 was not a result that came out of the blue. Yet its roots had traced back to the middle of 18th century in that period kandy was in a greater dilemma when her last Sinhalese king Sri Vira Parakrama Narendra Sinha died childless in 1739, which created a vacuum in the throne. Finally this led to create a new dynasty in Kandy and those rulers hailed from South Indian Nayakkar dynasty which crated a heavy unrest among the Kandyan Sinhalese nobles (Dewaraja, 1985, p.127). They were Tamil speaking; Hindus and this further agitated the Buddhist monks in the Kandyan kingdom. In the analysis given by Dr. Lorna Devaraja, Buddhist monks in Kandy were typical land lords in Weberian sense and their opposition towards Tamil speaking knew rulers became a strong factor to lose the grip of Kandyan kingdom (Ibid). In addition to that, British too had adhered to the traditional warfare and as a practical method of defeating the Guerrilla tactics of Kandyan hill country; they used experienced soldiers on mountain warfare. As an example when 1815 Britain successfully captured Kandyan kingdom with the fullest support of Sinhalese nobles, most of the British soldiers happened to be soldiers from Ireland or some Scottish regiments of British army and those soldiers were trained to fight in mountain campaigns (Bakel et al. 1994, p. 198) (Dewaraja, 1985, p.133). Another tactful method used by British on subduing the resistance of Kandy was using espionage through low country Muslims. It was a master minded plan by Oxford educated British officer John Doyly (Senaratne, 2013). He was a bureaucrat like William Jonnes in India, a person who was deeply infatuated with the local customs. Being a Latin and Greek scholar from Oxford Doyle felt passionate to learn Sinhalese and oriental languages like Pail, Sanskrit (Ibid). His approach to manipulate Kandyan chieftains against the last king accelerated the decay of Kandy. In fact Doyly's spies could infiltrate into the terrain of Kandy as merchants and gathered valuable information. With these circumstances Kandy could resist for no more and ultimately nailed by British in 1815 with the full pledge support of Kandyan Sinhalese nobles under the impression that they would be given the rightful throne to govern themselves. But it only became a fallacy and three hundred years of constant existence despite all those mighty attacks of the Western

nations reached its bottom end before the realistic plans of British both militarily and strategically.

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III. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the routines of kandyan resistance till it fell unto British hands, furthermore the military strategy, local knowledge and above all how geographic position became a paramount factor in deciding the fate of a war has been depicted in this study. Kandy's survival and its down fall have laid down certain lessons to the military affairs in several ways. Firstly it has proven a wrong perception on colonial wars as a one sided battle which always crushed the natives. But Kandyan experience proves the story had gone the other way around since Kandyan kings and soldiers duly adopted the military technology and tactics according to their needs. Many of the illustrations have been provided in this paper to prove it. Secondly Kandy rebuts another myth of superiority of weapon technology of Europeans. The examples given in this paper show how those mighty weapons became futile when westerners were encircled by guerrilla warfare and unconquerable forces of nature. This has been accepted by war historian Bruce Vandervort in by quoting a British colonel called Charles Callwell. He states "in most of the colonial wars real foes were climate, disease and distance, lack of food and water" (Vandervort , 2012, p. 71). Indeed this example was well manifested on the soil of Kandy. Thirdly kandyan resistance and its survival prove the gravity of an unconventional warfare could be detrimental upon any powerful nation. What exactly took place in Kandyan kingdom against western forces has not gained the attraction of war historians and scholars. Especially the knowledge possessed by Kandyans and their unique resistance to three mighty western nations should be well researched.

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