

SOME ASPECTS OF TRADE BETWEEN SRI LANKA  
AND THE SOUTH COROMANDEL COAST  
FROM THE MID-17th TO THE  
MID-18th CENTURY

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In Sri Lanka, the *V.O.C.* aimed at monopolising for itself all the major profit-giving articles of the export and import trade. This objective was not confined only to the coastal territories which were under its control, but also extended to the independent kingdom of Kandy, which too possessed certain coastal areas in the Island, including two ports of significance: Puttalam on the north-west coast and Kottiyar in the north-east. Although the Treaty of May 1638 between the Dutch Company and the king of Kandy gave them a privileged position only with regard to certain articles of trade (including the all-important cinnamon), and although there was also express provision for mutual trade between Kandy and the Coromandel coast, the Dutch deliberately set out to prevent any contacts, trading or otherwise, between Kandy and the outside world. It may be noted in passing that they had political, strategic and economic considerations in mind when they attempted to isolate the kingdom in that manner.<sup>1</sup>

The fact, however, is that during the period under discussion they were seldom able to completely cut off Kandy from the Indian coasts, especially the Coromandel. For one thing, it was no easy matter to patrol the rather extensive and difficult north-western and north-eastern coasts of the Island in successful fashion, especially when the personnel on the cruising Dutch vessels were susceptible to the bribery of merchants attempting to evade the blockade. For another, the Kandyan state was powerful enough during this period to force the Dutch, from time to time, to follow more accommodating policies, especially during the many years of the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth when the latter felt themselves to be particularly vulnerable on account of European wars with the English and the French (which had their repercussions in Asia too). Among the local factors that made the position of the Sinhalese kingdom

1. For the above and for the history of the period up to the close of the century, see: K. W. Goonewardena, *The Foundation of Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1638-1658*, (Amsterdam, 1958) and S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658-1687* (Amsterdam 1958).