2.52 Dona Catrerina: a weapon to gain political power

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the position held by Dona Catrerina in the power struggle of the Kandyan Kingdom in the Portuguese period.

Dona Catrerina (Kusumasana Devi) was the rightful daughter of king Karalliyadde Bandara of the Kandyan kingdom. Karalliyadde Bandara was defeated by Seethavaka Rajasinghe and he sought protection from the Portuguese. Both the king and his wife died while in Trincomalee leaving their baby daughter Kusumasana Devi and nephew Yamasinghe Bandara in the protection of the foreigners. Being brought up in a convent in Mannar, she became a Catholic. Later she was taken to Kandy and made the Queen of the Kingdom. Thereafter Dona Catrerina was considered by many an object through which rightful kingship could be gained. The Portuguese wanted to marry her to a noble of their choice and gain political power. But Konappu Bandara defeated the Portuguese and married Dona Catrerina and became the rightful owner to the throne.

After Konappu Bandara’s death a relative of his, Senarath took the hand of Dona Catrerina and came into power. Consequently Dona Catrerina’s elder son of the earlier marriage met with an untimely death. Consumed with grief she suspected Senarath of committing murder. She was 35 years old when she died of this sorrow. It is said that she died cursing Senarath and no doubt her fate as a weapon to power as well. Many believe that she was pregnant at the time of death. However even after death her children gained power not on account of their father, but on account of their mother.

Key words: Kandyan Dynasty, Rightful daughter of the king, Marriage and children, Power struggle.