

## The Portuguese and *Menikkadawara*

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After the emergence of the Europeans in the Indian Ocean, their attention was mainly focused on Sri Lanka, the biggest island located in a strategically very important place in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese, the first European explorers in the Indian Ocean, landed in the beach near Colombo around 1505 A.D., in the reign of the king *Dharmaparakramabahu IX*, (1483 – 1513 A.D) in *Kotte* kingdom. (de Silva 1995:11 – 22). In this period, the whole island was divided into several kingdoms like *Kotte*, *Kandy* and *Jaffna*. In Addition, the regional rulers who were called *Vanniyars* ruled some areas of the island. The main kingdom being *Kotte*, the Portuguese first linked with *Kotte* as merchants and later they played the role of the guardians of the king and the kingdom of *Kotte*. The contemporary political situation of the island was manipulated by the Portuguese to establish their power in the coastal areas. After the death of the king *Don Juan Dharmapala*, they became the legal rulers of the *Kotte* kingdom. Then they tried to conquer the other kingdoms in the island. In particular, they continuously waged wars with the kingdom of *Kandy*. As a result of this process, the low land wet zone of the country became more important. *Menikkadawara*, one of the most important places during the Portuguese period, located in the low land wet zone in Sri Lanka.

The village of *Menikkadawara* (latitude 1150 ft from MSL) is located in the *Warakopola* divisional secretariat in *Kegalle* district, *Sabaragamuva* province in Sri Lanka. At present, more than three thousand people inhabit this village. *Menikkadawara* and its adjacent area had a very long history, including up to the prehistoric period. *Dorawak Kanda* cave, a cave which shows 6000 years B.P. evidence, is located near *Menikkadawara*. (Wijepala 1997). After the prehistoric period, the early Brahmi inscriptions can be seen with drip ledge caves located at the bordering area of *Menikkadawara*, namely *Salgala*, *Lenagala*, *Mampita* and *Humuwala*. All of these inscriptions are related to the early historic period. (Paranavitana 1970). The above area was also important in the medieval period because *Dedigama*, a place quite close to *Menikkadawara* was the birthplace of *Parakramabahu* the great, in *Polonnaruwa* period. (Godakumbura 1969:06). According to the literary evidence, the history of the *Menikkadawara Rajamaha Vihara* goes back to the *Gampola* period. Road commendation in *Tisara Sandesha* describes about an ancient *Bo* tree as '*Ella Kola Himi*'. (Suraweera 1991: 55). Sometimes it may be the *Bo* tree of this temple. In addition, this temple had a *tempita Vihara*. A number of artifacts like ancient Ola leaf books, reliquaries caskets, sculptures and hoard of colonial period coins show the historical importance of this ancient *Rajamaha Vihara*. (Bell 1904:30).

The village of *Menikkadawara* is located in a strategically very important place. This place was located between the borderline of the *Kotte* and *Kandy* kingdoms. (Abeyasingha 1995:132).

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