

KERALAS IN MEDIEVAL SRI LANKAN HISTORY: A STUDY OF TWO CONTRASTING ROLES

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The Island of Sri Lanka, situated at the tip of the Indian subcontinent, separated from the mainland by a narrow maritime corridor of twenty two miles, has been repeatedly exposed to the impact of political developments in South India. The proximity of the mainland was self-evident to the Island's ancient chroniclers too, to whom it was simply 'the opposite coast' (*paratīra*). The principal architects of the Island's ancient civilization nurtured by Buddhism, were the Sinhalese who had migrated from different parts of Northern India to form settlements in the southern Island. Their language and literature, art and architecture, and most other components of their culture as testified to by a whole range of literary and archaeological evidence spread over the centuries, point to their North Indian affinities.¹ In the course of time, however, and quite naturally in the geopolitical context, Sri Lanka came into close contact with her neighbours in the mainland of the far south. While there is a substantial body of evidence on commercial and cultural relations between Sri Lanka and South India, a more prominent aspect in the historical records of the Island are the political relations with South India, which stands out clearly with the progressive evolution of historical kingdoms in the mainland, more particularly those of the Coḷas and the Pāṇdyas in the east coast of South India. These relations took the form of political adventurers from South India seeking their fortune in the Island, wresting power and ruling for brief spells, such incidents being recorded from as early as the second century B.C. These early incursions had developed into powerful organised invasions by the ninth and tenth centuries. These developments reached a climax with the Coḷa occupation of Rājaraṭa for almost one half of the eleventh century (1017-1070).²

In this paper, however, we are not concerned with these events, but with two different and indeed contrasting situations which, nevertheless, have

1. *A Grammar of the Sinhalese Language*, Colombo, 1938, see Introduction: 'The Origin of the Sinhalese Language', Muhammad Shahidullah, *JRASC.B.*, New Series, 1962), VIII, pp. 108-111; see also D.E. Hettiaratchchi, *Ibid.* pp. 212-217, S., Parana-vitana, *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon (= UCHC)*, Vol. I, Pt. I, Colombo, 1959, pp. 248-268.

2. *UCHC.*, Vol. I, pt. 1 pp. 304-51; *ibid.* Vol. I, Pt. 2, Colombo 1960, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, pp. 411-415, C. W. Nicholas, pp. 417-426.