

**KANDYAN STATE PRISONERS IN MAURITIUS (1818-1832 CE)**

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**Abstract**

The present paper is an introduction to a lesser well known historical fact of Kandyan State Prisoners in Mauritius during 1819-1832. Twenty four persons who involved in 1818 rebellion were banished to Mauritius by the British government of Ceylon in 1819. One person in 1820 and two others in 1823 who were engaged in disturbances after the great rebellion were also added to this group. Ehelepola Maha Nilame, the Prime Minister of the Kandyan Kingdom was kept in house arrest in Colombo till 1825 and then banished to Mauritius. Though there were several writings on these prisoners, all of these prisoners were not covered in those descriptions. The present paper attempts to gather details on all the prisoners collectively and individually. Original manuscripts at the National Archives in Colombo and several rare publications were scrutinized for this synthesis. Some early publications of the present writer and his late father were also utilized for the present research paper. The purpose of the paper is to lay foundation for a more detailed study in future.

**Keywords:** 1818 Kandyan Rebellion, State Prisoners, Mauritius, Ehelepola, British Government.

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## Introduction

During the Great Kandyan rebellion in 1818, many lives and properties were lost. The failure of the rebellion resulted in the traditional Kandyan society as not to be repaired again and the newly established British power over the Kandyan territories was strengthened as not to be shaken for over a century. As a result of the failure of the rebellion, properties of the Kandyans who went against British were confiscated. Some of the leaders were Court Martialed to death and some were imprisoned. Several families were deported to maritime areas such as Colombo, Kalutara and Galle. A few were exiled to the island of Mauritius, an "unknown land" to Kandyans. Mauritius is an isolated island about 2500 miles off Sri Lanka and closer to Madagascar. It was known also as Isles of France as it was under the French power when it was conquered by British in 1810.

The present paper is a brief description on the Kandyan State Prisoners who were exiled to Mauritius after the 1818 rebellion. A group of 24 persons, including 10 persons who were sentenced to life imprisonment and 14 others sentenced to a fixed number of years deported to Mauritius from Colombo port on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1819. They were embarked on to the ship named Liverpool and accompanied by Mr. William Stewart who was the officer in charge of them and Mr. K. Don Danial who was the interpreter to them.

It is stated that Ketakale Mohottala of Uva, was also to be deported with this group, but he died the day before the ship was to embark. In 1820, another prisoner named Coomaraswamy was brought there. In 1823, twelve people including the Wegodapola Raterala and Wegodapola Haluwadana Nilame who engaged in riots in Matale were brought there. Ehelepola Maha Nilame was brought to Mauritius in 1825 after being held in the Colombo prison for 7 years.

Of the 28 state prisoners, 14 died on the island of Mauritius. Nine were released after serving their sentences and returned to Ceylon. The remaining five prisoners were released in 1832. The last to be released was Pilimathalawa on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1832. A brief description of each of these 28 State prisoners are as follows:

### Ambagaspitiye Lekam

A native of Wedaruwa village in Dumbara. He was also known as the Ambagaspitiye Lekam, Ambagaspitiye Nilame and *Dissawe* of Wendaruwa. He was involved in the spreading of the rebellion in the Dumbara area. Although he was sentenced to death by the court-martial on 20.10.1818, the decision was later changed to a banishment from the country for life. Accordingly, he was exiled to Mauritius with the first group of prisoners on 24.02.1819. He died in Mauritius on 06.11.1831. His belongings were handed over to the servant who had served as his bailiff and to Godegedara Adikaram who was a close friend until the last moment. The confiscated land called Udukumbura was handed over to his wife and children by the government.

### Demodara Mohottala

A native of Demodara in Sabaragamuwa. He fought in Sabaragamuwa area together with Mutthettuwegama Nilame. He surrendered at the Matara Kachcheri on 27.01.1819. He was ordered to be exiled for life by the court martial and was sent to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He came from a noble family and was considered a second-class prisoner. Six women of his family were held in Kalutara and his male relatives, including his brother, were held in Colombo. He was released on 16.11.1824 and returned to the island on the ship Thimandra with four other prisoners.

### Dedunupitiya Mohottala

A native of Palle Palatha of Thumpane. He is said to have been an active fighter in Thumpane area. He was considered a second-class prisoner. He was sentenced to 7 years' exile by a court-martial and sent to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was suffering from a disease of cerebral palsy and refused to receive treatment from doctors and used medicines prepared by himself. He died in Mauritius on 28.09.1822, at an advanced age. At the moment of his death, he addressed Major Bates, who was by his side, and requested that the government provide assistance to his nine-year-old daughter in Ceylon. Major Bates agreed to convey this request to the Ceylonese government.

### Dangamuwa Mohottala

A native of Yatikinda Palatha of Uva, He was proclaimed a rebel by the gazette dated 14.11.1818 and his property was confiscated. Although the court martial sentenced him to death, he was later commuted to life imprisonment. He was considered a second-class prisoner. Accordingly, he was deported to Mauritius on 24.02.1818. He died of dysentery in Mauritius on 17.09.1823, at the age of 90.

### Hapathgamuwa Mohottala (Senior)

A native of Viyaluwa. He was an active fighter in the Walapane and Viyaluwa areas. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and was sent to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was considered a second-class prisoner.

He is said to have been deeply troubled by the death of his relatives and to have been addicted to alcohol. He died in Mauritius on 19. 01. 1826, at the age of 60.

#### **Hapathgamuwa Mohottala (Junior)**

A native of Viyaluwa. A younger brother of Hapathgamuwa Mohottala (Senior). He actively led the fighting in Viyaluwa and Walapane areas. He was exiled from the country for life.

He was ordered to be sent to the island of Mauritius on 24 February 1819. He died of Malaria in Mauritius on 22 December 1822.

#### **Ihagama Unnanse**

A native of Harispattuva. He was a monk of the Malwaththa chapter of Siyam Nikaya. His name was Ihagama Rathanapala. As a monk, he was known as Ihagama Unnanse. During his youth, he was also known as the Ihagama Nilame. He was arrested for the intrigue planned to expel British from the Kandyan territory in 1816. But he escaped while being brought to Colombo. He was given the post of *Pattapola Dissawa* and Basnayake Nilame by the King designated by rebels. He was most active in the area around Thuppitiya. He was arrested by Colonel Hook on 05.11.1818. He was court-martialed on 17.11.1818 and sentenced to death, but later it was decided to deport him. Accordingly, he was deported to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was known in Mauritius by the name John, and said to be the most cunning and intelligent amongst the prisoners there. He was also known as a skilled oculist. He was released on July 27, 1832, and sailed home on the ship Hector.

#### **Eriyagama Rate Mahathmaya**

A resident of Yati Nuwara. Court-martialed and sentenced to five years' exile. Sent to Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was not allowed to behave freely. He was named as a person who should be released on 05. 08. 1825 and left for the island on the ship Brigmaria. The confiscated lands were handed over to his wife, Imbuldeniye Mahathmayo.

#### **Eriyagama Padikara Lekam**

He was the brother of Eriyagama Rate Mahathmaya of Yatinuwara. He was also known as the Eriyagama Nilame and the Udapalatha Disawa. He was a person who worked very hard in the battle. He was considered a second-class prisoner. He was sentenced to life imprisonment by the court-martial and was sent to the island of Mauritius on 24 February 1819. It is reported that he died of pulmonary edema in Mauritius on 18 May 1825.

#### **Meewature Lekam**

A resident of Yati Nuwara. Considered a second-class prisoner. Ordered to be exiled from the country for life by order dated 20.10.1818. Accordingly, he was sent to the island of Mauritius on 24<sup>th</sup> 02 1819. Died in Mauritius on 08. 11.1821.

#### **Kempitiya Korala**

A native of the Four Korale. He was exiled from the country for seven years by the court-martial and was exiled to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was considered a second-class prisoner. He was released on 16.11.1824 and left for his country on the ship Timandra.

#### **Ketakumbure Rate Mahathmaya.**

A resident of Uduuwara. Also known as the Mahagabada Nilame of Ketakumbure. Brought from Kandy to Colombo on 12.01.1818. Court-martialed and sentenced to five years' exile and sent to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. Released on 25.08.1825, he sailed for the motherland on the ship Brihmaria. His confiscated property was returned.

#### **Meegahapitiya Raterala**

A resident of Wellassa. Also known as the Meegahapitiya Gan Ethirala and the Palle Mallahwe Gan Etirala. He led the group that assassinated the English agent of Badulla, Sylvester Wilson. He was captured by the people of Pelawatte and handed over to the British. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and was exiled to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He died in Mauritius on 06.11.1831 after being ill for some time.

#### **Maththemagoda Disava**

A native of Thun Korala. Sentenced to life in exile, he was exiled to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. A first-class prisoner. Considered to be from a high-ranking family. In July 1822, he was undergoing treatment for a defect in his right eye. He died of asthma in Mauritius on 27.06.1825.

**Pitawala Lekam**

A resident of Udu Dumbara. Arrested on 22.10.1818. Sentenced to five years' exile and deported to Mauritius Island on 24.02.1819. Considered a second-class prisoner. Released on 5.08.1825, he sailed for the island on the ship Brigmaria.

**Rahupola Pihanarala**

A resident of Udukinda, Uva. He has been declared a rebel and his property has been confiscated. He is a member of a very powerful family in Uva. It is stated that the Loku and Kuda Rahupola were arrested and the rest of the family surrendered. A large number of cattle belonging to them have been taken into the custody of McDonald. The court martial recommended that the Rahupola family, like the other leading families of Uva, should be exiled. Accordingly, for a period of five years he was exiled to Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was released on 16.11.1824 and sailed for the island on the ship Timandra.

**Walpalagolle Muhandiram**

A resident of the Ganga Ata Palatha, Thumpane. According to the decree dated 08.07.1818, he was named a rebel and his property was confiscated. He was ordered to be exiled from the country for five years by the court martial and sent to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was considered a second-class prisoner. It is stated that he was released on 05.08.1825 and sailed from Mauritius on the ship Brigmaria and returned to the island.

**Wattekele Mohottala**

A resident of Soranathota, Uva. Sentenced to seven years' exile from the country and exiled to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. Considered a second-class prisoner. Released on 16.11.1824, he sailed back for country on the ship Timandra.

**Wettewe Ratamahathmaya**

A native of Udapalatha, Thumpane . He was ordered to be exiled from the country for six years by a court martial. Accordingly, he was exiled to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was considered a second-class prisoner. He was released on 16.11.1824 and sailed for his country on the ship Timandra.

**Kurukohogama Kiri Banda**

A resident of Dumbara. Also known as the Kunam Maduwa Lekam.. Named a rebel and announced that his property would be confiscated. Surrendered to the British on 18.09.1818. Although the court martial sentenced him to death, it was later decided to exile him for life. Accordingly, he was exiled to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He died of dysentery in Mauritius on 11.07.1820.

**Kohukumbure Raterala**

A native of Wellasse. An early leader of the 1818 struggle. Named a rebel and declared his property confiscated by decree dated 01.01.1818. He was arrested in April 1818 after being caught in a trap of a group of Malay soldiers lead by Segu Nurdin.

He was detained in Colombo for some time and it was decided to exile him from the country for life. Accordingly, he was exiled to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was considered a second-class prisoner. He spent his time in Mauritius in anxiety, not associating with other prisoners. He died on 20.06.1825 after being ill for 12 days.

**Thalagune Vannaku Nilame**

A native of Dumbara. Married to a daughter of Muhandiram Nilame of Madugalle. Although not court-martialed, he was ordered to be exiled from the country for five years and sent to the island of Mauritius on 24.02.1819. He was considered a person who should not be allowed to roam freely. He died of cholera in Mauritius on 20.12.1819.

**Godegedara Adikaram**

A resident of Uva. He was the one who took the lead in bringing Wilbawe Unnanse to Wellassa. He was a leading associate of Keppetipola. He was court Marshaled to life imprisonment , but later changed it to life time exile to Mauritius. Accordingly, on 24.02.1819, he was exiled to the island of Mauritius. He was released from prison on 27.07.1832 and sailed back on the ship Hector.

**Pilimatalawe Nilame**

A resident of Yatinuwara and was a high-ranking nobleman. While holding the post of the dissawa of Hatkorale , he joined the rebels. He took the initiative in spreading the rebellion in the Hatkorale and Matala areas. He did

not obey the rebel king and tried to appoint another worthy person as king. On 01.11.1818, he was arrested at Paravahagama along with a group of rebel leaders including Keppetipola Nilame. Although the court martial sentenced him to death, it was later decided to exile him from the country for life. Accordingly, on 24.02.1819, he was exiled to the island of Mauritius. He was considered a first-class prisoner and was given a servant to serve as a bailiff. On 16.09.1832, he was released as the last prisoner and returned on the ship Attic.

### **Coomaraswamy**

He appeared as a Nayakkara clan, a relative of King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe. He is also known as Hewaheta Vannaku, a servant of the king. He was expelled from the palace by the king and wandered around the villages of Uva as a merchant and a monk. During the 1818 rebellion, he also acted as a henchman of Wilbawe Unnanse, who assumed the kingdom under the name of Duresamy. He was arrested in Ruwanwella and detained in Colombo for some time but was later released. In January 1820, he was arrested again for trying to fight against the British by pretending to be a king with the support of the Veddas of Bintenne. He was sentenced to life imprisonment by a court-martial and was exiled to the island of Mauritius in 1820 on the ship Alexandria. He was considered a liar and a madman by the other prisoners in Mauritius. It is said that others also shunned his company. He was released on 11.08.1832 and returned to Sri Lanka on the ship Eunice.

### **Wegodapola Raterala.**

He was one of the two state prisoners belonging to the Wegodapola family who were among the twelve prisoners who were exiled to Mauritius for their involvement in the Matale rebellion of 1823. He was exiled to Mauritius on the Princess Charlotte ship along with other prisoners who had participated in the rebellion in August 1823. It is said that 20 palm leaves were also brought on board the ship for the use of the prisoners. Wegodapola, who had suffered from epilepsy in Mauritius, died in his bed on 22 September 1824.

### **Wegodapola Haluvadana Nilame**

He was another state prisoner among the prisoners sent to Mauritius Island by the Princess Charlotte in August 1823. Lowry states that he was the son of Wegodapola Raterala. He was released on 27 July 1832 and sailed back on the Hector ship with Ihagama and Godegedara.

### **Ehelepola Maha Nilame**

The connection between Ehelepola and the 1818 struggle is unclear. The fact that his brother-in-law, Kappetipola, took the lead in this struggle increased the suspicion on Ehelepola among the British. Although the British requested Ehelepola's assistance to suppress the rebellion, he ignored it. On the night of 2 March 1818, he was forcibly removed from Kandy and placed under house arrest in Colombo Fort. He was held in Colombo for seven years without charge and was deported to the island of Mauritius, claiming to be "giving him greater personal freedom". Although he was ordered to go to Mauritius, the British kept the date of his embarkation a secret until the end. They did this as a measure to prevent the escape of Ehelepola or his servants. The Maha Nilame, who was taken on board the ship Alexander, arrived at Port Louis, Mauritius, on 6 June 1825. Mr. Don William and three servants, who were to act as interpreters, accompanied the Ehelepola Nilame to Mauritius on the same ship. Ehelepola was kept in the house of Major Bates, the prisoner-in-charge, until a permanent residence could be provided. He was then taken to a rented house at Pompilimuse, 1/2 mile from the "Powder Mills" where the other prisoners were staying. Ehelepola appealed several times to release him, but the British ignored his appeal. After being ill for some time, he breathed his last at the Pompilimuse on Saturday morning, 04.05.1829, at about 9.00 a.m. He was 56 years old at the time.

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