

On Two Sides of a Battle Field: Malays in the Service of the Kandyan King

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The aim of this paper is to discuss the contribution of the Malays who fought for the Kandyan King. The Dutch gained control of Sri Lanka's Maritime Provinces in 1640 after successfully expelling their rivals, the Portuguese. And during their subsequent one and half centuries of control in the Maritime Provinces, they brought with them a significant number of Malays to the Island. Among those brought to the Island, a large number served in the Dutch military establishment. After the British gained control of the Maritime Provinces in 1796, the Malays continued to function in a military capacity. However a little mentioned fact is the contribution of the Malays to the forces of the Kandyan King. It is evident that by 1800, a number of Malays served as mercenary soldiers of the Kandyan King. They were mostly deserters from the Dutch and British ranks. It appears that the Nayakkar kings of Kandy had come to rely heavily on foreign mercenaries for their personal protection, and the Malays proved to be the most efficient and dangerous of them all, according to writers such as Jonville in the 1800's. This paper will attempt to discuss the contribution of the Malays to the Kandyan wars from the perspective of the Kandyan kingdom and also discuss their gradual amalgamation with Kandyan society during later times.

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